

Gogebic Range Next Generation Initiative

Evaluation Summary

April, 2010

In March of 2010, a Zoomerang survey was sent via e-mail to 131 participants in the Gogebic Range Next Generation Initiative (NGI). A total of 52 responses were received, from a good cross-section of program participants.

Overall Satisfaction

Eighty-eight percent of the respondents stated that their involvement in the NGI gave them a better understanding of how to create a community more attractive to young people.

Ninety-seven percent agreed that the NGI had a positive impact on the community. These opinions were shared equally among natives, boomerangs and transplants to the community.

It has been a great starting point for people to express positive energy and attitudes regarding our community.

Changes in Understanding

A clear majority of respondents stated that as a result of their participation in the NGI, they have a better understanding of:

- The nature-based outdoor recreation niche – 74%
- The economic benefits of strengthening the niche – 83%
- The strengths of the community – 76%
- The economic benefits of promoting the community's strengths – 79%
- How to better connect students to the community – 64%

Most respondents also believed that the NGI provided the public with a better understanding of the same factors (slightly less than half agreed that the general

public has a better understanding of how to better connect its students to the community).

- The nature-based outdoor recreation niche – 75%
- The economic benefits of strengthening the niche – 66%
- The strengths of the community – 67%
- The economic benefits of promoting the community's strengths – 64%
- How to better connect students to the community – 47%

In general, respondents were less optimistic about changes in the public's understanding of these factors than changes in their own understanding.

Changes in Perceptions

Seventy-nine percent of the respondents stated that because of their involvement in the NGI, their perceptions of the community have improved. Eighty-eight percent of natives and 71% of boomerangs said that their perception of their hometown improved. One native said: "We really do have a lot to offer!" and a boomerang said "Good things are happening and finally change is coming".

A common theme expressed by people growing up in the community was that they perceived their home town more favorably after hearing from new people moving to the community:

Having always enjoyed the beauty of the area I have been able to view the area from a different point of view. Previously I had my favorite places to visit but never thought they could also persuade people to live here and enjoy it for themselves. I also have been surprised by how many locals do not enjoy the natural beauty of the area.

My opinion always was positive, but I appreciate our area even more now that I've looked at it with a stranger's eyes.

Even transplants improved their perception of their new home as a result of the NGI, with 77% saying that their perceptions have improved:

It is good to have facts to back up my assertion that we live in the best place on earth!

Only one person (a transplant) stated that their perception of the community became more negative as a result of their involvement in the NGI, stating that they became exposed to negatives attitudes in the area.

Skill Development

Only 30% of the respondents agreed their involvement in the NGI taught them valuable skills (e.g. leadership, presentation, organizational skills). Most of the respondents were neutral on this question (65%). However, all six of the work-group leaders who responded agreed that they learned valuable skills as a result of their leadership experience.

In the past, I have usually taken on "support" roles, background work involved in community and business planning. My leadership role in NGI has pushed me out of my comfort zone into the arena of making public presentations....something I'm not comfortable in doing. But, as with most things, one grows the more one is exposed to different things.

Sixty-seven percent of the respondents who participated in the “Promoting Our Strengths” work-group stated that their involvement provided them with a greater awareness of marketing resources and tools to promote the community.

Attraction and Retention

Seventy-eight percent agreed that the NGI will be successful in attracting more young people to the community. A slightly higher percentage of transplants (88%) agreed with this statement compared to natives (75%) and boomerangs (71%).

I believe that the people directly involved will have an impact on our target demographic - I think they will already have the urge to live here, and we just need to show them that it's possible.

Sixty-nine percent agreed that the NGI will be successful in retaining young people in the community. Again, more transplants (77%) agreed with this statement than natives (63%) and boomerangs (57%).

I believe the more we concentrate on the positive assets of the area the more we will convince our young people to stay.

While a clear majority agreed with this statement, the respondents were generally less optimistic about retaining young people than about attracting young people from outside the area.

Respondents were asked if their involvement in the NGI has made them more likely to stay in the community. Half of the respondents agreed that they are now more likely to stay in the community, while 39% were neutral. Sixty-three percent of natives agreed with this statement, compared with 43% of boomerangs and 53% of transplants.

Go-In Forward Next Generation Group

Five additional questions were asked of participants in the Go-In Forward Next Generation social and networking group. A clear majority agreed that their participation in the group's social activities met with the following positive outcomes:

- Made them more aware that there are other young people in the community that share their interests – 87%
- Made them feel more “at home” – 80%
- Helped them meet new friends – 60%
- Made them feel more connected to the community – 73%
- Made them more likely to stay in the community – 87%

There were significant differences in these outcomes between natives, boomerangs and transplants:

	All Respondents	Natives	Boomerangs	Transplants
Aware of other young people with similar interests	87%	50%	100%	89%
Feel more “at home”	80%	0%	100%	78%
Meet new friends	60%	0%	100%	50%
Feel more connected to the community	73%	50%	100%	67%
More likely to stay	87%	0%	100%	89%

Note: Due to the relatively small number of respondents after breaking the results down by smaller groups of Go-In Forward participants, the results – while helpful – should not necessarily be considered a representative sample

The more often the respondent participated in these social events, the more likely they were to offer positive outcomes. The following shows the percent that agreed with the following statements among participants in at least five social outings:

	All Respondents	Attended One Through Four Events	Attended Five or More Events
Aware of other young people with similar interests	87%	86%	88%
Feel more “at home”	80%	57%	88%
Meet new friends	60%	29%	75%
Feel more connected to the	73%	57%	88%

community			
More likely to stay	87%	57%	100%

Impacts

A number of positive impacts of the NGI were cited by the respondents. The most common responses centered on enhanced awareness regarding the messages of the NGI and the attributes of the community (11 out of the 20 responses), including:

New awareness to all the positives in this region

Promoting some positive feelings and attitudes about our area

The NGI has revived an excitement in possibilities for the Gogebic-Iron Range that has lain dormant for a long time. There is much optimism and forward momentum streaming through our communities!

Another common beneficial impact of the NGI was the number of positive people working together to improve the area (eight responses), including:

Putting positive people together

People thinking more positively about our community and exposing this positivity to others

That a group of people have taken the initiative to help the area

Outcomes

A number of specific outcomes that have occurred in the community as a result of the NGI were noted by the respondents, including:

- Promotional efforts/website – 4 responses
- New leaders/community involvement – 3 responses
- Increased cooperation in the community – 2 responses
- The Go-In Forward Next Generation Group – 2 responses

NGI can put the area on the map as a great place to live and raise a family, referring to the area as a whole and not focusing on one particular city or town, changing the overall perspective as one united community.

We are creating new leaders, who are willing to give input and consider solutions to problems. We are engaging a generation of residents who here-to-for were not often heard from.

How To Improve

Respondents offered a number of ways in which the NGI could be improved to fulfill its mission of attracting and retaining young people. The most often cited suggestions included:

- More outreach/media exposure – 3 responses
- More “big group” gatherings – 2 responses
- More people need to become involved – 2 responses

Summary and Conclusions

After 15 months, this evaluation of the Next Generation Initiative’s short-term outcomes has been largely positive. According to the survey:

- 88% had a better understanding of how to create a community more attractive to young people
- 97% believed the NGI had a positive impact on the community
- A clear majority believed that they (and the community) had a better understanding of the community’s assets and the importance of promoting these assets
- 79% of all respondents – and 88% of natives – had a more positive perception of the community
- All six work-group leaders indicated that they learned new valuable skills

In addition, participants in the Go-In Forward Next Generation Group overwhelmingly agreed that they:

- Were more aware of other young people in the community with similar interests
- Felt more “at home”
- Met new friends
- Felt more connected to the community
- Were more likely to stay in the community

Several questions were specifically asked to help determine if the NGI was meeting its specific goals of attracting and retaining young people. Seventy-eight percent of the respondents believed that the NGI would be successful in attracting more young people to the community and 69% believed it would be successful in retaining young people in the community.

Fifty percent of the respondents said they would be more likely to stay in the community as a result of the NGI.

And 87% of participants in the Go-In Forward group said they would be more likely to stay in the community as a result of the group’s social and networking opportunities. In fact, for participants who attended five or more of these social events, 100% stated that they were now more likely to stay in the community.

It is too early to determine whether or not the NGI will be successful in fulfilling its mission to attract and retain young people on the range. However, the above indicators show that many of the pieces are falling into place to make this happen.

Collectively, these positive short-term outcomes will better position the Gogebic Range to attract and retain young people to reverse its decades-long population decline.

Characteristics of Respondents

N = 52

Experience with Next Generation Initiative

- Attended Rebecca Ryan's Presentation – 27 (64% of respondents)
- Attended One or More "Big-Group" Gatherings – 28 (67% of respondents)
- Member of a Work-group – 19 (45% of respondents)
- Leader of a Work-group – 6 (14% of respondents)
- Heard About the NGI Through Other Sources – 13 (36% of respondents)
- Other – 4 (10% of respondents)

Work Groups Involved With

- Strengthening Our Niche – 14 (30% of respondents)
- Promoting Our Strengths – 6 (13% of respondents)
- Retaining Our Students – 3 (7% of respondents)
- Go-In Forward – 16 (35% of respondents)
- None – 16 (35% of respondents)

Location Background

- Natives – 11 (24% of respondents)
- Boomerangs – 9 (20% of respondents)
- Transplants – 22 (48% of respondents)
- Don't Currently Live on the Gogebic Range – 4 (9% of respondents)

Age

- 20- 29 Years – 3 (7% of respondents)

30-39 Years – 17 (37% of respondents)

40 Years and Over – 26 (57% of respondents)

Field of Employment

Local Government - 4 (11% of respondents)

Education – 7 (19% of respondents)

Health Care – 2 (6% of respondents)

Business – 15 (42% of respondents)

Other/Retired – 8 (22% of respondents)