

Rural Retention & Attraction Committee

2026 Action Summary

Purpose

The Rural Retention & Attraction Committee brings together community leaders to better understand why people choose to live, work, and invest in the Tri-State region and to develop practical tools that help communities attract, retain, and reconnect with talent.

The Opportunity

Communities across the Tri-State region share many of the same challenges. Young people often leave for education or career opportunities, employers struggle to attract workers, and many communities lack the time or resources to develop consistent marketing materials. While each community is unique, the committee recognized an opportunity to develop regional tools and resources that could be adapted and used locally.

Rather than focusing only on identifying challenges, the committee committed to creating practical resources communities could begin using immediately. The work completed during the year reflects that approach.

2026 Highlights & Key Outcomes

Building a Shared Understanding of the Tri-State Region

The committee recognized that meaningful decisions begin with reliable information. To establish a common understanding of the region, baseline demographics, workforce, housing, and quality-of-life data were compiled for every county, each state, and the Tri-State Development region as a whole. This shared foundation continues to guide committee discussions and the development of new resources.

Listening to the Next Generation

The committee had the opportunity to engage graduating college students from institutions across the region. Rather than assume why young people stay or leave, the committee asked them directly.

The students consistently shared that job availability in their field, proximity to family, and pay, benefits, and affordability were their top concerns for where they plan to live and work post-graduation. These findings reinforced that while quality of life matters, access to meaningful employment remains the foundation of successful talent retention efforts.

Connecting Talent to Opportunity

Students consistently identified finding employment in their field as the single most important factor influencing where they planned to live after graduation. At the same time, employers across the region continue to report workforce shortages. Recognizing this disconnect, the committee developed the Regional Job Search page, which is housed on the Tri-State

Development website. The page offers one centralized place where users can explore every county in the region and connect to a third-party job search tool. The Regional Job Search page helps bridge the gap by providing job seekers with one place to begin exploring opportunities throughout the region while giving employers another avenue to connect with potential employees.

Defining the Region's Story

As the committee reviewed the data, discussed survey findings, and explored what makes the Tri-State region unique, one question kept resurfacing:

What is the story we want people to know about the Tri-State region?

The committee recognized that while every community has its own identity, many of the region's strengths are shared. Rather than creating a message centered on one community, the committee developed a regional messaging framework built around four themes that consistently emerged from the data and discussions:

Time – The region offers something many people value but cannot create more of - time. Shorter commutes and less time spent in traffic, and closer connections to work, family, and recreation allow residents to spend more time doing what matters most to them.

Affordability – Compared to many metropolitan areas, housing costs and everyday living expenses are more manageable. Greater affordability provides opportunities for homeownership and financial flexibility.

Opportunity – Opportunity means something different to everyone. For some, it is finding a rewarding career. For others, it is starting a business, pursuing an education, becoming involved in the community, or building a life where they can make a meaningful impact.

Place – Where time, affordability, and opportunity come together, people find their place. Strong communities, meaningful relationships, and a sense of belonging help make the region more than simply a place to live, they make it a place to call home.

These four pillars became the foundation for the Regional Messaging Toolkit and provide a consistent framework communities can adapt while still celebrating their own unique identity.

Equipping Communities with Practical Tools

The Regional Messaging Toolkit is intended to provide adaptable messaging, templates, and promotional resources that communities and organizations across the Tri-State Development region can customize and use to attract residents, workforce, businesses, students, and visitors.

Communities can use the toolkit to create social media campaigns, recruitment materials, relocation guides, websites, and promotional pieces while maintaining consistent regional messaging.

Looking Ahead

2027 Focus: Building Connections Across Every Stage of the Talent Journey

The committee's work is shifting from creating tools to helping communities put these tools into practice. During the coming year, the committee will focus on expanding use of the Regional Messaging Toolkit, gathering examples from communities, and exploring ways to strengthen connections with students, alumni, and former residents who may one day choose to return to the region.

The committee will also continue exploring opportunities to strengthen regional networking, support entrepreneurship, and engage young professionals as part of a broader strategy to retain talent and build lasting connections across the Tri-State region.

Through collaboration, research, and practical resource development, the committee laid the foundation for a coordinated regional approach to talent retention and attraction that communities across the Tri-State region can continue to build upon.

Additional Resources

- [Baseline Community Data](#)
- [Regional Job Search page](#)
- [Regional Messaging Framework](#)
- [Regional Messaging Toolkit](#)