

CRAIN'S CLEVELAND BUSINESS

Global Cleveland shifting to data-driven approach to help turn around region's population slide

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Global Cleveland is working to attract newcomers and boomerangers to live and work here. The group is taking a data-driven approach, more appropriate for wooing job seekers.

Like Positively Cleveland before it, Global Cleveland, the nearly 3-year-old talent attraction nonprofit, is working to erase the negative image of Cleveland with a more positive image of the region.

But where Positively Cleveland, the regional convention and visitors bureau, is polishing the region's image to attract more outsiders to come to Northeast Ohio for vacations and conventions, Global Cleveland is working to attract newcomers and boomerangers to live and work here, with the ultimate goal of turning around the region's population slide.

"The discovery that we made is, we have a much better view (of the region's strengths) from people outside than from people inside" the region, said Albert Ratner, a member of Global Cleveland's board of directors and a driving force in the organization's creation.

"What we discovered was, talent can go anywhere," Ratner said. "Therefore, this is an attempt to reach out and bring in more people in the normal course of business."

Ratner, board chair Baiju Shah and president Joy Roller met with the *Crain's Cleveland Business* editorial board on Monday.



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The organization publicly will unveil this new direction on Thursday, May 1, at the Cleveland Convention Center. Ohio Gov. John Kasich and Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson will help the organization launch its latest talent attraction campaign with a program of multi-ethnic musical and dance presentations. This event will be followed by a national kickoff in Washington, D.C., on June 26, with similar road shows to follow in New York City and Chicago.

Attracting talent has been Global Cleveland's mission since its creation in 2011. What's different now is a fresh look at the region's talent pool and a new way to demonstrate the job opportunities for younger people — especially young professionals.

When Positively Cleveland in March debuted its new approach to selling Cleveland to potential visitors, organization president David Gilbert said people “have a visceral reaction to the word 'Cleveland.' So before we can go out and promote our arts, sports, restaurants or great outdoors, we have to first change what they think of as Cleveland.”

What is following from that rollout is a glitzy multimedia campaign.

Reversal of fortune

Global Cleveland is taking a more data-driven approach, more appropriate for wooing job seekers to town than tourists to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum.

It's using data that it believes shows that well-educated people, qualified for the jobs of future, aren't fleeing the region and are not leaving an undereducated work force here. In other words, Global Cleveland believes, the region isn't seeing a brain drain, but rather is experiencing a brain gain. It intends to promote that on its website and with virtual job fairs.

The new research data is being created and analyzed by the new Center for Population Dynamics at Cleveland State University. Senior research associate Richey Piiparinen, building on a research paper he completed last year for Ohio City Inc., argues that the region can grow economically and attract young people seeking rewarding jobs based on what he sees as the beginning of a brain gain.

That research, “From Balkanized Cleveland to Global Cleveland,” argued that traditional assumptions about migration into and out of Northeast Ohio were wrong and those fleeing have not largely been well-educated knowledge workers prepared for the jobs of the future.

Instead, people with the talents of the future who are struggling in congested labor markets in places like New York City and Chicago are looking for greener pastures.

“They are increasingly finding a better return on their skills in Rust Belt cities like Cleveland,” Piiparinen wrote in November. He backed that up with research showing strong migration to Northeast Ohio from both of those major cities.

Now with the backing of Cleveland State and Global Cleveland, Piiparinen has produced a second report for Global Cleveland that shows that the number of college-educated 25-to-34-year-olds in Greater Cleveland increased by 23% from 2006 to 2012. That, Global Cleveland believes, will help it attract even more young professionals.

“What we've set as an ambition is we want to double the number of in-migrants into the region every year,” Shah said. “We average 30,000 newcomers coming into the region; by 2020 we'd like to see that doubled to over 60,000. That would drive a fundamental shift in the nature of the population gain versus drain debate.”