Public Service Perspective

COVID’s Legacy:
How Hybrid Work Models Benefit “Remote Ready” Rural Communities

Brent Lane, Executive in Residence for Economic Strategies
Center for Economic Development and Community Resilience
Hybrid (Remote) Work – Bug to Feature

Hybrid working, necessitated by COVID pandemic, can be capitalized upon as a rural economic development opportunity

Lessening job/residence proximity constraints benefits both rural employees and employers.
Hybrid Work’s Persistence

Average share of work done remotely (percent)

- **Service firms**
- **Manufacturers**

- **Before the Pandemic**
- **June 2021**
- **August 2022**
- **Expected Next Year**
Pre-COVID: US Jobs More Mobile Than People

- Commuting times and costs increasing
- Workforce participation declining
- Geographic “Skills gaps” expanding
- Unemployment and open jobs increasing
- Upward mobility impaired

An inefficient market for both labor and capital.
AN OVERLOOKED LABOR POOL:
OHIO SOUTHEAST REGION HOME TO HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF “SUPER COMMUTERS”

In August, 2022, Stacker ranked Ohio counties based on the proportion of workers who commuted 90 minutes or more one-way to work. This map ranks the top 50 Ohio counties for “Super Commuters”.

County Super Commuter Rank
- 1st through 16th
- 17th through 32nd
- 33rd through 50th
- Not in Top 50
- OhioSE Counties
Hybrid Work and Economic Development

HW *reduces market inefficiencies* by enhancing employment access by employees and employers

**Employees**: Optimize job and residence choices

**Employers**: Optimize personnel pool and location factors

Bridges people- and place-based ED strategies
2018-2021 Gallup Polls:

“If Americans did sort themselves according to their desires, **there would be an exodus** from the big cities and, to a lesser degree, from small cities and town, accompanying a **movement to rural areas**.”

Source: Gallup
1. Digital Nomads/Gadflies

2. Potential residents optimizing home locations

3. Current residents optimizing occupation/job

4. Businesses optimizing personnel candidates
HW’s Numerous SE Ohio Benefits

1. Imports income and reduces commuting retail leakage
2. Saves commuting costs, time, and negative impacts
3. Increases workforce participation accessibility
4. Retains graduates and early career residents
5. Enhances upward mobility opportunities for residents
6. Diversifies economy in both employment and employers
7. Grows and revitalizes communities’ populations
SE Ohio HW Strategy Portfolio Options

**CONTINUE**: Support HW by current residents

**CONVERT**: Help out-commuters become hybrid workers

**UPSKILL**: HW training/job placement for current residents

**RETAI N**: HW job placement for graduates/likely out-migrants

**REPATRIATE**: Solicit return of former residents via HW

**(RE)CONNECT**: Attract HW with SE Ohio connections

**INCENT**: Bribe HW workers with no SE Ohio connection
Rural “Remote Ready” Scorecard

1. Internet Access
2. Attainable Housing
3. Childcare
4. Cost of Living
5. Remote Workspaces
6. Outdoor Recreation
7. Professional Education
8. Remote Work Training
9. Travel Access
10. Financial Incentives
### SE Ohio “Remote Ready” Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSITIVE</th>
<th>NEUTRAL</th>
<th>NEGATIVE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Attainable Housing</td>
<td>1. Internet Access</td>
<td>1. Remote Work Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Outdoor Recreation</td>
<td>3. Childcare</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Professional Education</td>
<td>4. Travel Access</td>
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Conclusions

1. HW is a **sustained but evolving** trend
2. HW enables **thwarted rural location preferences**
3. HW benefits **current & prospective** residents
4. “**Incented**” HW economic **impacts are small**
5. Supporting **resident HW over relocation attraction** better addresses SE Ohio priorities
6. SE Ohio “**remote readiness**” must be proactive
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ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR REMOTE WORK IN ATHENS COUNTY

Mollie Fitzgerald, Director
Athens County Economic Development Council
EXPLORING REMOTE WORK FOR
ATHENS COUNTY

- Remote work necessitated by COVID-19 pandemic
- Trends in remote work (ASCEND West Virginia)
- Economic and community development benefits
- Level of preparedness for remote work
- Athens’ attractiveness/priorities for remote workers
WHAT WE FOUND

What won’t work:

• Focusing on non-local talent attraction
• Offering large financial incentives

What could work:

• Using remote work opportunities to increase local labor force
• Supporting infrastructure and build-out of remote work “hubs”
DIRECT AND INDUCED ECONOMIC IMPACTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual Household Income Level</th>
<th>Direct Impacts</th>
<th>Induced Impacts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Income</td>
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<tr>
<td>&lt;$30k</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>$616,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>$30-49k</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>$50-74k</td>
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<td>$75-100k</td>
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<td>$100-150k</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>$1,339,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>$150k+</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$570,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>$7,086,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This assumes an income level distribution consistent with the distribution of current Athens remote workers
Deploying a remote work strategy that aligns with our public policies at the local level will leverage what we are already doing to:

- Enhance upward socioeconomic mobility for underemployed/unemployed
- Recruit and retain employees by expanding the work shed
- Retain talent from Ohio University
- Reduce out-commuting and associated retail leakage
- Capitalize on Athens’ “stickiness” factor

*It also doesn’t become cost prohibitive*
MOVING FORWARD...

- Focus on regional remote work network and “hub” approach
- Infrastructure and buildout of remote work hubs (Athens Armory, KOP, etc.)
- Offer transferrable memberships
- Ohio BUILDS proposal
CONTACT INFO

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Remote Work in Appalachian Ohio
Buckeye Hills Regional Council: Who We Are

- Area Agency on Aging
- District 18 Liaison for the Ohio Public Works Commission
- Economic Development District
- Local Development District
- Regional Transportation Planning Organization
- Southeast Ohio Aging & Disability Resource Center
- Representing: Athens, Hocking, Meigs, Monroe, Morgan, Noble, Perry, and Washington Counties
Addressing Remote Work in Appalachian Ohio

• Strive to create thriving communities to live, work, play for current and potential residents.
Addressing Remote Work in Appalachian Ohio

- Broadband expansion and deployment
- Infrastructure support
- Asset utilization
- Workforce support
- Economic diversification
• Grant and loan application support
• Funding Sources:
  • JobsOhio Vibrant Communities program
  • Ohio BUILDS
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