Gaining and Maintaining Young Adults in Wisconsin

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See the full report at http://apl.wisc.edu/youngadults

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Project Team

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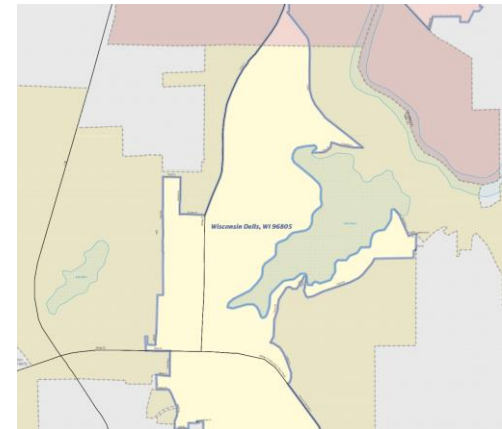
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Research Project Framework

- A strengths approach—studying communities that are gaining and maintaining young adults rather than those that are losing them

- A community approach—studying municipalities rather than counties

- An "effects first" approach—looking for places with strong young adult populations, and then looking for causes rather than doing programs and then looking for effects

- *Goal*—find positive forms of community development that attract and maintain higher numbers of young adults.

- Started with all 1800+ Wisconsin municipalities and towns

- Assembled U.S. Census counts of "young adults" (20-39 yrs) at 1990, 2000, 2010; 5-year cohorts

- Excluded "group quarters" population

- Merged counts from cities and villages crossing county lines

- Calculated measures of *gainers* and *maintainers* in each place.
  - *Gainers* – absolute growth of young adult population
  - *Maintainers* – higher total percent of young adult population

Note: communities in red are larger Wisconsin cities that are not gainers and maintainers, or are cities outside of WI.

All communities that are both gainers and maintainers

Gainers: had an *increase* in the number of young adults from 1990-2010 (median is -22%)

Maintainers: had a young adults proportion above the median of 24%

Sauk County gainers/maintainers include Lime Ridge, Spring Green, North Freedom, Baraboo, West Baraboo, Wisconsin Dells, Loganville, Ironton, Reedsburg, Prairie du Sac, Lake Delton, Washington Town, Delton Town, Dellona Town, Sumpter Town.
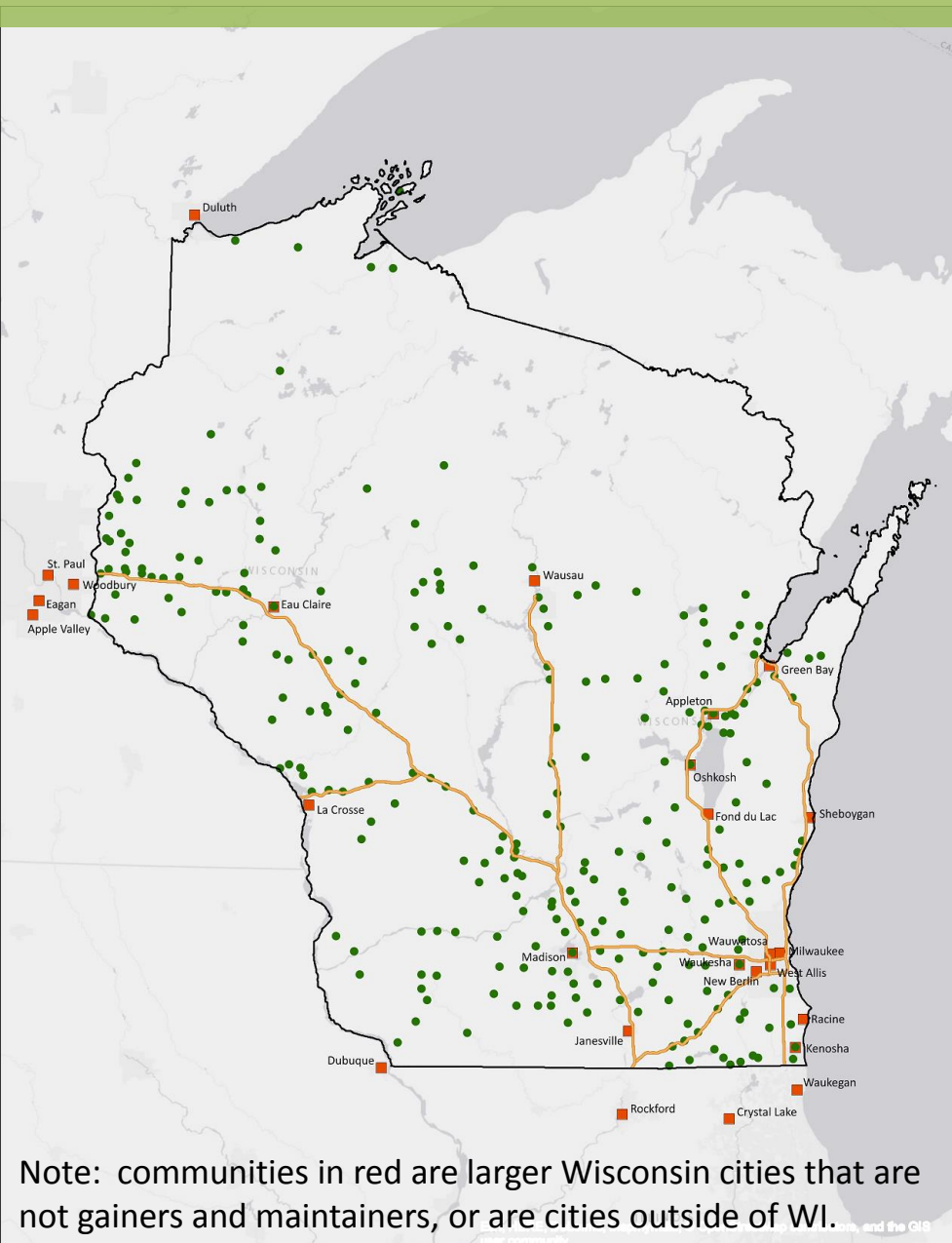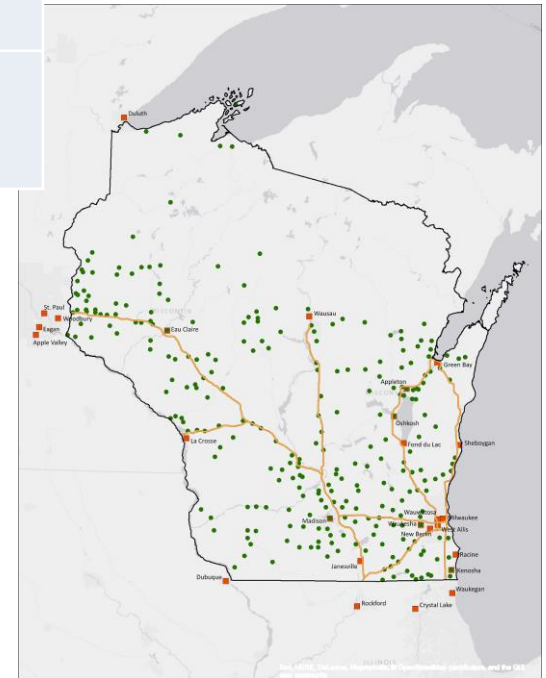
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Where are Young Adults?

|	Gainers/Maintainers	Non-Gainers/Maintainers
Count	280	1600
Average distance (miles) to freeway	15.5	29.4
Average distance (miles) to city >39,000	24.2	33.4
Percent of communities within 20 miles of city >39,000	46%	27%

Gainers/maintainers are closer to larger cities and closer to freeways.

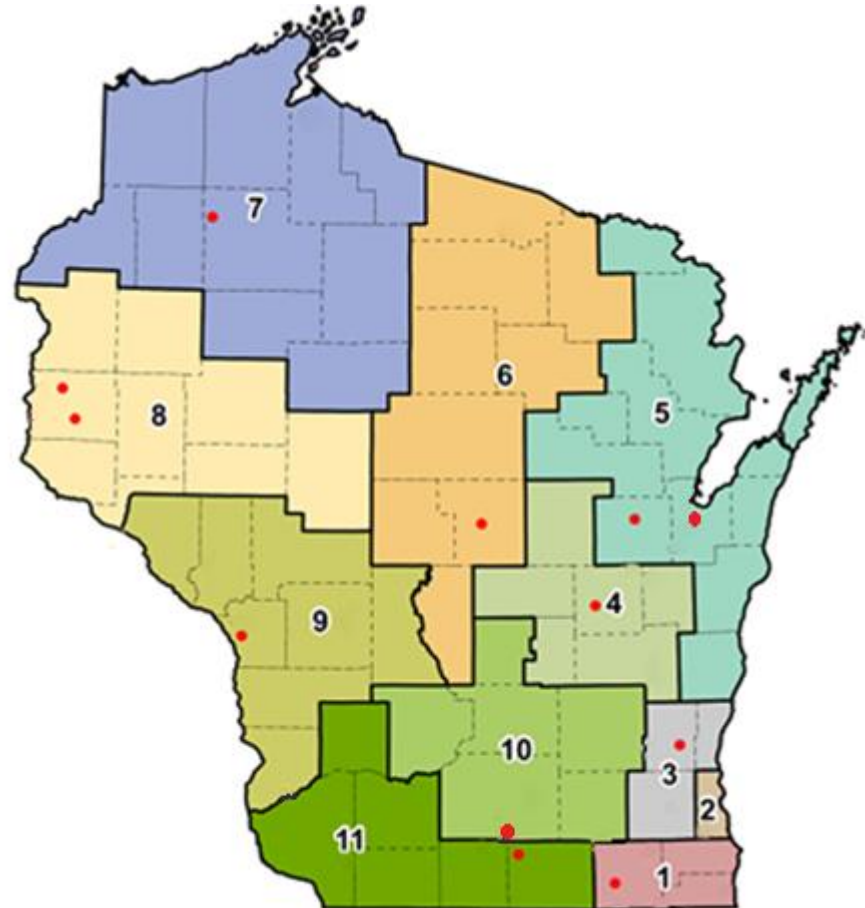# Gaining and Maintaining Young Adults in Wisconsin

Case Study Selection Methods

- Used Wisconsin Workforce Development Board regional division strategy to highlight more cases *across* Wisconsin

- Ranked the "top 20" gainers & "top 20" maintainers *within* each WWDB region

- Selected *overlappers*--places that appeared in both "top 20" lists (top 30 in region 7) = **118 places**

- Solicited input from Extension professionals on suitability of selection

- Included non-overlappers in northern portion of regions 5 & 6

- Resulted in **130 places** under consideration
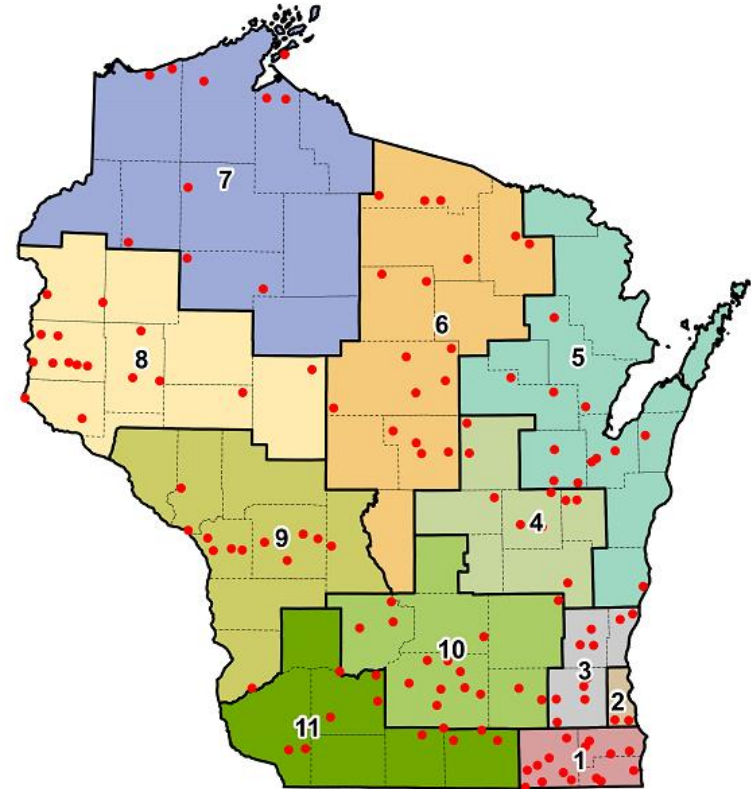
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Choosing case studies

Region 1	Delavan
Region 3	West Bend
Region 4	Omro
Region 5	De Pere Black Creek
Region 6	Plover
Region 7	Hayward
Region 8	Somerset New Richmond
Region 9	Onalaska
Region 10	Brooklyn
Region 11	Evansville

Case studies were selected for diversity, not because they were the "best" gainers/maintainers. Region 2--Milwaukee County--was excluded as too urban.

- Moving from "where" questions to "why" questions

- Conducting case studies of municipalities that show more success at gaining and maintaining young adults and potentially hold lessons for other communities.

  - Chose one to two case studies per region
  - Gather knowledge to understand the total picture of a community, not just the effect of a single intervention or program to attract young adults

- Learning about the community by involving the community
  - Engage "core group" of local community leaders to inform research
  - Conduct "lay expert interviews" (goal of 12-25 per case—210 total)
    - Ask them about others, not just themselves
      - Look for repetitive themes
      - Accuracy even with "biased" samples
  - Create stories that communities can tell about themselves

Why do young adults choose communities to live in?

- The "obvious" reasons:
  - Schools (a majority in every community)—for more than students
  - Housing (nearly half of interviewees)—right size and right price
  - Amenities inside (one quarter of interviewees) and out (one-third of interviewees)—public spaces
- The less obvious reasons:
  - Proximity to, and distance from, larger employment/shopping/ entertainment centers (a majority across all but one community)
  - Appreciation for traditional community/family feel (vast majority across all communities)
  - Appreciation for new diversity (four communities)
  - Universities may have a regional influence (two communities)
- The unconfirmed reasons:
  - Young adult networking and support programs
  - Local jobs development

What challenges are facing these communities in general?

- "Old guard" tensions
- "Bedroom community" and volunteerism concerns
- "Tipping point" worries
- Absence of resources for youngest adults, especially singles
- Maintaining the minimum of desired amenities (coffee houses, restaurants, pools, outdoor spaces)

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Implications

- It might be as important to develop the regional urban center as the community itself—regional revenue generation and sharing
- Attempting to attract young singles may be difficult.
- There may be a minimum set of local amenities needed: outdoor spaces, cafes and restaurants
- Housing needs to be appropriately affordable and appropriately sized for the family age cohort the community is most likely to attract.
  - Less expensive smaller housing for new families with new careers that pay less
  - More expensive larger housing for growing families moving toward mid-career with higher salaries
- Schools and teachers may need extra special care
  - Residents want to feel like the teachers and administrators know them
  - Residents want the school to feel like it is a community space
- Too much emphasis on growth may be counterproductive

- What can we do with these results?

  - Building on ideas from the case study communities
  - Adapting the research guide at: http://apl.wisc.edu/youngadults to learn about your own community.
  - Engaging young adults in community design.