



Moving Motivations

Results from a 2024 national poll to understand the relocation motivations and preferences of young people.

May 2024



● Background



Michigan Statewide Population Projections through 2050

April 2024



Overview

As reported by the Michigan Center for Data and Analytics, Michigan is projected to have a slower growth rate and earlier onset of population decline than the United States. Future population growth will be increasingly dependent on net positive migration.

Michiganders know all that our great state has to offer, from our natural beauty to our robust higher education system to our innovative history. Most people who are raised in the Great Lake State continue to call it home for their lifetime, but we struggle to attract new people to Michigan.

This struggle has led to Michigan being ranked 49th out of 50 in population growth since 1990.

A declining population has ramifications on numerous aspects of state health: fewer wages and a smaller tax base to support public amenities and schools, talent gaps that challenge business growth and diminishing political power in Congress, to name a few. For Michigan to enter its new renaissance, our net migration — the number of individuals we gain vs. lose— must increase. Policy recommendations to help reverse this trend in Michigan have been reported in the [Growing Michigan Together Council's final report](#).

For Michigan to further combat population trends, it is critical to understand why people move, specifically the most likely movers. According to the Census Bureau, the most mobile population year-to-year is young people ages 20–34. Therefore, understanding the motivations behind young people's moves is crucial. Let's Grow Michigan, an initiative of Michigan's broader population growth effort, has embarked on a study to delve into these motivations and understand why young people choose certain places to call home.

In collaboration with GenerationLab, Let's Grow Michigan conducted a comprehensive survey of over 6,000 young people across the country, offering a rich understanding of their mobility patterns and preferences. The respondents, with a median age of 23, provided diverse perspectives. Over one-third had moved before 2020, and nine percent indicated they have children. Survey respondents were asked questions about whether or not they are considering moving in the near future, whether specific incentives would motivate them to relocate, and whether tackling specific social issues impacts their view of different states. The insights from this poll can guide Michigan leaders in creating a value proposition designed to attract and retain young talent.

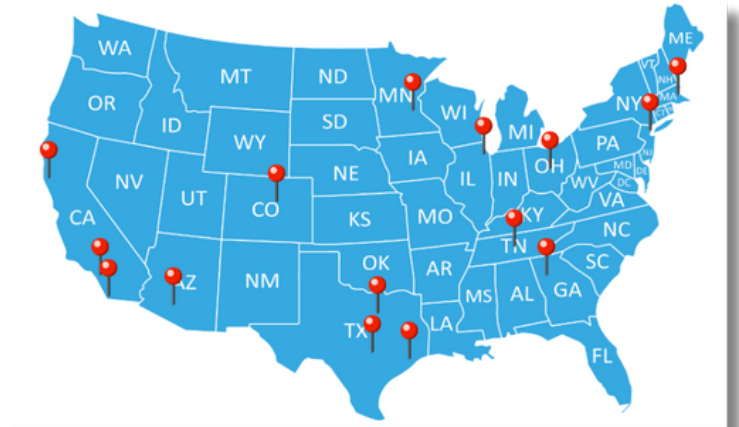
This report is the first in a series of Let's Grow Michigan publications. We hope readers will choose to stay connected with us as we build a growth plan by and for Michiganders—current and future—across our state.

Sign up to get involved at growingmichigan.org/lets-grow-michigan/

● National Poll Results



Let's Grow Michigan worked with GenerationLab to study the motivations behind why young people relocate and what they look for when choosing a new place to call home. The survey reached 6,096 18–34-year-olds in 15 major metropolitan areas across the United States. Respondents varied in education level, race and socioeconomic status. They currently live in Atlanta, Austin, Boston, Chicago, Columbus, Dallas, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Nashville, New York City, Phoenix, San Diego or San Francisco.



National poll respondents, cities

How did you find this place?

When asked how they learned about living in their current location, **31% of respondents indicated their search for higher education led them to where they are now.** Michigan boasts a robust higher education system comprised of nationally ranked public and private universities and community colleges. While Michigan is a net importer of students, continued collaboration will be needed to more effectively retain those students in order to drive net positive retention post-graduation.

Additionally, 14% of respondents shared that they have a personal connection with their current location or have traveled to it before.

Challenges + Drawbacks

Cost of Living

Respondents were asked to share some of the challenges or drawbacks they have been experiencing since living in their current location. **57% said their current location was becoming too expensive. 36% of those who indicated cost of living as a challenge said they have considered moving because of this factor.** This is an opportunity for Michigan, which boasts a lower cost of living than the average state, *if* Michigan is recognized as an option for young people when considering alternative places to call home.

Transportation

Robust multimodal transportation investments are often touted as strategies for states to attract and retain young talent. The Growing Michigan Together Council (GMTC) included a [transportation recommendation](#) to create thriving, resilient communities that are magnets for young talent.

Forty-four percent of national poll respondents indicated that the state of transportation is a challenge they have experienced since moving to their current location.



Important Factors

In seeking to understand what factors young people find important when deciding where they want to live, the poll asked participants how important certain considerations were in their decision-making process. Respondents ranked each factor from extremely important to extremely unimportant. The factors respondents deemed extremely and somewhat important are listed below.

*Top 5 factors when relocating**



**Percentage of people for whom ranked each factor as extremely or somewhat important.*

To attract and retain young people, -talent require a holistic value proposition that rivals or outweighs that of cities that attract the most talent – including NYC and LA – or places that grow most quickly but are experiencing skyrocketing housing costs, like Austin.

While young people have historically moved to these cities in search of opportunity and new exciting adventures., our polling shows that they are facing unsustainable living costs and considering a move due to this burden.

With ongoing commitment, Michigan checks all of the boxes young people are looking for: safe, welcoming, amenity-rich communities, beautiful outdoors, and opportunities to grow.

When analyzing respondents who indicated they have children, quality of schools gains traction as a top consideration at 91%. Isolating responses from respondents who indicated their race as Black or African American reveals slightly different top factors. **88% of Black respondents say cultural diversity is a top characteristic they consider when deciding to relocate. Similarly, 54% of Black respondents say that they wish their communities invested more resources toward cultural amenities like museums, art galleries, festivals and community centers.**

Michigan is fortunate to be home to nationally ranked museums like the [Detroit Institute of Arts](#). Increasing commitment to arts and culture and becoming an even more recognized destination for the creative class, could be a catalyst for greater appeal to a diverse population.

*Top cities Black respondents are considering moving to**



ATLANTA



AUSTIN



HOUSTON

88%

of black respondents cite **cultural diversity** as a top characteristic they consider when deciding where to move.

Housing affordability and safety ranked number one (both at 95%) among Black respondents.

**Respondents were asked to select all cities in which they are considering moving to. 29% of respondents indicated they are not interested in any of the cities listed as options.*

Talent retention + attraction programs

A handful of cities and states throughout the country have piloted and scaled talent attraction and retention initiatives to encourage movers to choose their community as home. The Tulsa Remote Program, Think Vermont and the Lincoln Free Home Site program offer various relocation incentives ranging from \$10,000 cash to a free plot of land. **West Virginia—the slowest growing state in the nation, behind MI—received over 42,000 applications to move to WV after launching their popular program.** But all programs are not created equal. As talent retention and attraction programs become more common, it's critical to tailor programs to the highest impact offerings.

To that end, we asked respondents: *Which of the following, if offered, would most strongly cause you to consider moving to a new location?*

In our analysis, **we focused on the 60% of survey respondents who indicated they planned to move in the near future or were not sure of their relocation plans.** Program offerings included: Free universal pre-K, free school lunches for K-12 students, student loan repayment assistance, free or highly subsidized childcare, down payment assistance, and free community college.

Two program offerings rose to the top among this group of policies and incentives: down payment assistance on a home and student loan repayment assistance.

Down Payment Assistance

On a scale of 1-6 (with 1 being which incentive you would most strongly consider moving for) 71% of survey respondents who indicated they planned to move or were not sure of their relocation plans ranked down payment assistance on a home as 1 or 2 most motivating.

A [recent survey](#) showed 1 in 5 millennials, and 1 in 10 of young people in Generation Z (Gen Z), feel owning a home is not in their future due to rising mortgage rates and the inability to save for a down payment. Michigan's low cost of living relative to the national average could support this opportunity otherwise unattainable in many other cities and states, aiding talent retention and attraction.

Student Loan Repayment Assistance

Just over half (51%) of the same group said student loan repayment assistance would cause them to seriously consider relocation.

[Millennials and Gen Z make up almost half \(48%\)](#) of the total student loan borrower population, many of whom owe between \$10,000 - \$40,000 in student debt.

Because of this burden, Millennial homeownership has fallen since the 2000s and early 2010s. Millennials are also taking longer to finish their degrees, thereby increasing their debt the longer they are in school.



Parents

Of the 60% of survey respondents who indicated they planned to move in the near future or were not sure of their relocation plans, **42% indicated they have children.** Among parents, assistance with buying a home (54%) and free universal pre-K (28%) were the most motivating programs and policy offerings when considering their relocation plans. In addition to ensuring Michigan kids have access to critical childhood development regardless of zip code, **the poll would suggest universal pre-K can also act as a compelling strategy for retaining and attracting young families to Michigan.**

Social + Political Environment

Prior research in Michigan’s population growth effort indicated talent wants great opportunities, great places, and welcoming communities. To that end, we wanted to test if the social and political environment could be a factor in relocation decisions, alongside traditional factors like access to opportunity and cost of living. Participants were asked to indicate the degree to which specific statements regarding social issues applied to them from 0–10, with zero representing “not at all” and 10 representing “a great deal.” The following table shows the percentage of respondents who indicated the statement strongly applied to them by ranking it 7–10.

Importantly, 50%+ of survey respondents strongly agreed that access to reproductive health care, diversity and welcoming immigration policies, community safety, unionization, and combatting climate change were important factors in where they chose to live. Safe, diverse, and welcoming communities are a priority for young people. When deciding to relocate, they seek inclusive environments and communities that will empower them to confront society’s most vexing issues, like climate change, head-on. And in both the complete set of respondents and the analysis of parent respondents, community safety topped the list as a top priority when choosing where to live.

When disaggregating the data by race, age, gender and location we can see that respondents gravitated toward certain statements more than others.

Furthermore, we asked respondents to rank how statements about reproductive healthcare, LGBTQIA+ rights, and climate change impact their view of their current location and what they seek when relocating.

Climate Change

Fifty-two percent of respondents aged 25–34 said they wish their community did more to combat climate change. This would imply Michigan’s commitment to lead the fight against climate change creates a value proposition for which young people are searching. The 2024 Gen Z Millennial Survey released by Deloitte states that 42% of Millennials and 46% of Gen Z have already changed or plan to change jobs or industries due to environmental impact concerns. To attract and retain young people who wish to live in communities taking action to mitigate the impacts of climate change, Michigan can tout our ranking as #1 in clean energy investments and energy sector job growth and support the innovation ecosystem around climate while building strong messaging that indicates to young people in Michigan and nationwide that the Great Lake State is leading on climate action and innovation.





LGBTQ+ Rights

Twenty-one percent of respondents told us the statement “my state unjustly restricts the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals” strongly applied to them. The share of respondents who feel this way increases when we look at respondents from Nashville (42%), Austin (38%), Phoenix (38%), and Houston (38%). According to the [Human Rights Campaign 2023 State Equality Index](#), these cities are located in states that have yet to achieve basic equality for LGBTQ+ individuals. Legislation in Michigan to protect the rights of people regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity is important to those survey respondents identified above as they seek new places to call home.

Additional Polling

The poll revealed that young people value communities that implement robust safety measures and strategies to combat climate change. Due to the complexity underlying the definition of community safety and individual meaning of climate change mitigation for each respondent, we will deploy an additional poll to gain insight into the action that young people would like to see taken.

Additionally, Let's Grow Michigan will be releasing further insights from our national poll in the coming weeks that dive deeper into responses from more detailed segments of poll respondents.



● Conclusion



Michigan's population growth effort seeks to understand young people's motivations when deciding where to put down roots. Housing affordability, welcoming, diverse, walkable communities, access to transit, outdoor recreation, and quality healthcare, including abortion access, are factors young people consider when choosing a new place to call home.

In 2023, the state's public engagement campaign, Let's Grow Michigan, traveled the state, collecting honest feedback and ideas from over 11,000 Michiganders about the challenges facing their communities and what they love most about calling Michigan home.

Around 34% of [Let's Grow Michigan public engagement poll](#) participants said they weren't sure they see themselves living in Michigan 10 years from now. **We have an opportunity to ensure they do, while inviting more new faces to join us in our great state.**

Putting Michigan on a path to growth is a project that will take all of us. As efforts to grow Michigan continue, there is a serious need to come together as residents, community members, business leaders and elected officials to shift our current trajectory. **We can do it if we do it together.**

The insights gleaned from our national survey echo the sentiments of Michiganders. They underscore that to retain our current residents and attract new ones, we need to create great opportunities, foster great places, and build welcoming communities for all Michiganders current and future.

LET'S GROW *Michigan*

Follow us on social @LetsGrowMI for event updates, engaging conversations, resources and more!

[Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#) | [X](#) | [LinkedIn](#)

growingmichigan.org/lets-grow-michigan/



To retain current Michiganders and attract new people to our state, we need:

+ GREAT OPPORTUNITIES

Access to excellent education and high-paying jobs

+ GREAT PLACES

Well-maintained infrastructure, access to natural amenities, walkable communities and affordable housing

+ WELCOMING COMMUNITIES

Places to live, work and raise a family that are friendly, inclusive and offer a sense of belonging

● *Appendix: Results from National Poll*

How did you first learn about living in your current location?

Response	Percentage of respondents
Word of mouth	6%
Social media	3%
Personal connection / travel	14%
Job-related searching	7%
News article or segment	1%
Real estate agent or relocation specialist	2%
College application process / moved here for a specific academic program	31%
Other	4%
Not applicable - I'm a lifelong resident	33%

What are some of the challenges or drawbacks you've experienced living in your current location?

Response	Percentage of respondents
It's hard to make social connections or become involved in community	20%
I'm struggling to find work	16%
There's not enough investment in sustainability practices (recycling, composting, etc.)	19%
It's too expensive	57%
Lack of recreational activities in the area	14%
I disagree with the dominant political view	12%
Poor educational system	11%
Transportation is inconvenient - poor public transit, bad traffic, etc.	44%
Diversity (in religion, sexuality, race, etc.) is not welcome	8%
There's a lot of violence / it's unsafe	33%
Other (please specify)	4%
None of the above – there haven't been any challenges	7%

*Respondents were asked to select all that apply.

Have you ever considered moving due to dissatisfaction with any of the challenges you selected in the previous question?

Response	Percentage of respondents
None of these factors have made me consider moving	31%
It's hard to make social connections or become involved in community	6%
I'm struggling to find work	8%
There's not enough investment in sustainability practices (recycling, composting, etc.)	3%
It's too expensive	36%
Lack of recreational activities in the area	5%
I disagree with the dominant political view	4%
Poor educational system	4%
Transportation is inconvenient - poor public transit, bad traffic, etc.	17%
Diversity (in religion, sexuality, race, etc.) is not welcome	3%
There's a lot of violence / it's unsafe	16%
Other (please specify)	3%

*Respondents were asked to select all that apply.

How important are each of these factors when deciding where you want to live?

Response	Percentage of respondents*
Walkability	81%
Transit accessibility	78%
Local amenities (museums, art galleries, community centers, etc.)	74%
Access to nature and outdoor activities	84%
Social and political environment	76%
Housing affordability	94%
Safety	94%
Quality of Schools	79%
Quality of Healthcare	89%
Cultural Diversity	75%

*Percentages are comprised of respondents who ranked each statement 7-10. Indicating the statement strongly applies to them.

How important are each of these factors when deciding where you want to live?*

Response	Percentage of Respondents	
	Age Group	
	18-24	25-34
Walkability	81%	81%
Transit accessibility	77%	79%
Local amenities (museums, art galleries, community centers, etc.)	72%	78%
Access to nature and outdoor activities	83%	85%
Social and political environment	74%	78%
Housing affordability	94%	94%
Safety	94%	94%
Quality of Schools	83%	74%
Quality of Healthcare	88%	88%
Cultural Diversity	73%	77%

*Percentages are comprised of respondents who ranked each statement 7-10. Indicating the statement strongly applies to them.

Do you plan to continue living in your current location for the foreseeable future?

Response	Percentage of respondents
Yes, I plan to stay here long-term	40%
No, I plan to move in the near future	29%
Not sure	31%

What is the main reason for your planned relocation?

Response	Percentage of respondents
New job or educational opportunity	47%
Poor quality of schools or education system	2%
Living expenses are too high	29%
Inadequate social support infrastructure	3%
Limited access to reproductive healthcare	2%
Limited recreational opportunities (events, hiking trails, museums, etc.)	3%
Unwelcoming / unappealing social atmosphere	6%
Other	9%

Which of the following, if offered, would most strongly cause you to consider moving to a new location?*

Response	Percentage of respondents
Free Universal PreK	14%
Free school lunches for K-12 students	12%
Student loan repayment assistance	51%
Free or highly subsidized child care	24%
Downpayment assistance	70%
Free community college	27%

*Table shows responses from respondents who indicated they plan to move or were not sure of their relocation plans. n=3,678

Which of the following, if offered, would most strongly cause you to consider moving to a new location?*

Response	Percentage of respondents
Free Universal PreK	28%
Free school lunches for K-12 students	24%
Student loan repayment assistance	12%
Free or highly subsidized child care	16%
Downpayment assistance	54%
Free community college	26%

*Percentages are comprised of respondents who indicated they have children and plan to move or were not sure of their relocation plans. n=235

Do you have kids?

Response	Percentage of respondents
Yes	9%
Not yet, but I plan to	41%
No	50%

On a scale of 0-10, rate how much each of the following statements applies to you.

Response	Percentage of respondents
If I or my kids had the opportunity to attend community college for free in another state, I would choose to move there	35%
I wish my community invested more resources toward combating climate change	50%
I wish my community invested more resources toward combating violence	55%
It is important for me to live in a diverse community	59%
Access to abortion and other reproductive health care is a big consideration in choosing where to live	55%
I would choose to work, but I am unable due to inadequate child care options in my community	15%
My state unjustly restricts the rights of LGBTQIA+ individuals	21%
I prefer to live in a community that is welcoming to immigrants	62%
I wish my community invested more resources toward cultural amenities (e.g., museums, art galleries, festivals, community centers)	42%
I prefer to live in a state that does not prohibit unions	50%
Community safety is a top priority when I choose where to live	76%
Climate change makes day to day life in my community more difficult	28%

*Percentages are comprised of respondents who ranked each statement 7-10. Indicating the statement strongly applies to them.

On a scale of 0-10, rate how much each of the following statements applies to you.*

Response	Percentage of Respondents	
	Age Group	
	18-24	25-34
If I or my kids had the opportunity to attend community college for free in another state, I would choose to move there	34%	36%
I wish my community invested more resources toward combating climate change	49%	52%
I wish my community invested more resources toward combating violence	54%	56%
It is important for me to live in a diverse community	57%	62%
Access to abortion and other reproductive health care is a big consideration in choosing where to live	53%	57%
I would choose to work, but I am unable due to inadequate child care options in my community	14%	19%
My state unjustly restricts the rights of LGBTQIA+ individuals	21%	21%
I prefer to live in a community that is welcoming to immigrants	61%	63%
I wish my community invested more resources toward cultural amenities (e.g., museums, art galleries, festivals, community centers)	40%	45%
I prefer to live in a state that does not prohibit unions	48%	53%
Community safety is a top priority when I choose where to live	76%	76%
Climate change makes day to day life in my community more difficult	26%	31%

*Percentages are comprised of respondents who ranked each statement 7-10. Indicating the statement strongly applies to them.

Which of the following cities are you considering moving to?*

Response	Percentage of respondents
Colombus, Ohio	3%
Nashville, Tennessee	6%
Atlanta, Georgia	8%
Minneapolis, Minnesota	4%
Austin, Texas	12%
Denver, Colorado	12%
Phoenix, Arizona	6%
San Diego, California	12%
Dallas, Texas	11%
New York, New York	15%
San Francisco, California	12%
Los Angeles, California	12%
Chicago, Illinois	13%
Houston, Texas	8%
Boston, Massachusetts	12%
Detroit, Michigan	4%
Ann Arbor, Michigan	5%
I am not interested in living in any of these cities.	38%

*Respondents were asked to select all that apply.

Which of the following cities are you considering moving to?*

Response	Percentage of Respondents	
	Age Group	
	18-24	25-34
Colombus, Ohio	3%	3%
Nashville, Tennessee	6%	4%
Atlanta, Georgia	7%	9%
Minneapolis, Minnesota	3%	5%
Austin, Texas	12%	12%
Denver, Colorado	12%	14%
Phoenix, Arizona	7%	5%
San Diego, California	11%	13%
Dallas, Texas	12%	8%
New York, New York	17%	11%
San Francisco, California	13%	12%
Los Angeles, California	11%	12%
Chicago, Illinois	14%	13%
Houston, Texas	8%	8%
Boston, Massachusetts	13%	12%
Detroit, Michigan	3%	4%
Ann Arbor, Michigan	5%	5%
I am not interested in living in any of these cities.	38%	39%

*Respondents were asked to select all that apply.