The Tompkins County Department of Administration & the Greater County Community: CALS NYS Internship Program 2013

My Biographical Details: Born and raised in Rochester, NY, I love upstate New York. I transferred to Cornell University after completing an Associates degree at Monroe Community College. After completing a Bachelors degree at Cornell I plan to study Public Health. I would like to work in the public sector, with issues surrounding community nutrition, food security, and sustainable development.

Tompkins County Demographics

Individual poverty is likely much higher than the national average due to the number of full time students in Tompkins County. The number of families in poverty is significantly lower than the national average.

Tompkins County has a younger population than the U.S. Every year, new students come and reside in the county, artificially keeping the mean age low. Most also leave after four years. Youth are attracted for the college years, but few stay as young professionals.

The Tompkins County Department of Administration is responsible for ensuring that all of the close to 30 County departments and divisions carry out resolutions and policies passed by the County Legislature—Tompkins County’s 15-member elected voting body. Many of the services people receive—from highway maintenance to solid waste pickup—are overseen by County Administrator Joe Mareane. My supervisor for the summer was Paula E.F. Younger, Deputy County Administrator. Budgets are a large part of what Administration handles. I was assigned to create an Online Grant Development and Management Center to assist County Departments and Divisions in diversifying their funding streams.

My Main Internship Responsibilities:
1.) Conduct research about grant development and management.
2.) Prepare and format content for website about grant opportunities relative to programs and services offered by Tompkins County Departments and Divisions.
3.) Develop new-website architecture, upload and publish content.

Opportunities

STARTUP NY is an initiative aimed at attracting new businesses to New York by offering zero-tax licenses (sales, income, property, business) for 10 years. Given the cost of living in Tompkins County, this type of incentive could help to bring in young entrepreneurs who may not be financially stable yet.

Opportunity #1: “Tompkins County is a community that is perfect for the new generation of young professionals who understand the importance of work-life balance” - Paula E.F. Younger.

The abundance of natural capital allows people in Tompkins County to find the balance between work and life. It has been the best part of living here.

Opportunity #2: Tompkins County is less diverse than the nation. Much of the County’s diversity is associated with the academic institutions.

Community Engagement Component

The Community Capitals framework was by Developed Cornellia and Jan Flora of Iowa State University. Each capital area is interconnected with the others and investment in one capital area usually involves the others. According to Flora and Flora, the communities that pay attention to each capital area have the best outcomes—social well-being, vital economies, and healthy ecosystems. The research I conducted used this framework to identify what young professionals would find attractive unattractive within each area, as well as challenges and opportunities for youth attraction and retention. Tompkins County has a lot of young people that are attracted for the education and natural beauty of the region, but few stay due to the high living costs and the lack of labor market depth. Jobs and housing options are the biggest barrier to youth retention in the region, which I explore in the “Challenges” and “Opportunities” section below. Overall I found a vibrant community that, given certain challenges are addressed, will thrive due to its abundant cultural and natural wealth.

Challenges

Challenge #1: 23.4% mismatch in jobs and skills. Job opportunities need to be created that match existing skills. The academic institutions can also help foster workforce readiness by developing programs that foster new job creation. Lack of depth in labor market can be addressed by incentivizing companies to locate their HQs in Tompkins County.

Challenge #2: Housing costs are much higher than surrounding region. Affordable housing is a crucial youth retention strategy. One organization working to remedy this is Better Housing Tompkins County.

View the Website I created: Tompkinscountyny.gov/cyadmin/grants