

WORTH A LIFETIME

The Relocation Transition Experience In Maine



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Acknowledgements and Dedication

To my Mom and Dad. For always giving me the space to ask “Why?”, for wholeheartedly supporting me in everything I do, and for giving me both roots and wings. Every day you show me what the best kind of love looks like and remind me that I can do anything I set my mind to. Thank you for raising me to value grit alongside grace and thank you for instilling within me a strength of spirit. The best lessons I have learned in life I learned from both of you.

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Executive Summary

This capstone project examined the relocation transition experiences of individuals who moved to Maine to live and work. The intent was to generate insights that could be leveraged to better support relocators as they navigated their transition to Maine. The focal organization was Live + Work in Maine (LWM), a not-for-profit entity that partners in a cross-industry capacity to put forward offerings aimed at attracting talent to the state of Maine.

Given their function, LWM plays an important role in the state-wide effort to address talent shortages and other workforce development related challenges. LWM, along with other entities across Maine, have a vested interest in retaining the talent that chooses to move to Maine to live and work. This capstone study endeavored to provide evidence-based insights that could be leveraged to support talent retention interventions.

The study examined the relocation transition using the following questions:

1. How did individuals who moved to Maine navigate the phases of their transition (relocation) to Maine?
2. For individuals who moved to Maine, what factors, obstacles and/or barriers impacted their transition and affected their adaptation to living and working in Maine?
3. How did the individual's expectations prior to relocation compare to their experience(s) once they transitioned to Maine to live and work?

To inform the exploration of the relocation experience, a conceptual framework was built that employs the lens of both human development and anthropology to position a geographical move (relocation) as a transition. Van Gennep's (1960) three phases associated with change (pre-liminal, liminal, post-liminal) serve to animate the elements of the relocation transition that an individual must navigate, then Schlossberg's (1984) Transition Framework is utilized to understand how the changes embedded within the three phases are experienced. The multidisciplinary scaffolding for this study was intentional and allowed for a fuller conceptualization of the nuances associated with individual change experiences.

Guided by a sequential exploratory approach, the study combines qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (open and close-ended survey) methods. By first engaging with individual transition experiences via semi-structured interviews and then implementing an instrument (survey) to measure the prevalence of the experiences (as identified by the interviewees), the study was able to generate a range of useful findings to address each of the three research questions. The findings are grouped below by which research question they apply to:

Research Question 1:

Finding 1: Elements of the relocation transition can be bucketed into two categories (phases), the personal and the professional.

Finding 2: Employers play an important role in the initial components of the relocation transition experience.

Research Question 2:

Finding 3: Accessing opportunities to build meaningful connections in their new community is a key challenge encountered by individuals who relocate to Maine.

Finding 4: The Maine attitude towards people “from away” creates challenges for transplants as they try to build both personal and professional connections across the state.

Research Question 3:

Finding 5: The Maine “lifestyle” resonates with relocators and positively impacts their transition experience.

The study generated four recommendations based upon the research findings:

Recommendation 1: Live + Work in Maine should spearhead the creation of Welcome Kits that can be made available to new arrivals and provide crucial information to support them in the early elements of their relocation transition.

Recommendation 2: Live + Work in Maine should curate a selection of pre-packaged programmatic offerings positioned to address key challenges faced by new Maine residents.

Recommendation 3: Live + Work in Maine should continue to emphasize the positive benefits of living and working in Maine in marketing initiatives aimed at trying to entice individuals to relocate to the state.

Recommendation 4: Live + Work in Maine should develop a strategy for sharing and leveraging the insights gathered from the research executed for this capstone.

While this capstone is specific to the relocation transition experience in Maine, the study provides valuable insights relevant to relocation transitions broadly. Findings and recommendations articulated here will be useful to a range of practitioners and can contribute to conversations related to workforce development, attraction, and retention.

Worth a Lifetime: The Relocation Transition Experience in Maine

Where it was once commonplace for individuals to remain close to their community of origin, now it is more likely that people relocate at least a few times over the course of their lives. Whether it is a relocation spurred on by a career opportunity, moving to a new city or state for a fresh start, or returning to your hometown to raise a family, each of these experiences requires the individual to navigate a significant transition. As someone who has relocated several times, I have always been curious about the common experience(s) one encounters while acclimating to a new country, state, or community. What do you need to help a new place feel like home? How do you build meaningful connections in a place where you may not know anyone yet? Where should you look for support as you navigate the many layers of change associated with relocation? I started to ask these questions in conversations with friends, peers, and professional colleagues, and as people shared their relocation stories, I heard similar struggles.

My most recent relocation took place in late 2018 when I moved to Portland, Maine. As a new resident, I was eager to take advantage of all the state had to offer. While I expected I would enjoy living in Maine, I soon came to realize that simply liking a place was not the same as building a home for yourself in that place you like. While adjusting to my new place of residence, I wondered if other people were encountering the same challenges such as where to go to meet people, trying to adjust to a new city and a new job at the same time, and even the more trivial tasks like

finding a new dentist and transferring a car registration. My curiosity about shared relocation transition experiences served as the catalyst for my capstone study.

To explore the relocation experience, I partnered with Live + Work in Maine, a workforce attraction organization that serves as a key player in Maine's workforce development efforts. Live + Work in Maine has built and executed several impactful marketing initiatives designed to entice people to relocate to Maine to live and work. They also partner with a range of employers across the state to offer them a direct connection to individuals planning a relocation and looking for employment. Early conversations with Live + Work in Maine helped solidify that relocation transition was more than just my own individual concern. Workforce development is a key economic development priority for the state of Maine and efforts to cultivate a vibrant workforce can hinge on the ability to retain the individuals who choose to relocate to the state to live and work (Maine Development Foundation, 2020). Because of this, Live + Work in Maine is committed to retaining the new talent the state needs by investing in providing relocators with a positive experience.

The purpose of this capstone project is to help Live + Work in Maine better understand what people experience as they navigate a relocation to Maine. The goal is to identify opportunity areas where entities like Live + Work in Maine would be best able to contribute to interventions aimed at retaining these new residents and supporting them through their relocation transition.

Organizational Context

Focal Organization: Live + Work in Maine

Live + Work in Maine (LWM) is a not-for-profit entity that focuses on a mission of enticing individuals to build both their career and their life in Maine. LWM launched in 2015 through a combination of private and public funding collaborators and is positioned as a lynchpin across sectors, partnering with private, public, government, and education to contribute to the cultivation of a strong workforce statewide. To achieve goals associated with workforce attraction, development, and retention, LWM primarily functions in a marketing and awareness-raising capacity.

A range of employer partners across the state support LWM, including technology companies, banks, health care providers, and manufacturing companies. The employer partners provide a combination of funding and strategic guidance to ensure alignment between LWM initiatives and Maine workforce needs. The partnership with employers is synergistic and LWM provides a range of valuable offerings to employers, such as their job board, which connects prospective relocators with available positions.

Given the organization's collaborative nature, LWM can create value despite having a very small full-time staff. In 2019, they expanded their staffing to include a Director of Engagement, bringing the total full-time employees to two. To execute their range of programmatic offerings and initiatives, the LWM team relies on the strategic partnerships they have cultivated with other non-profits and state-level agencies oriented towards workforce development goals.

A significant amount of LWM resources are focused on connecting Maine-based employers to the workforce they need via campaigns designed to attract people from out of state and support them in relocating to Maine. Their longest running campaign entices individuals with a prior connection to Maine to choose to “boomerang” back to the state for career opportunities and lifestyle preferences. By capitalizing on the unique work-life balance Maine offers, marketing campaigns and strategic projects executed by LWM leverage a sense of place to highlight the unique lifestyle ability Maine cities like Portland and Bangor offer career-minded individuals. LWM shares stories about the unique career and life choices available to Mainers and leverages these narratives to fuel their attraction campaigns, such as the Boomerang campaign. Attraction efforts intended to elevate the Maine employment brand amplify sentiments such as:

In a city like Portland, you can have a “big city” job akin to an opportunity you would find in locations like Boston, but with the ability to more easily pursue hobbies like outdoor recreation or raise a family in a tight-knit community.

In Maine, it is feasible to wake up early before work, get in a few runs on the ski mountain, or go for a hike or out for a surf, and then still be able to make it into the office on time.

A Maine state motto is, “Maine, worth a visit, worth a lifetime” and this ethos undergirds the majority of the work done by the LWM team and its partners across all sectors and industries. Last year (2020) marked the fifth year the organization has been in operation. As they look to grow and enhance their contributions to workforce and economic development statewide, LWM is interested in building out more resources and programming to support workforce retention efforts alongside attraction.

Additional Context: The State of Maine

The state of Maine is often referred to as “Vacationland.” The nickname first appeared on Maine license plates back in 1936 and the Vacationland descriptor has been used in both present-day popular culture and by classic American literary giants like E.B. White and John Steinbeck (Metro, 2020). Maine has benefitted from being known as Vacationland with tourism functioning as a core driver of the Maine economy. In 2019, tourists spent 4.29 billion in taxable sales across the state (Maine Office of Tourism, 2020). However, tourism alone is not enough to sustain an economy.

While many know Maine as the best place to travel to for some good lobster, there is much more to the state than what

it offers tourists. In addition to the Vacationland moniker, Maine is also the Pine Tree state, an ode to the expansive pine forests that populate large portions of land.

Relatedly, wilderness and outdoor recreation are a core part of the state identity. Maine is known for its abundant natural beauty, with 3,500 miles of coastline, 6,000 lakes, and 17 million acres of forest. Access to a diverse range of scenery is also a point of distinction – it is feasible to take a day trip and see the mountains, the lakes, and the ocean. These features lend themselves to a strong quality of life.

Table 1

Maine: Key Facts and Figures from 2019 Census

Population	1,344,212
Race	94% White
Persons 65 Years and Over	21%
Bachelor’s degree or higher	32%
Mean travel time to work	24 minutes
Median household income	\$57,918
Persons in poverty	11%

Source: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/ME>

Area of Inquiry

Maine is the oldest state in the United States, according to both median age and percent of the population over the age of 65 (Rector, 2020). Driven in part by the aging population, the state's civilian labor force has been starting to trend down since the mid-2000s (Rector, 2020). The decline of the workforce is also impacted by things like young Mainers choosing to move elsewhere after college, perceived lack of diversity in career availability, and a declining birth rate. Trends like these contribute to a growing challenge regarding long-term workforce shortages and capabilities. Addressing these issues is top of mind for a range of actors across the state. Combating the impact of a dwindling workforce requires a coordinated effort across government, education, and industry. As a result, workforce development efforts have long been a strategic priority for many of these entities, driven in part by the Governor's strategic mandates (for example, the 2020-2029 Economic Development Strategy for Maine focuses on talent and innovation). For Maine to benefit from its prioritization of workforce development efforts, it should treat both the retention and attraction of workforce-eligible individuals as key strategic priorities (Maine Development Foundation, 2020).

Over the last five years (2015-2020) there has been an influx of new residents into the state (Rector, 2020). If Maine is invested in retaining this group of new residents, then special attention should be paid to better understanding what people who have relocated over the past five years need in order to navigate the transition to living and working in Maine. This requires engaging with this population to learn more about what resources and experiences they are looking for to help Maine become (or stay)

their home. This also prompts a desire to learn more about what Mainers who have recently relocated have done to cultivate community here and move through their relocation transition. Insights such as these are what Live + Work in Maine, and by extension, this capstone project, are interested in delving into.

While their workforce attraction endeavors have gained momentum since their founding in 2015, LWM is looking to expand the range of their contributions to the workforce attraction, retention, and development efforts. The staff has realized that it is not enough to simply attract a workforce, more attention should be paid to what the workforce needs are once they relocate to Maine. LWM wants to know how to best leverage their capacity to assist individuals in their transition to Maine. What resources, programs, and new initiatives could LWM launch that would help individuals who have recently relocated begin building community and deepening their ties (connection) to the state? Presently, LWM functions almost entirely in an attraction capacity, but there is interest in gleaning a better understanding of what it would entail to build out retention efforts or to assist their employer partners in doing so.

LWM recognizes that workforce attraction is just one piece of the puzzle. For the state of Maine to effectively capitalize on efforts to grow and strengthen the workforce, it must pay more attention to how best to retain a workforce. Information needs to be provided to the various actors across the state that are positioned to assist new residents and help effectively facilitate their transition to becoming engaged within the Maine communities of which they are now a part. There is a need to better understand what

happens to new Mainers once they relocate, immigrate, or “boomerang” back to Maine.

The term relocation can summon up a range of images: the military family that relocates to a new base and a new city, the recent college graduate who relocates for their first job, the young family who relocates to raise their children closer to their support network, the adult who encounters an unexpected life event that necessitates an unplanned move, or the retiree who relocates to a town they always dreamed of living in. While each of these relocation experiences encompasses a range of individualized nuance, at their core each relocation is also comprised of a predictable set of components, each of which is anchored in a change experience. Framing the relocation as a major life transition allows for both an acknowledgement and examination of relocation from a new lens. This capstone positions relocation as a transition in order to gain a deeper understanding and ultimately allow that understanding to inform the design of future interventions aimed at retention.

When it comes to bolstering economic development and cultivating a strong workforce, in addition to attraction, the strength of the workforce appears to hinge on the state’s ability to retain the workforce. Through retention, the workforce is strengthened. However, a revolving door of viable (employable) Maine residents is not the desired outcome. Instead, Maine needs a strong citizenry (workforce), a collective of individuals engaged in their communities with a desire to build their lives in the state. What can be done to ensure people relocating to Maine choose to make Maine

worth a lifetime? Live + Work in Maine is positioned to address this question, but they need guidance around where best to direct resources.

The specific purpose of this capstone project is to develop recommendations for what types of interventions, programs and/or offerings Live + Work in Maine could provide to support individuals who have recently relocated to Maine as they navigate the transition(s) associated with the change(s) brought on by a geographical move.

Literature Review

A relocation is a particular type of migration that involves a geographical move over a significant enough distance to result in a change of economic environment (Molloy et al., 2011). By emphasizing the change in economic environment, a distinction can be made between a geographical move across town (same economic environment) versus a geographical move to a new state (a different economic environment). Aligned with this conceptualization of migration, the act of relocating to the state of Maine to live and work can be considered a migration.

Relocation as Migration Motivated by Choice

While some individuals who relocate to Maine are prompted to do so by circumstances outside of their control, the majority are making an active decision to move to the state. As a result, relocation motivated by choice is the type of migration that is the focus of this capstone. However, when examining migration, the focus often tends to be on migration when it is prompted by an economic, environmental, or demographic crisis of some sort (De Haan, 1999). The concept of choice is a central distinguishing feature in a comparison between relocation for lifestyle or career preferences (i.e., moving to Maine to live and work) versus an instance of forced relocation (i.e., because of a natural disaster). By focusing on migration from a purely economic lens, or by exploring migration only when it results from an unanticipated change in situation, means that less attention is given to the type of migration that is a common occurrence within most societies, i.e., the choice to relocate for lifestyle or career purposes (De Haan, 1999).

Given the resources needed to migrate and subsequently, relocate a career to a new geographic destination, the decision to migrate (relocate) more often than not, represents an infrequent choice. Expectations play a significant role in distinct and infrequent choices, as these usually require more thought, consideration, and thus stronger motivation (Wanous et al., 1983). There is a range of reasons that can motivate the choice to relocate to a new state and, for folks that have chosen Maine, the motivations behind this choice likely vary.

In attempting to inspect these motivations it is helpful to understand phenomena at play when selecting from available courses of action. Expectations are considered a driving force in the context of human motivation and individuals are likely to choose when to enter a new community based upon what they expect to yield from their decision (Vroom, 1964; Wanous et al., 1983). Given that the transition to Maine to live and work is considered a choice and Maine, in this case, functions as a community to join, one can posit that the individuals choosing to relocate to Maine are making this choice based upon what they expect to be able to experience once they arrive in the state.

Another way to frame migration that is a result of personal choice and motivated by expectations rather than economics is the idea of lifestyle migration (Hoey, 2005). This frame accounts for personal motivations while articulating the migration as more than a single action and positioning it as an involved process (Benson & O'Rielly, 2015). Amenity migration (see Osbaldiston, 2011; Gosnell & Abrams, 2011) also provides a relevant lens into choice-based relocation, however, given the population of interest for

this particular capstone, insights gleaned from the lifestyle migration frame offer more utility.

Relocation as Lifestyle Migration

Hoey (2014) defines lifestyle migration as “the movement of individuals at all stages of the life course who relocate... to geographic places made personally meaningful by belief in the potential of their own act of relocation and the places themselves to improve quality of life” (pp. ix). Here there is alignment between the suggestion of potential and the aforementioned ideas about expectations as motivation. The idea of a place being made personally meaningful expands the migration experience to include more individualized elements (like meaning). By accounting for the human experience within migration, lifestyle migration provides fertile ground for examining the contextual nuance within the relocation experience for each migrant (Benson & O’Rielly, 2009). Researchers concur that the lifestyle migration frame allows for this nuanced exploration by centering the individual experience and circumstance embedded within non-economic migration (Benson & O’Rielly, 2009, 2015; Benson & Osbaldiston, 2016; Hoey, 2005, 2006).

Understanding Migration as Personal Transition

An exploration of the individual experience as it relates to migration (relocation), can benefit from an interdisciplinary approach that employs both micro and macro-level insights, all the while centering the individual. By centering the individual experience there is the ability to expand our understanding of the relocation beyond

economic models and instead as a personal transition. When examining a relocation decision relies solely on economic indicators, we miss the opportunity to delve deeper into the human experience associated with the migration (Hoey, 2006). Studies concur that to explore the human experience within relocation and what happens at the individual level, it is useful to position migration as a personal transition (Van Tonder, 2013). Unlike other lenses of inquiry, positioning migration as personal transition allows for a more fluid understanding of the change experiences associated with migration, regardless of the impetus for, or result of, the migration itself. The personal transition framing also offers the ability to understand migration experiences in new ways, which is what this capstone endeavors to accomplish.

Transition

While the literature offers an abundance of discipline-specific definitions of transition, most research agrees that transition involves a passage or movement, complemented by an experience of inner re-orientation (Kralik et al., 2006). Meleis et al. (2000) explain what occurs during the inner re-orientation of the transition experience by asserting the complexity of the concept. They posit that despite the multidimensional nature of transitions, as an experience a transition includes a set of essential and interrelated properties: awareness, engagement, change and difference, timespan, and critical points and events (Meleis et al., 2000). The change property of transition is of particular interest to this capstone project. Supporting these descriptions of transition, Schumacher & Meleis (1994) elaborate on the complexity by depicting transitions as a series of unorderly processes that unfold over time and include a range

of changes. Willson (2019) aligns with this description and suggests that individuals will move through these processes and changes in different ways.

Embedded within the individual change experience, as it relates to relocation, is much more than only a change of place. When relocation is positioned as transition and analyzed at the individual level, it becomes possible to acknowledge and engage with the umbrella of changes that occur for an individual in transition, including changes to relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles (Anderson et al., 2011).

Relocation as Transition

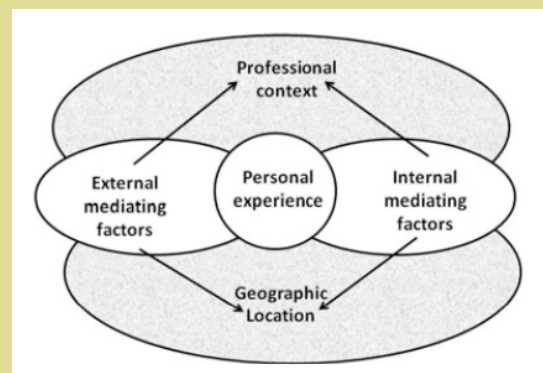
When looking to understand how an individual experiences the transition associated with a geographical move, Lockyer et al.

(2011) found that it is important to make a distinction between the elements of the transition that occur within the career context (i.e., new workplace and colleagues, different systems) and the personal context (i.e., housing and recreation). Using the model in Figure 1 as a

visual, the complexity embedded within the personal experience becomes clear. When an individual moves to a new location there are multiple contexts within which they are experiencing transition - the context of their new locale and the context of their career (referred to in the Figure 1 as “professional”) – and how the individual navigates the transition across these contexts is impacted by both internal and external mediating

Figure 1

Dimensions and Factors Affecting a Geographic Transition



Note. (Lockyer et al., 2011)

factors (Lockyer et al., 2011). Merriam (2005) aligns with the claim that transitions occur across multiple contexts and expands on this framing by asserting that for adults in transition it is common to be navigating several transitions at once. These findings suggest that to understand the transition experience, attention must be paid to the various contexts within which the individual is experiencing change, the makeup of the internal and external factors influencing the transition overall, and the multiple transitions potentially occurring in parallel.

Research also shows that transitions are impacted by the environment within which the transition occurs, level of planning, access to relevant knowledge and skills, and individual meaning, expectations, and emotional and physical well-being (Schumacher & Meleis, 1994). Each of these adds additional potential layers of analysis when examining the relocation transition and will be leveraged by this capstone study.

Conceptual Framework

Transition, as a concept, manifests across a wide swath of disciplines. For this capstone, the focus will be placed on the intersection of transition theory coming out of the anthropology and human development realms. Transition will be defined in alignment with the anthropological theory on transition developed in Van Gennep (1960). The data collection and analysis methods used for this study were guided by the Transition Framework (Schlossberg, 1984; Anderson & Schlossberg, 2011), stemming from human development theory on transition.

In the discipline of anthropology, Van Gennep (1960) described how people move through changes in his work, *Rites of Passage*, where he put forward three phases that occur as people move through transitions. Pre-liminal rites are associated with separating the individual from the environment they had once occupied. Liminal rites are associated with the actual transition experience where the individual operates in an in-between (liminal) way of being. Thirdly, post-liminal rites are associated with incorporation, when the individual integrates into their new environment or role.

Van Gennep's (1960) phases offer a suitable framework to use to define the transitional experiences of individuals who have relocated to Maine. Pre-liminal rites align with the physical act of a geographical move whereby the individual experiences a separation from where they once were located (where they resided before relocating to Maine). Liminal rites conceptually animate the change experience an individual encounters once they arrive in their new location and begin to adapt to the new environment (moving and initial period of residence in Maine). Post-liminal rites, or the

act of incorporation, refers to how the individual experiences integration into their new location (integration into Maine).

Building upon Van Gennep's (1960) foundational dissection of the core elements at play in any transition, the Transition Framework can be used to understand how adults experience and navigate the changes embedded within the three phases (Anderson & Schlossberg, 2011). Within the framework, the Transition Model itself includes three stages: identifying the type of transition and the related process, identifying the coping resources available to the individual navigating the transition, and the integration of strategies that can be used to assist with the changes related to the transition (Anderson & Schlossberg, 2011).

Figure 2

Stages of the Transition Model

1. Approaching Transitions: Transition Identification and Transition Process

2. Taking Stock of Coping Resources: The 4S System

3. Taking Charge: Strengthening Resources

Note. (Anderson & Schlossberg., 2011)

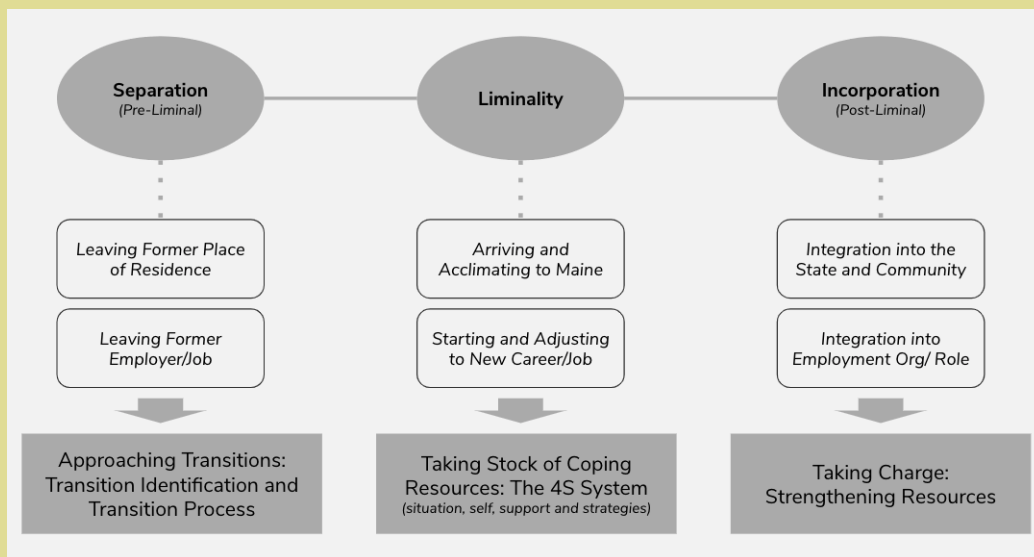
Component one involves identifying what type of transition is occurring (anticipated, unanticipated or nonevent) and then integrating the process piece (moving in, moving out, or moving through). Component two, the 4S System, is comprised of four variables: situation, self, support, and strategies. Each of the variables can be categorized as potential assets and/or liabilities and together they determine the range

of coping capacity the individual has access to when navigating a transition. Situation, self, support, and strategies are variables that can be used to understand the different factors that contribute to how an individual navigates their relocation to Maine. The final component involves the shift within the individual where they move from assessing and unpacking the variables impacting the transition (The 4 S's) into a mode of being that involves action, planning, and leveraging available resources (Anderson & Schlossberg, 2011).

Together, the theoretical framework of Van Gennepe's (1960) transition theory (the three phases) and Schlossberg (1984) and Anderson & Schlossberg (2011) Transition Framework (the three stages) are used to guide an exploration of how individuals who have relocated to Maine progressed through transition; which assets and/or liabilities influenced how they overcame obstacles associated with relocation; and which resources they looked to leverage as they acclimated to their new state.

Figure 3

Conceptual Framework



Note. Using Rites of Passage (Van Gennepe, 1960) and the Transition Framework (Schlossberg, 1984; Anderson & Schlossberg, 2011)

Lastly, the notion of choice is implicit in the discussion about transition in the context of relocating to Maine to live and work. The transition would not be experienced without the impetus (choice) that led to the change (relocation). Therefore, the motivations behind the relocation decision are of relevance to this capstone. The concept of expectancy theory is often used to explain how individuals choose to enter and/or leave an organization and while Maine is a state and not an organization, by focusing on marketing the appeal of Maine as a tool to entice (recruit) individuals to move to the state to live and work, clear parallels can be drawn between Live + Work in Maine and a recruiting function within an organization. As a result, this capstone project utilized expectancy theory to better understand the expectations that motivated an individual to choose to relocate to Maine for their life and work, and subsequently integrates a conceptualization of those expectations into the exploration of the individual's transition experience.

Capstone Study Questions

For this study, I crafted three study questions. The goal of question 1 was to unpack the phases embedded within a relocation transition and draw out insights about how individuals experience those phases. The goal of question 2 was to animate the types of struggles individuals encounter during a relocation, identify the significance of those challenges, and understand their impact on the overall transition experience. The goal of question 3 was to examine how the motivations for a relocation align with what was experienced by individuals after they officially relocated.

Figure 3

Research Questions

1. How did individuals who moved to Maine navigate the phases of their transition (relocation) to Maine?
2. For individuals who moved to Maine, what factors, obstacles and/or barriers impacted their transition and affected their adaption to living and working in Maine?
3. How did the individual's expectations prior to relocation compare to their experience(s) once they transitioned to Maine to live and work?

Study Design and Methods

The purpose of this capstone is to better understand how individuals experienced their transition to Maine. I used a sequential exploratory approach to first explore the transition phenomenon in-depth followed by a measurement of the prevalence of the phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2006). Using qualitative methods in conjunction with quantitative provided access to narratives and contextual nuances that illuminated insights gained from the quantitative, which ultimately allowed for an in-depth examination of the Maine context specifically.

I began with a document analysis focused on key pieces of prior research relevant to the area of inquiry. This provided the context necessary to build out an approach for first engaging with individual transition experiences (via semi-structured interviews) and then implementing an instrument (survey) to measure the prevalence of the experiences (as identified by the interviewees) associated with the relocation transition across the population affiliated with LWM. By utilizing this phased (sequential) approach to data collection and analysis I was able to leverage insights from the qualitative data collection to inform the subsequent quantitative data collection (Creswell, 2006; Greene et al., 1989).

Document Analysis

Document analysis aimed to gain insight into the context of both the area of inquiry and the work of LWM to date. This data informed the definition of the population of

interest and determined the parameters to be used to identify subsequent study participants.

I placed an emphasis on a collection of internal LWM documents, including the 2019 annual report card, 2020 employer partner report, and LWM 2020 report for the Maine Economic Recovery Committee. Also, at the start of the COVID pandemic, LWM conducted a Remote Worker Survey that they distributed across their network. While the primary focus of this survey was the experiences of individuals who had been long-time remote workers residing in Maine, I reviewed the survey as a part of this capstone. The goal of including the survey and subsequent analyses conducted by LWM in the document analysis was twofold: to better understand the survey philosophy and habits of the organization and to gather any insights relevant to relocation and transition referenced by remote workers who had recently transitioned to Maine.

In addition to the LWM specific documents, I also reviewed a prior research study commissioned by the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development that focused on workforce and business attraction (Davidson Peterson Associates, 2017) and was intended to provide insights that could be leveraged to inform the design of workforce development solutions. Given the range of actors invested in interventions aimed at workforce development, it was important to understand the research already conducted in relation to this particular problem.

The initial document analysis helped to provide a clear picture of the landscape that LWM was operating in. Given the multifaceted nature of their work (i.e., working across industry to market Maine while also serving as a trusted strategic partner to key

statewide economic development initiatives), it was important to anchor the development of additional data collection efforts within the current statewide landscape related to workforce development.

Semi – Structured Interviews

With the insights gathered during document analysis, I was able to develop a profile that was utilized in the selection for semi-structured interview participants. The parameters were as follows:

- Given that LWM has only been in operation since 2015 the goal was to select interviewees who had relocated to Maine during 2015 – 2020
- LWM partners with employers across a wide swath of industries, the goal was to select interviewees who represented those industries

To identify potential interviewees LWM staff sent out a call for participants via targeted email invitations across their network. Individuals interested in participating in an interview were invited to fill out a Google Form. The form asked for name, contact info, a confirmation of their willingness to participate in an interview, and their relocation year.

Twelve individuals registered as potential interviewees. Each was sent a follow-up email inviting them to schedule an interview. After they scheduled their interview, they were sent a pre-interview questionnaire (via Google Forms) to complete. This questionnaire asked basic demographic information (age, race/ethnicity, gender identity, level of education obtained, annual household income), if they had relocated

with dependents, and the industry of their current employer. The items were designed to capture the diversity of the pool of interviewees (see Table 2 below for final interview pool make-up). Industry of current employer was prioritized when soliciting participation from potential interviewees, as the goal was to have representation across the range of employer partners that LWM works with. Diversity with regards to demographics was also taken into account (to the extent that it was feasible given that only 12 individuals indicated their interest and availability to participate in an interview).

Ultimately 10 individuals scheduled interviews, and 9 interviews were completed. Each interview was conducted via Zoom. Interviewees were not provided questions ahead of time. The questions were developed using The 4S System within the Transition Model (Anderson & Schlossberg, 2011). The questions addressed situation, self, support, and strategies (see Appendix B for full list of questions). Interview questions were curated to provide interviewees with the opportunity to give voice to crucial elements of the transition including motivation behind the relocation, personal feelings while navigating the move, available support system, and strategies for acclimating.

The following industries were represented by the interviewee pool: Health Care, Manufacturing, Educational Services, Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services, Finance and Insurance, Military. Eight interviewees relocated between 2015 – 2020, one interviewee had relocated prior to 2015 (2013). Table 2 below provides an overview of the pool of interviewees.

Table 2

Interviewee Demographic Info

Age Range	25 – 40
Gender Identity	44% Male 56% Female
Highest Level Education Obtained	56% Bachelors 33% Masters 11% Doctoral
Annual Household Income	66% \$150,000+ 11% \$75,000 - \$99,999 22% \$50,000 - \$74,999
Relocated with Dependents	67% No 33% Yes

The goal of the semi-structured interviews was to provide narrative insight into how individuals experienced the different elements of their personal relocation transition. I analyzed the interviews and identified themes across the range of personal experiences. The identified themes were then utilized to inform the design of both closed and open-ended survey items.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed using the online software Otter.ai. The transcriptions were reviewed and coded according to a scheme developed based upon the components of both Van Gennep's (1960) conceptualization of the three transition phases (pre-liminal, liminal, post-liminal) and Anderson & Schlossberg (2011) Transition Framework. The goal was to identify which elements of the personal narrative animated which transition phase and/or framework component. Special attention was given to The 4S System, as this drove the design of the interview questions.

While analyzing the survey data (described below) I identified three potential constructs: relocation expectations; challenges, barriers and obstacles encountered; experience navigating transition. I went back to the semi-structured interview data and reviewed it again to be able to include these additional codes. This resulted in the following final coding scheme shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Coding Scheme Using Conceptual Framework

Pre-Liminal Rites	Liminal Rites	Post-Liminal Rites
Motivation for Relocation	Assets and Liabilities	Pivotal Transition Moments
Type of Transition	The 4S System Self, Situation, Support, Strategies	Strengthening Resources
Expectations	Challenges, Barriers, Obstacles	Navigating the Transition

Survey Instrument

Few studies have explicitly examined the relocation transition of individuals who engaged in a geographical move as a result of a lifestyle and/or career choice. The lack of research in this space, and the large-scale nature of transition, means that there are also challenges with consensus and the measurement approaches available to gauge key components of a relocation transition, such as what features entice people to select a particular place to relocate to (Fotheringham et al., 2000). Limited prior studies and lack of consensus within the research, meant there were few survey instruments to leverage for the specific purposes of this capstone. Additionally, the goal of the survey was to examine the relocation transition within the Maine context only, which required the ability to design survey items that could account for Maine specifics.

To effectively answer the focal capstone study questions, I built a new survey instrument. The survey instrument was built based upon insights gathered during the semi-structured interviews and informed by the components of the conceptual framework (Van Gennep, 1960; Anderson & Schlossberg, 2011).

After survey items were developed, I used Ryan et al.'s (2012) four-part model for assessing the cognitive processing that occurs when an individual takes a survey (question comprehension, informational retrieval, judgement and estimation, documenting a response). In lieu of a formalized cognitive interview, the survey instrument was presented to a single test respondent during a Zoom video conference, and I went through each survey item using a tailored iteration of the hybrid model, combination think-aloud method, and verbal probing, to gather insights into how the respondent understood the components of the instrument. The aforementioned process was informed by Ryan et al. (2012) and prioritized practicality. The survey was also distributed to several test respondents ahead of the launch. Each of these individuals was asked to provide specific feedback about their experience taking the survey (with an emphasis on comprehension). The feedback gathered from the above helped inform final edits and adjustments to both wording and sequencing of the items included in the survey instrument.

The survey was distributed via the LWM network. Social media (Facebook and LinkedIn) and targeted emails to LWM newsletter subscribers were the primary channels used as these two distribution streams allowed for the easiest access to individuals who likely fit into the target sample population (individuals who had

relocated to Maine between 2015 – 2020). Emails were also sent to the Chamber of Commerce in each of Maine’s 16 counties asking them to repost or share the survey link. This was done to expand the reach of the survey beyond Maine’s two hubs, Portland and Bangor.

While the primary interest was the relocation experiences of individuals who relocated to Maine between 2015 – 2020, given the distribution method utilized, the survey was accessible to individuals who may have relocated

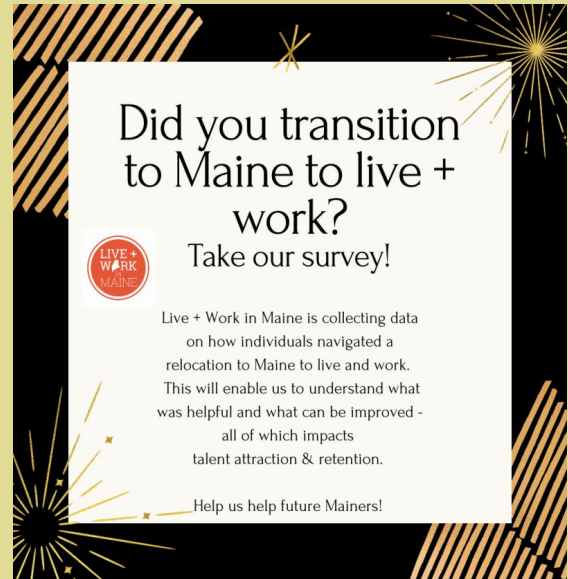
prior to 2015. This was an intentional decision. Gathering data from relocators who arrived prior to 2015 could provide the opportunity to compare their experiences to the experiences of those who relocated between 2015 – 2020.

The survey was hosted on Qualtrics. During the five-week window when the survey was open, 386 individuals started the survey, which resulted in 314 usable responses. Each survey item was structured as a voluntary response, which meant some survey respondents skipped certain questions or did not fully complete the survey. Therefore, usability was determined by the completion of 50% of survey items.

Given that the survey was distributed across multiple channels and the survey link was shareable, there is no way to accurately gauge response rate across the sample

Figure 5

Messaging for Social Media Survey Outreach



population (however, prior LWM surveying often resulted in ~400 responses and utilized similar distribution methods). Additional details about survey respondents can be found below in Table 4.

Table 4

Details About Respondents

176 Boomerangs	138 Transplants
208 Did not relocate with dependents	104 Relocated with Dependents
220 Relocated between 2015 – 2020	92 Relocated prior to 2015

Survey Analysis

To prepare the survey data for analyses I exported all raw data from Qualtrics into Excel. Open-ended responses were coded using the same coding scheme employed during the semi-structured interviews (see Table 3). The remaining close-ended survey data was then numericized. Likert scale items were changed from *strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree*, to a five-point scale with 1 corresponding to strongly disagree and 5 corresponding to strongly agree. Survey items that served to sort potential comparison groups were identified. Crosstabs were exported from Qualtrics into Excel across survey items that could be analyzed by comparison groups.

The identified survey items below provided data oriented to answer the corresponding capstone study question. Using these groupings, I was able to align survey data to the question the data was best positioned to answer. This approach also allowed me to holistically examine the data related to each piece of the transition puzzle: transition navigation, challenges encountered, and expectations versus experiences.

Table 5

Aligning Survey Items to Study Questions

Capstone Study Question	Corresponding Capstone Survey Item(s)
How did individuals who moved to Maine navigate the phases of their transition (relocation) to Maine?	Theme: <i>Navigating Transition</i> Q15: 1, 2; Q17; Q19
For individuals who moved to Maine, what factors, obstacles and/or barriers impacted their transition and affected their adaption to living and working in Maine?	Theme: <i>Challenges, Barriers, Obstacles</i> Q15: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5; Q18
How did the individual's expectations prior to relocation compare to their experience(s) once they transitioned to Maine to live and work?	Theme: <i>Expectations</i> Q15: 6, 7, 8, 9, 10; Q20; Q21; Q22

Note. See Appendix C for Survey Items.

Findings

Research Question 1: How did individuals who moved to Maine navigate the phases of their transition (relocation) to Maine?

Finding #1: Elements of the relocation transition take place in two phases: personal and professional.

Relocators use a segmented approach to describe elements of their personal transition and elements of their professional transition. While personal and professional are referred to as separate transition elements, the two are often occurring in parallel within the overall relocation transition. One interviewee framed the experience in terms of parallel processes by discussing how the processes in their personal life overlapped with the processes in their professional, “...there were so many moving parts, and it was such an extreme experience... it touches every aspect of your life. We talk a lot about jobs and a house, but it's like, doctors and dentists and teachers and grocery stores and license plates and driver's licenses and utilities.”

For relocators who move with children, there is an added layer over the personal and professional elements of the transition because as parents or guardians they are also supporting their child's transition while navigating their

own. One survey respondent shared, “[The biggest challenge was] acclimating my son

Figure 6

Transitions Operating in Parallel



to a new daycare while my wife and I acclimated to new jobs”. Another interviewee elaborated about the challenges faced while trying to balance parenting through transition, “...it's just like everything changes...especially with [a] family... it's a very intense process from like, a functional perspective... but then also from an emotional perspective.”.

Transition experiences pertaining to the personal and professional play a nearly equal role in the adjustment process for relocators. Survey data indicates figuring out everyday logistics and learning the ins and outs of their new employment

Table 6

Facilitating Acclimation: What Is Important

Ranked Order	<i>Looking back on your relocation transition, which of the following was the most important in helping you feel acclimated to living and working in Maine?</i>
1	Learning the ins and outs of my employment arrangement
2	Figuring out everyday logistics
3	Building meaningful connections with others
4	Determining what to do with my free time
5	Becoming an active participant in my new community

arrangement, are among the most important factors in helping individuals feel acclimated to living and working in Maine (see Table 6 above). Despite deprioritizing making connections in the early phases of the acclimation process (ranked third), this appears to be a significant component in the acclimation process in the long term (see Findings 3 and 4 for more details).

The data collected also suggest relocators initially prioritize the professional transition. Survey respondents rank adjustment to employment as most important in the

initial acclimation process (see Table 6 above). Interview data further animate some of the narratives behind this order of prioritization. As one interviewee explained,

... there were kind of two different, tangible stages [of the transition] for me... the first was... when I had finally figured out what I was supposed to be doing at my new job... once I kind of understood that, then I [could] relax and... focus on things outside [of work] because I knew what I needed to do at work.

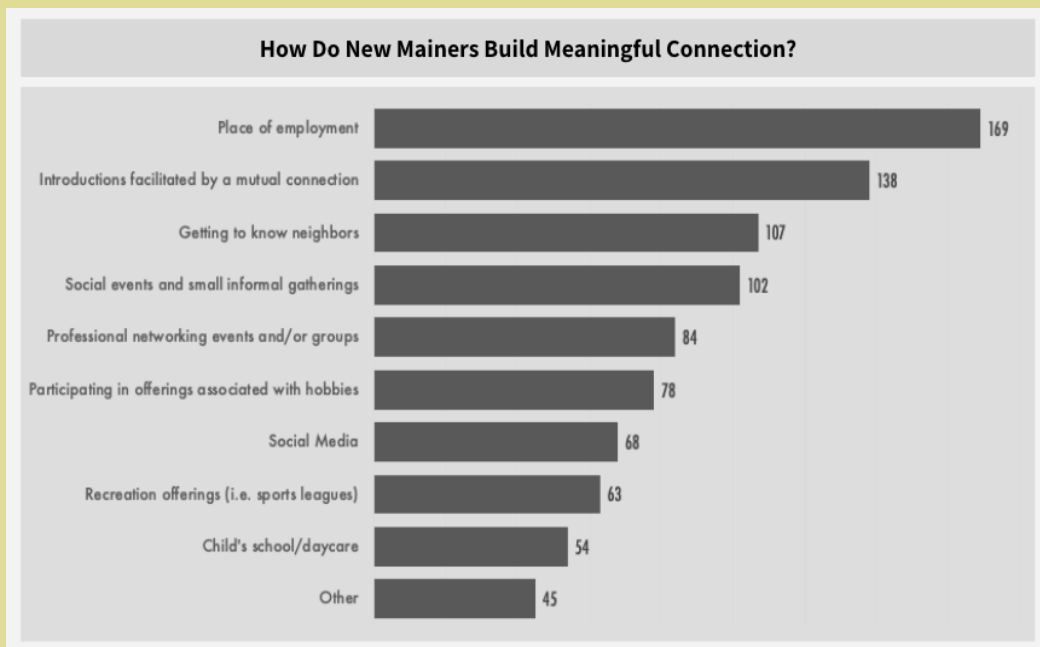
Within the professional category, key components include understanding a new job, determining commuting routines, acclimating to a new work environment, and developing relationships with colleagues. Within the personal category, key components include logistics (doctors, groceries, housing, routines), making connections, building community, and cultivating a sense of home. Logistics seem to be prioritized in the early stages of the personal transition (see Table 6 above). This suggests a perception that logistical minutia could be sorted out somewhat immediately so that is where relocators direct their initial efforts and energies. While building community and connection are transition components that relocators expected to happen “eventually”. They often used language that animated their strong desire for connection and community but anticipated having to wait for these opportunities to materialize (see Finding 3 for more details).

Finding #2: Employers play an important role in the initial components of the relocation transition experience.

In both survey data and insights gathered from the semi-structured interviews, respondents consistently reference the role their employer played in everything from helping them to navigate the logistics associated with a relocation (housing, transportation, financial assistance) to supporting their efforts to develop a network in their new community. Most survey respondents indicated their employer facilitated their access to engagement opportunities and helped them build community in Maine, see Figure 7 below.

Figure 7

Accessing Opportunity for Connection



Comments in the interviews animate employers as conduits to connection, as one person said, *“I have a local employer [now], [my partner] is engaged towards their job and that's local...so those networks are starting to build and form around us and are pretty important”*. Another interviewee spoke about how their career network was crucial to their ability to meet new people, *“...it is often more difficult to find new [friend groups] when you do not have children or networks other than your career to meet new people. I was lucky that my employer was rather large, and I met a lot of wonderful new people”*.

Working for a Maine-based employer also has a more positive impact on access to connection building opportunities, as individuals who relocate but work remotely for an out-of-state employer appear to have more difficulty making connections. One interviewee shared how their experience working for a Maine-based employer provided them more opportunities to meet people than their partner, who works remotely:

I [got] a part-time job at [a local grocery store] and that was when I actually started to make a lot more friends... since I have a job here in Portland I have that kind of network... it's actually a little more difficult for [my partner]... I go into a place of work and work with people, but he has had a harder time making friends because he's working remotely.

Despite the indication that employers play a central role in the relocation transition, only 51% of survey respondents indicated they felt supported by their employer during their relocation. This suggests an opportunity area for future retention interventions.

Research Question 2: For individuals who moved to Maine, what factors, obstacles and/or barriers impacted their transition and affected their adaptation to living and working in Maine?

Finding #3: Accessing opportunities to build meaningful connections in their new community is a key challenge encountered by individuals who relocate to Maine.

When speaking about how they approached navigating a relocation transition, it was common for relocators to highlight the importance of being able to build connections, community, and networks in their new locale. Relatedly, difficulty making meaningful connections emerged as a top challenge for relocators. Meaning that making connections is both important to relocators and something they struggle with. One interviewee spoke about how they and their partner had to consciously motivate themselves to be intentional about finding friends, despite knowing that it would be difficult to do so:

...and then we were like, okay, friends, [we need to] make friends. When you're [a young adult] it's not easy... [takes] a lot of time and effort... that was the toughest part of transitioning was trying to... find our place and our people.

Many also positioned making meaningful connections as something they expected to have to wait a long time to achieve, below one interviewee speaks to being intentional about finding opportunities for connection while also reconciling with the amount of time it would take to reap the benefits of those connections:

...it takes a lot of initiative to build [a network]... especially in today's reality... to ingratiate yourself with the community... has taken a lot of effort... [I] just kind of put myself out there in the hopes that, you know, a year from now, I'm able to be an active participant in the community and... have those connections that make [Maine] feel like home.

The survey data further supported these sentiments. 68% of survey respondents indicated that they are still looking to find “their people” here in Maine, while 5% believe they will not be able to find meaningful connections here in Maine. Only 27% affirmed they have already “found their people”.

During the interviews a series of questions were asked specifically related to support systems and social ties. When these questions were asked, nearly every interviewee shifted their demeanor as they reflected on their experience trying to meet new people, make friends, and build meaningful connections. I noted the shift in demeanor by an increase in pauses and filler words, visible discomfort, and a perceived pensive vulnerability. Below one interviewee animates the challenges associated with making meaningful connections and the difference between having friendly acquaintances and finding real friends:

...it was harder to necessarily feel like we had real friends because everybody is so polite... it could be a product of moving here in my mid 30s... it's maybe not as easy to make friends anymore... this is the... fifth time that I've moved, and you think it would get easier to meet people and have a social circle. But yeah, that was probably a bit harder.

It is important to call out that the challenge of making meaningful connections is experienced by both Boomerangs (individuals with a prior connection to Maine) and Transplants (individuals with no prior connection to Maine). This suggests that simply knowing people in Maine is not a guarantee of friendship or meaningful connection. Below, one interviewee, who was born and raised in Maine, gives voice to the challenge from the perspective of a Boomerang:

It was like a lot harder for me to meet people here. I had most of all my high school friends here... But I didn't want to only rely on their friendship, I wanted to network and meet new people, but just compared to the opportunities I had in places like [a large south-central American city] or [another large southern city] to network... there it's like everyone moves there for a job. No one grew up there and lives there. So, um, everyone's trying to make friends. And here it was, like no one was trying to make friends.

Finding #4: *The Maine attitude towards people “from away” creates challenges for transplants as they try to build both personal and professional connections across the state.*

In Maine vernacular, the phrase “from away” is used to describe anyone who was not born and raised in Maine. The phrase has been defined informally and articles in local publications about the implications of the phrase are abundant (see Piper, 2020). The sentiment seems to have started as a way for locals to distinguish between themselves and the people who come to Maine for vacation.

The phrase may seem innocent, a cheeky way for locals to rebuke the presence of tourists, but it is laced with a twinge (or sometimes an outright) categorization of those “from away” as outsiders. Being positioned as “from away” is even applied to people who are transplants and have been residents of the state for years. Essentially, people “from away” are seen as a temporary fixture. The implications, and the persistence of the “from away” sentiment, are part of a long-held debate over what it means to be considered “a Mainer” – which has only intensified amidst public conversations about the need to welcome new residents in an effort to bolster the economy (Piper, 2020). This tension is not lost on individuals who have relocated to the state to live and work, and the “from away” sentiment seems to contribute to key challenges faced by relocators. Table 7 below features a series of responses to the open-ended survey question where respondents described the most challenging aspect of their relocation.

Table 7

Identifying Challenges

Open Response: <i>What was the most challenging part of your relocation transition?</i>
The culture here is a bit binary, Mainer or From Away, rather than a celebrated spectrum of views and experiences that enrich the community as a whole.
Being tagged as “from away” [was a challenge]. This hurt us professionally and personally.
Networking from away was difficult. Everyone knows everyone in Maine. I've heard people say the entire state is like a small town. Trying to break into that circle is difficult.
Being considered "from away." Not having people take new transplants seriously if they weren't assessed to have a strong enough connection to Maine.

Mainers will often ask a stranger where they are from in order to be able to position them socially and culturally (Biddle et al, 2019). Here, the “from away” sentiment becomes a positionality tool, and, in an interaction, the “from away” identity appears to carry implications for what is expected socially and culturally. Even born and raised Mainers who boomerang back to the state later on in life reconcile with the inclination to distinguish themselves from others who have recently moved to Maine. One interviewee (a Boomerang) reflected on the influx of transplants and gave voice to the difference between people “from away” and the people for whom moving back to Maine means moving back home:

Actually, it really did surprise me when I moved back here, like how many people moved here who hadn't grown up here... I have a little bit of... like, I love it cause, this is so great for Maine's economy...but then I do have a small part of me that's like, well, like [the people who move here]... you don't really know [Maine]... And yeah, sometimes I'm... I feel like I'm such an awful person. I don't know...

The tension is palpable, as long-time Mainers try to grapple with the significant influx of new residents and all the change that comes along with prioritizing economic development. In this context, the “from away” sentiment can become a boundary label leveraged in response to shifting power structures (Biddle et al, 2019). New residents mean new voices and new perspectives that potentially stand in opposition to the perceived Maine way of life. In an attempt to prioritize a sense of place, Mainers appear to be claiming the power that resides in their long-term residency status when

they levy the “from away” categorization against transplants and new arrivals. This presents a valid challenge and raises questions about how to ensure the continued economic viability of a place, while also preserving that which makes the place feel like home to the people who have always lived there.

This capstone study is not equipped to evaluate the full spectrum of implications associated with the “from away” sentiment. However, as it pertains to the relocation transition, this piece of contextual nuance appears to add an additional layer of challenge for individuals who move to Maine to live and work.

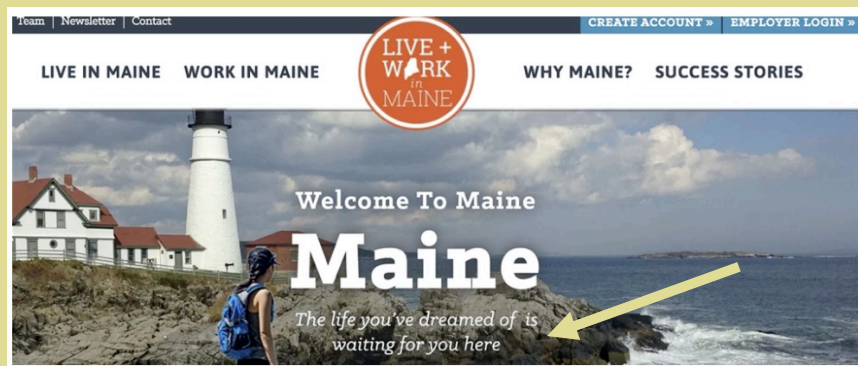
Research Question 3: How did the individual’s expectations prior to relocation compare to their experience(s) once they transitioned to Maine to live and work?

Finding #5: The Maine “lifestyle” resonates with relocators and positively impacts their transition experience.

When LWM puts forth campaigns or offerings positioned to bolster the Maine employment brand, they rely heavily on marketing a lifestyle. Campaigns and collateral, such as the LWM website in Figure 8, feature language that suggests Maine is a place where you can build the life you want.

Figure 8

Sample Content From LWM Website



While there is no official definition of what is considered a part of the Maine lifestyle, there are many characteristics that can explain what is meant by the idea of the lifestyle available to people who choose to live and work in the state. Key features such as the ease of access to nature, abundant outdoor recreation opportunities, and the prioritization of the natural environment are a core component of the lifestyle emphasized by LWM. Relocators agree that they have been able to both experience and enjoy these elements of the Maine lifestyle.

Another lifestyle feature includes the conceptualization of Maine as a close-knit community. The small population size makes it the type of place where everyone knows everyone else.

There is a saying that in Maine there are not six degrees of separation between people, there are only two. These close social ties also allow for easier access to opportunities to get involved and interact at the levels where change happens, as one interviewee shared: *“I think, if you want to put yourself out there, this is a very easy place to get involved in and to...make an impact”*. Survey data supports this assertion with 84% of respondents indicating they believe Maine is the type of place where they can make a meaningful contribution at the community and/or state level. Relocators also highlight these characteristics as points of distinction for the state. One survey respondent reflected on why they see a

Figure 9

Lifestyle Benefits

94% indicate they have benefitted from easy access to nature and outdoor recreation opportunities available in Maine.

84% agree moving to Maine had a positive impact on their quality of life.

74% agree moving to Maine allowed them to obtain a desirable work/life balance.

future for themselves in Maine in an open-response question and shared, *“The culture, the sense of place, and the smaller degrees of separation to the change-makers here are incredible - that’s why I stay”*. An interviewee expands on the value of the smaller degrees of separation with the following anecdote:

...it's a smaller pond... if you want to be a big fish, it's easier to be a big fish in a small pond... you can get out there and you can... be like, I want to meet the mayor [and you can] meet with the mayor. I had a conversation with the mayor [in] like, my first month here...that's pretty unique. I've lived in a bunch of cities and that's not happening in those cities.

These aspects of the Maine lifestyle likely contribute to the increased quality of life relocators indicated experiencing after they arrived (see Figure 9). Many interviewees spoke to a shift that happened as they adapted to the pace of things in their new community. One interviewee compared her experience living in New York City to her experience living in Maine and spoke about the noticeable impact the Maine *“way of life”* had on her and her partner and indicated, *“...it [now] feels like our priorities are a little bit different”*.

Accessibility to decision-makers (change-makers), quality of life, and the ease of access to the outdoors are all positive attributes for Maine. Together, these elements of the Maine lifestyle, paint an accurate picture of what relocators can expect to experience when they live and work in Maine.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations for interventions and offerings Live + Work in Maine can implement to better support individuals while they navigate their relocation transition. While the recommendations below offer a strong starting point, it will take additional contributions from a range of actors working in collaboration with LWM to make a meaningful difference in providing support for individuals navigating a relocation transition.

Recommendation 1: Live + Work in Maine should spearhead the creation of Welcome Kits that can be made available to new arrivals and provide crucial information to support them in the early elements of their relocation transition.

Individuals who relocate to Maine need a wide array of resources to assist them in their initial acclimation. There are entities across the state positioned to provide these resources, however, a conduit between new arrivals and the resources available is lacking. Live + Work in Maine is uniquely positioned to facilitate the development of a Welcome Kit that could serve as the first source of information. These Welcome Kits could serve as the missing conduit. LWM could develop the Welcome Kits in collaboration with employer partners since they have a vested interest in supporting new hires who are moving to Maine to work at their organization and employers play an important role in the relocation transition itself (Finding 2).

Contributions to content for the Welcome Kits could come from organizations such as other non-profits, government agencies, the chamber of commerce, and community organizations like the Maine Development Foundation. The State of Maine is also an entity that should be included in the creation of the Welcome Kits. Development of the Welcome Kits must also be accompanied by a distribution strategy, which should include physical and digital iterations of the information and be translated into multiple languages to ensure accessibility.

In terms of development, the content for the Welcome Kits appears to already exist, the task is to centralize access to the content and then distribute it effectively. There are many resource guides in circulation around the state. The Maine.gov website offers a landing page for residents that links to resources related to living in Maine, as well as child and family services. Another great example to emulate, or collaborate with, is The Greater Portland Immigrant Welcome Center. They partnered with the Portland Public Library in 2019 to create the “New Mainer’s Guide to Greater Portland”. Their guide could serve as a blueprint for a Welcome Kit that is designed for immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and everyday relocators alike.

In addition to leveraging already developed content and resources, LWM could crowdsource first-person accounts to include in the Welcome Kit that could help to animate the stories of individuals who have successfully navigated a relocation transition. Data gathered from this capstone study could also be utilized within the Welcome Kits.

Suggested additional categories of information to include are logistics guidance, resource sharing, and connection building opportunities:

- Grocery Stores and Food Markets
- Professional Networking Groups
- School Related Information
- Childcare/Daycare Resources
- State Resident Info (BMV, Voter Registration etc.)
- Local News Sources and/or Publications
- Housing Resources
- Transportation Information
- Civic Engagement

Below is a proposed outline of suggested key partners in distribution:

Table 8

Distributing Welcome Kits

Distribution Partner	Proposed Distribution Method
Employers	Supplied to all new hires
Healthcare Providers	Available for all new patients
Faith Based Organizations	Circulated to new members at services
Schools	Included in parent/guardian information packets
Area Chamber of Commerce	Available at the Chamber's physical location
Maine Downtown Centers	Available at MDC community events
Banks	Available for new customers

To cover costs associated with developing and distributing the Welcome Kits LWM could leverage financial buy-in from their employer partners. While relocators

indicated that acclimating to their new job is a contributing factor to a place starting to feel like home, it is not the only factor. If employers want to retain their employees, it will behoove them to invest in resources that are positioned to support the employee in their full relocation transition, the personal and the professional (Finding 1). Human Resource departments and employers are mostly limited as far as the resources they can provide to aid in the personal elements of a relocation transition. The Welcome Kits could function to meet this need. The more connections and ties individuals can build within the community they relocated to for their new job, the more likely they are to stay in the area and thus, more likely to remain at that new job.

Recommendation 2: Live + Work in Maine should curate a selection of pre-packaged programmatic offerings positioned to address key challenges faced by new Maine residents.

Given the structure of LWM, the organization cannot realistically be expected to execute all attraction and retention related initiatives. However, they can design pre-packaged offerings that can then be implemented by a range of other entities across the state. These events should be aimed at mitigating some of the key challenges faced by new arrivals, specifically: making new connections and combatting pre-conceived notions about people “from away” (Findings 3 and 4).

To address challenges with making new connections, LWM could offer New Arrival Meetups designed to connect individuals who have recently relocated to other new

arrivals. These events could occur in partnership with local area organizations and source sponsorship from businesses. The goal of these events needs to extend beyond traditional networking. Intentional facilitation will be necessary to effectively create an environment within which individuals are provided the opportunity to make meaningful connections. Finding community requires access to spaces and experiences that are curated to prioritize human connection and provide fertile ground for potential friendship.

At the crux of this recommendation is a proposal to think differently about networking events and frame them instead as purposeful connection experiences. Professional networking supports the work component of a relocation transition, connector events can support the life component. Given that the primary function of LWM is to attract individuals to the state for both life and work, it makes sense to invest in connection opportunities that support both life and work.

To address challenges with the impact of the “from away” sentiment, LWM could collaborate to host Learn About Maine events. Similar to their Imagine ME + You event (a Maine immersion experience currently offered by LWM), these Learn About Maine events could bring together individuals who have recently moved to the state to interact with Maine institutions and gain a better sense of place in relation to their new home.

As an aside, broader discussion about mitigating the negative effects of the “from away” sentiment will require complex engagement with the thorny nature of this particular challenge. As the state of Maine continues to evolve to meet its economic development goals, valid concerns from long-time citizens about the future of their

state deserve attention. Balancing between the needs of current residents with the interests of future residents will require careful collective effort that extends beyond the scope of LWM.

With both of these proposed offerings, New Arrival Meetups and Learn About Maine events, LWM should develop a “program in a box” approach that is scalable to all regions within Maine. These events can start in the larger cities like Portland and Bangor, then be replicated across the state. This will allow for each of the 16 counties to take an approach to the events that best match the contextual nuances of their particular part of the state.

Recommendation 3: Live + Work in Maine should continue to emphasize the positive benefits of living and working in Maine in marketing initiatives aimed at trying to entice individuals to relocate to the state.

The Maine lifestyle is a point of distinction for the state (Finding 5). By highlighting the unique experiences available to individuals who choose to work and live in Maine, LWM communicates an authentic representation of what individuals have access to when they relocate. The majority of relocators who contributed to this study (via survey responses and interview participation) emphasized their appreciation for all that Maine has to offer with regards to lifestyle. While further research is needed to examine the modifying factors that could impact who has access to these lifestyle benefits, this study found that the messaging used by LWM matches the experiences relocators give voice

to. Essentially, LWM campaigns offer an authentic representation of what it really means to live and work in Maine.

Recommendation 4: Live + Work in Maine should develop a strategy for sharing and leveraging the insights gathered from the research executed for this capstone and continue to invest resources in evaluating the relocation transition experience for new Maine residents.

Given the statewide emphasis on workforce attraction and retention, there is clear value in amplifying an understanding of the relocation transition experience. State and local government, employers, and a range of other organizations all have a vested interest in ensuring successful relocation transitions for new Maine residents. Therefore, it would be beneficial for these stakeholders to fully understand what relocation encompasses for families and individuals arriving in Maine.

With geographical moves being commonplace, I hypothesize that many people simply settle for the fact that their relocation will be rife with challenges and change. While it is true that any relocation will involve significant change, more can be done to support people as they navigate those changes. To generate buy-in to any efforts aimed at providing support for relocators, it will be important to help stakeholders comprehend the significance of the changes people endure when they move to a new place. Essentially, there is a need to reframe a geographical move as a major life transition. Sharing the insights gathered in this capstone study will be useful in framing relocation as a transition.

Additionally, sharing information about the relocation transition experience has the potential to be useful to other organizations positioned to make an impact. For example, while many employer partners are in tune with the experience of on-boarding a new employee into the company and their new role, they may not be as cognizant of the additional layers of transition a new employee is navigating in parallel to their employment transition (the professional vs the personal elements of transition as described in Finding 1). Using this capstone study to help frame a relocation as a major life transition could further conversations amongst employer partners about how to better support and retain the talent that is recruited to Maine to live and work.

Discussion

This study aimed to better understand the relocation transition experiences of individuals who choose to move to Maine to live and work. Three research questions were posed, and each addresses a component of the relocation transition experience: phases of change, challenges encountered, and expectations compared to experiences. Findings from the study identified two key elements of a relocation transition, the personal and the professional. Within these elements, employers play a pivotal role in helping a new resident in the early stages of their relocation. While new residents are navigating their relocation transition, their top challenges include accessing opportunities to build meaningful connections and combatting the sentiments associated with people “from away”. Despite the difficulties encountered, the majority of relocators experience a range of benefits after moving to Maine, including a positive impact on quality of life, better work/life balance, ease of access to the outdoors, and enhanced ability to make an impact in their new community.

To generate these insights, this capstone utilized both qualitative and quantitative data to explore the nuances of the relocation experience by leveraging semi-structured interviews and a survey instrument. After analyzing the data collected, this study provided four recommendations to Live + Work in Maine that can inform their efforts to retain the new residents that have chosen to move to Maine to live and work.

In addition to the recommendations presented, a key takeaway from this capstone study is that individual experiences in navigating a relocation transition are complex. When utilizing the findings put forth in this capstone study it will be important to

account for the individual nuance and acknowledge the wide array of mitigating factors that can impact how someone experiences all of the change associated with a geographic move.

While this capstone study addressed some of these nuances, the more significant mitigating factors would benefit from additional exploration in future research. Specifically, in the Maine context, the impact of racial identity and immigration status on individual relocation transitions deserves focused attention. Lack of diverse study participants was a limitation encountered during this capstone. Maine is severely lacking in diversity, with 94% of the population identifying as white. In future efforts to support talent attraction and retention it will be important to amplify the voices of diverse relocators in order to identify challenges that may be unique to their lived experiences.

This capstone sought to engage in a human centered exploration of the relocation experience with the goal of leveraging insights gathered to improve and enhance the relocation transition for individuals who choose to move to Maine to live and work. In addition to achieving these aims, the work presented here opens the door to new lines of inquiry. As relocation becomes more commonplace, how can we work together to help one another find our place and find our people? As migration to new places continues to increase, how can communities come together to better welcome new residents? The findings presented in this capstone offer a starting point for answering these questions, but bigger questions remain and deserve future attention, such as:

What does it mean to make a place worth a lifetime?

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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Language for Semi – Structured Interviews

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

You are invited to participate in a capstone study to explore the transition experiences of individuals who have relocated to live and work in Maine between 2015 - 2020. Data received from this interview will be used to make recommendations to Live + Work in Maine regarding the resources made available to individuals who relocate to Maine. This interview should take about [45-60] minutes to complete. Participation is voluntary and responses will be kept anonymous to the degree permitted by the instrument being used.

You have the option to refrain from response on any question. Participation or nonparticipation will not impact your relationship with the Live + Work in Maine.

Your agreement to participate in the interview serves as your informed consent to participate in this study and your affirmation that you are at least 18 years of age*.

If you have any questions about the project, please contact the Principal Investigator, Kaylyn O'Brien, via email at kaylyn.s.obrien@vanderbilt.edu or the faculty advisor, Dr. Tracey Armstrong, at tracey.m.armstrong@vanderbilt.edu.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, contact the Vanderbilt Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (615) 322-2918.

Please print a copy for your records.

**I have read the above information and agree to participate in this capstone project.*

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B: Semi – Structured Interview Protocol

Interview Questions

Situation

1. When did you move to Maine?
 - a. Where in Maine did you move to?
 - i. Are you still located in the same place?
2. How did you end up living and working in Maine?
 - a. What attracted to you Maine?
 - i. What about Maine made it somewhere you could see yourself living and working?
3. How did you choose where in Maine to live?
4. How did you choose where in Maine to work?
5. How much planning did you do prior to relocating to Maine?

Self

1. Can you describe your transition to living and working in Maine?
 - a. How prepared did you feel for your transition to a new state?
 - b. Can you tell me about emotions and inner experiences during your relocation transition?
2. Looking back on the transition, would you categorize it as a positive or negative experience? Why?

Support

1. Upon arrival in Maine, what did your in-state support network look like?
2. What does your support network in Maine look like today?
3. What communities do you have close social ties to here in Maine?
 - a. How did you cultivate those social connections?
4. How did these communities, support networks, and social ties contribute to your transition?

Strategies

1. What resources did you leverage to assist you in all phases of the transition associated with your relocation?
2. When and how did you begin to feel integrated into Maine?
 - a. At what point did you no longer feel “in transition”?
3. What actions did you take to facilitate your acclimation to your new location (Maine)?

Additional Questions

1. What would you add to or change about your transition planning?
2. Please provide some examples of resources you wish you had access to during your transition to Maine.
3. Are you currently working remotely from Maine?
 - a. If YES:
 - i. How has the shift to remote work impacted you?
 - ii. Has the shift to remote work impacted your integration/relocation transition?
4. Do you consider Maine to be “worth a lifetime”?
5. Is there anything else you would like me to know about your relocation transition experience?

Appendix C: Survey Instrument

Everyone has a different story about how they transitioned to Maine. Some moved right after college, others boomeranged back, some moved having never visited the state, and many intentionally picked Maine and made it their goal to get here as fast as they could. We are collecting data on how individuals navigated a relocation to Maine to live and work. This will enable us to understand what was helpful and what can be improved - all of which impacts talent attraction & retention.

Help us help future Mainers! This survey should take about 10 minutes and is anonymous.

This survey is a part of a capstone study and participation is voluntary. Your responses will be kept anonymous to the degree permitted by the instrument being used. You have the option to refrain from response on any survey question. If you have any questions about the project, please contact the Principal Investigator, Kaylyn O'Brien, via email at kaylyn.s.obrien@vanderbilt.edu and if you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, contact the Vanderbilt Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (615) 322-2918.

Q3 I have read the statement above and I consent to participate

I consent to participate

I do not consent to participate

Q4 What is your current age?

Under 18

18 - 24

25 - 34

35 - 44

45 - 54

55 - 64

65 - 74

75 - 84

85 or older

Q5 What is your gender?

Male

Female

Non-binary / third gender

Prefer not to say

Q6 Which category best describes the industry of your current employer?

Health Care

Manufacturing

Educational Services

Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services

Finance and Insurance

Utilities

Military

Q7 What year did you move to Maine?

2020

2019

2018

2017

2016

2015

Prior to 2015

Q8 When you first arrived in Maine did you rent or buy?

Rent

Buy

Other: _____

Q9 What county did you reside in when you first moved to Maine?

Q10 Do you still reside in the same county?

Yes

No

Q11 [If no] What county do you currently reside in?

Q12 Why did you move to Maine? Select all that apply.

For a new career opportunity

For my partner to be able to pursue a new career opportunity

To be closer to family and/or support network

To live in a place that aligns with my values and lifestyle

Looking for a new adventure and/or opportunity to "start over"

An unplanned transition prompted by personal life circumstances

Attracted by the cost of living in Maine

To be able to better provide for my children/dependents

Refugee or Asylum Seeker

Migrant (from outside of the USA)

Q13 Which of the following best describes you during your relocation?

Boomerang (I had a prior connection to Maine, such as: former resident, college, summer camp, family summer vacation destination)

Transplant (I did not have any significant prior connections to Maine)

Q14 Did you relocate with children/dependents?

Yes

No

Q15 To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

I had access to the resources I needed in order to plan my relocation transition.

I felt supported by my employer during my relocation and initial acclimation to Maine.

I have been able to build a useful professional network here in Maine.

I have been able to build a fulfilling personal/social network here in Maine.

I have been able to access opportunities for community engagement here in Maine.

I am satisfied with the range of cultural opportunities available here in Maine.

My quality of life has increased since relocating to Maine to live and work.

I have benefitted from the easy access to nature and outdoor recreation available here in Maine.

Relocating to Maine has allowed me to obtain a desirable work/life balance.

I believe that Maine is a place where I can make a meaningful contribution at the community and/or state level.

Q16 Please list the resources that were the most useful to you during your transition and acclimation to living and working in Maine.

Q17 Looking back on your relocation transition, which of the following was most important in helping you feel acclimated to living and working in Maine? Please drag and drop to rank order from the most important (1) to the least important (5).

Figuring out everyday logistics (such as: grocery shopping, location of desired amenities, commute, doctors).

Becoming an active participant in my new community (such as: engaging with local issues, volunteering).

Determining what to do with my free time (such as: recreation, hobbies, arts/culture, food/drink).

Building meaningful connections with others (such as: neighbors, community members, social circle, coworkers).

Learning the ins and outs of my employment arrangement (such as: securing a job, adjusting to a new role, remote work routine, finding a co-working space).

Q18 Reflecting on your current social, professional, and community networks, do you believe you have found "your people" here in Maine?

No, and I am not sure I will.

Not yet, but I am working on it.

Somewhat, but I am still looking for more.

Yes, I have definitely found my people.

Q19 Which of the following was the most influential in helping you build meaningful connections here in Maine? Select all that apply.

My place of employment

Social Media (i.e. Instagram posts about events, Facebook groups)

Professional networking events and/or groups

Getting to know my neighbors

Recreation offerings (i.e. sports leagues, outdoors groups)

My child's school/daycare

Attending social events and small informal gatherings

Introductions facilitated by a mutual connection

Participating in offerings associated with my hobbies (i.e. joining a climbing gym, taking an art class)

Other: _____

Q20 How satisfied are you with the career options/opportunities available in Maine?

Extremely satisfied

Satisfied

Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

Dissatisfied

Extremely dissatisfied

Q21 How satisfied are you with the education opportunities available in Maine for your children?

Extremely satisfied

Satisfied

Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

Dissatisfied

Extremely dissatisfied

Q22 [If yes to Q14) How satisfied are you with the childcare options available in Maine?

Extremely satisfied

Satisfied

Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

Dissatisfied

Extremely dissatisfied

Q23 Looking back on your relocation experience and acclimation to Maine, what was the most challenging part of the transition?

Q24 How likely is it that you will remain in Maine long-term?

Very likely

Somewhat likely

Neither likely nor unlikely

Somewhat unlikely

Very unlikely

Q25 On a scale from 0-10, how likely are you to recommend moving to Maine to a friend?

Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey up to this point. All that remains is the following optional open response questions. We are always interested in learning more about the experiences of individuals who have moved to Maine to live and work so if you are willing, we invite you to respond to these questions.

Q27 As someone who relocated in either 2020 or 2019, how has COVID impacted your transition and acclimation/integration into Maine?

Q28 What resources do you wish you had access to while navigating your relocation and acclimation to living and working in Maine?

Q29 Is there anything else you would like us to know about your relocation transition and integration into Maine?

Q30 You indicated that you relocated with children/dependents. Is there anything else you would like us to know about your experience navigating a relocation transition with children/dependents?