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Vitality gap

Report: Area needs more creatives to match vigor of other Midwest cities

By [Chad Halcom](#)

Southeast Michigan needs to build a critical mass of at least 50 percent more households with young creatives and professionals — including a threefold increase within Detroit itself — to achieve the economic and cultural vitality of other Midwest cities, according to an upcoming report.

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Lou Glazer, president of Ann Arbor-based **Michigan Future Inc.** and author of a *Young Talent in the Great Lakes* report to be completed within weeks, said the Motor City shows startling differences from Minneapolis and Chicago in its distribution of demographic groups that are key to attracting investment.

"These groups, studies have shown, are interested in living in active urban environments. They will often make a decision on where to live first based on finding a stimulating lifestyle or environment and then will look for a job within that environment," he said.

"And these people tend as a group to be more entrepreneurial than others. Attracting them doesn't necessarily mean attracting a company that's likely to employ them. If they come first, those companies follow."

Glazer expects to complete his report by early May, which will follow up on his *First Annual Progress Report*, released in February, on Michigan's transition from a manufacturing-based economy to a knowledge-based economy.

In both reports, Glazer draws on demographic data from San Diego-based marketing and research firm **Claritas**. It tracks the distribution of households with college graduates and advanced degree-holders ages 25 to 34 in six major metropolitan areas of the Midwest.

Glazer's research found that households without children were evenly distributed in the Midwest and gravitated slightly more toward urban centers, while those with children tend to congregate more in the suburbs when the children approach school age.

But unlike the other metropolitan areas, neither group has any major presence inside Detroit.

GRAPHIC: Where young college graduates choose to live
[See where young college graduates live in Detroit, Chicago, and Minneapolis.](#)

Young college graduates account for just 15,000 households in the city, and fewer than 500 of those are households with minor children, compared to 250,000 young college grad households in suburban or outlying areas. Detroit would need 50,000 households in the city and 395,000 in the region to have roughly the same distribution as Minneapolis and 65,000 households in the city out of 375,000 regionally to create a demographic mix that emulates Chicago.

The Michigan Future reports highlight Chicago, Minneapolis and Madison, Wis., because those cities showed some of the highest average household incomes in the Midwest. *Crain's* Publisher Mary Kramer is a member of a Michigan Future advisory committee.

Detroit has a history of racial division and strife between city and suburbs that most cities in the report lacked, but Glazer said it is not a factor in making Detroit attractive to young professionals again.

"The only reason the race stuff would matter at all is to help explain the historical background. This generation doesn't really consider it," he said. "They have no memory of things like the (1967 Detroit) riots

Where talent lives

Lou Glazer, president of Ann Arbor-based **Michigan Future Inc.** and author of the *Young Talent in the Great Lakes* report, said Detroit shows startling differences from Minneapolis and Chicago in its distribution of demographic groups key to attracting investment.

- **In Detroit:** Young college graduates account for just 15,000 households. Fewer than 500 of those are households with minor children.
- **In Detroit's suburbs:** There are 250,000 households with young college graduates.
- **What Detroit would need to catch Minneapolis:** Detroit would need 50,000 households with young college graduates in the city out of 395,000 in the region to have roughly the same distribution as Minneapolis.

or white flight, and they're just looking at whether the lifestyle features are there in the city that appeals to them."

Eric Cedo, president and founder of **BrainGain Marketing** in Troy and the former executive director of **Create Detroit**, agreed with Glazer that historical racial tensions or other divides are not a significant factor in deterring or attracting young talent.

He also concurred that large employers for young talent are a secondary concern and are better for shoring up and cementing the talent that gathers in a community.

"Royal Oak did everything right by first having a 'café culture' attracting young people, then businesses and residential development came up around that," he said.

"You can definitely have that same kind of culture build up in the downtown. I think one of the few reasons young talent may not gather to that area now is they're just spread too far apart," Cedo said.

Cedo is also considering a move for his own marketing company from Troy to the city as well, and added that his relocation plan proposes sharing a new venue with a café or retailer with a lure for the young.

The May report, which Glazer is still completing, will further address attributes that attract young talent to a community. Some of those factors include a concentration of mixed-use development, mass-transit services, arts and culture, and easily accessible parks and outdoor areas.

He said Detroit has some of those attractive features in its revitalized downtown areas and expanded RiverWalk but still faces an uphill battle persuading residents to repopulate the city center.

"The maps of our market data really create an 'egads' reaction and at least get a dialogue started when we show them," he said.

"We're making some progress in showing that it's talent that drives the future economy, but it's still a pretty hard pull."

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- **What Detroit would need to catch**

Chicago: Detroit would need 65,000 households with young college graduates in the city out of 375,000 in the region to create a demographic mix like Chicago's.