



BUILDING WYOMING'S FUTURE: THE EXIT INTERVIEW

PUBLIC POLL RESPONSES: WHAT WYOMING'S YOUNG PEOPLE ARE TRYING TO TELL US

Question: *"If you could sit down with a Wyoming policymaker, what would you want them to understand about why young people stay or leave?"*

Watch the full replay of our conversation [here](#).

RESPONSE SUMMARY

Use the hyperlinks below or scroll down to find the exact responses within each category.

Note: All identifying information has been removed to keep these responses anonymous.

The following are the top 5 key points/categories respondents would want a Wyoming policymaker to understand about why young people stay in or leave the state.

1. Economic Opportunity and Jobs: A frequent concern is the lack of diverse, high-quality, and meaningful jobs offering competitive salaries and long-term career growth, often citing over-reliance on the mineral industry. Economic diversification is widely requested.

2. Affordability and Housing: The high cost of housing (both rent and purchase) relative to available wages is a major barrier to young people building a life and family in the state.

3. Investment in Youth and Community Infrastructure: Many respondents feel the state is failing to invest in the future by cutting funds to essential institutions and services, particularly public education and healthcare/public services. They suggest that policymakers prioritize the needs of older generations (e.g., keeping taxes low for retirees) over investing in community amenities, infrastructure, and programs that attract and support young families (e.g., indoor/outdoor recreation).

4. Political Climate and Representation: A significant theme is the feeling that young people are not seen, heard, or valued by policymakers. Concerns were raised about the state's dominant political party, the focus on partisan or "old cowboy" politics, and legislative actions that attack institutions and values important to younger generations, leading to a sense of being unwelcoming or unsafe (mentally and physically).

5. Quality of Life: Beyond jobs and housing, young people seek a sense of belonging, cultural fit, and vibrant, inclusive, livable communities that embrace innovation, diversity, and new ideas.

1. ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND JOBS

Summary: Responses in this category emphasized the need to transition from a mineral-dependent economy to a diversified landscape offering innovation, competitive wages, and clear professional career paths.

- "Where there is a lack of long-term, quality jobs, it makes it hard to stay in the place you grew up, and there are other places where hard work is put in to attract anchor industries and create a great place to live AND work."
- "Lack of career growth opportunities."
- "We need to have sustainable jobs with a living wage - and not depend on jobs in the mineral industry. DIVERSIFICATION!!!!"
- "Not only are there many good employment options for those that leave, but Wyo government seems to make it very difficult for outside employers to bring those options to Wyoming. Speaking as a business."
- "I feel like they need to know that Wyoming youth want to be innovative and are looking for careers that make a difference."
- "They don't believe there are opportunities or assume they have to settle. More information and stories should be shared on the plethora of diverse jobs and industries that make up the state. Finance, marketing, entrepreneurship, advocacy in community."
- "Lack of jobs and diversity of jobs."
- "Our industries & workforce feel comparatively behind the rest of the country... We need to challenge our ethos as 'small town' and be willing to embrace our youth's perspectives to guide scaling."
- "All of my children have graduated k12 education in Wyoming... The other 4 have all left due to opportunities for careers and continuing their lives."
- "I am considering a second departure based on what policymakers are doing to undermine various institutions. We talk a big game about homegrown, but our homegrown have left town for greener pastures and aren't returning."
- "When our rhetoric says we don't want growth, it means we don't want opportunity and if Wyoming doesn't want it, why would a young person stick around and fight for it."
- "I would want them to be very intentional in policy about the diversity of job opportunities."
- "Access to capital to start a business."
- "Economic opportunity with a career trajectory."
- "We need to do more for economic diversification."
- "Meaningful work offering competitive salaries, which requires diversification."

- "Investing in better paid jobs will keep youth in the state."
- "Limited economic opportunities for professional career."
- "Businesses not set up with locations in Wyoming won't even consider remote workers. How do we solve that issue or attract larger companies to even consider operating in Wyoming?"
- "I left and the only real reason I came back was the ability to start a business."
- "Younger folks desire more innovation and less reliability on dependence of fossil fuels, etc."
- "Economic opportunity drives why people leave."
- "Job, Career are not prepared or available to the population."
- "Job opportunities in sustainable fields."
- "Another reason would be lack of opportunity. You need to work at the mines in order to make good money, or have to know people to get a different job."
- "Without diversifying our economy there will never be enough jobs to sustain the young population in Wyoming."
- "Negativity towards clean energy is counter-productive... young people get excited about technology and jobs in those sectors."
- "Lack of career opportunities. Not much diversity in industry."
- "Opportunities."
- "Lack of good paying jobs."
- "Culture, politics and lack of business variety."
- "The economy is stagnant and uninspired."
- "diversity in workforce."
- "Economic diversification has failed in WY. Let's revise the current econ dev setup to become more regional."
- "Wyoming needs to diversify its economy so it is not only Oil & Gas or Tourism that supplies the jobs."
- "Meaningful jobs are slim and pay less than the same job in other states."
- "Losing sleep over kids leaving is futile. Focus on giving them a reason to stay... Defunding business development efforts won't help."
- "For me it has so much to do with access to a good job... We want to build a successful career."

- "Make business friendly decisions for more opportunity for our business students and graduates."
 - "Opportunity has to be available. Investing in... economic development has to be more of a priority than it has been."
 - "A lack of meaningful and reasonable paying jobs."
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2. AFFORDABILITY AND HOUSING

Summary: Responses in this category focused on the critical gap between local income and the rising costs of rent and homeownership that prevents young people from establishing long-term roots.

- "The younger generation has to focus on their well-being and ability to live a prosperous life in a place that they can afford."
- "Affordable housing absolutely need to considered in decisions impacting the state now & in the future."
- "Affordability of being able to make a good living and create a home and maybe family."
- "High cost of housing makes it difficult for many young people to stay in Wyoming, even though they may want to."
- "The balance of job opportunities to cost of living in Wyoming, it doesn't feel like it is in balance."
- "We need different approaches to housing. The Radiant debacle in Bar Nunn was a perfect example of what could have been but NIMBY!"
- "I would want them to be very intentional in policy about... AFFORDABLE housing."
- "Access to affordable housing (monthly payment being half or less of the gross income from salaries in a town) both rental and to purchase for long term legacy."
- "We need to do more for affordable housing."
- "Cost of living, lack of jobs, and lack of housing are pushing me out."
- "Young people stay when they can build a sustainable life here - not just survive, but thrive. When wages don't keep pace with housing costs and student debt, even Wyo kids who love this state have to leave."
- "The housing is so expensive here."
- "Cost of living is high: housing availability and costs are high."
- "They need... the ability to own a home or afford rent in the state."
- "I cannot afford to buy property here."

- "I could not imagine trying to start a business today, and be able to afford housing."
 - "Lack of good paying jobs and overall cost of living."
 - "How can we make entrepreneurship appealing and supported ie. healthcare affordability, housing, childcare."
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3. INVESTMENT IN YOUTH AND COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Summary: Responses in this category prioritized consistent, long-term funding for high-quality education, the University of Wyoming, healthcare access, and stable public infrastructure.

- "Cutting funding to education guarantees our children are less supported than we had. If I stay as a young parent I'm choosing to make my children's life harder than I had it."
- "With the defunding of schools and healthcare combined with focus on issues that seriously compromise the quality of life, you can't make it in Wyoming unless you are wealthy."
- "Put our youth first! Keep public education of the highest possible quality, it starts at a young age!"
- "Lack of investment into infrastructure to support businesses (housing, internet, etc.)."
- "Low taxes equate to... lower standards for public property upkeep and lower standards for public utilities such as roads and infrastructure."
- "Investing in our education systems would greatly improve the amount of students we have here instead of them leaving the state to go to school."
- "If you don't invest in Wyoming's future, people will leave... The property tax issue and the UW budget cuts are prime examples of deliberately choosing to de-invest."
- "I see the legislature (mainly Freedom Caucus) trying to attack our municipalities and public education through property tax cuts... We should be investing in healthcare, education and third spaces."
- "Health Insurance at a reasonable cost and healthcare that is high quality. Most of us are getting treatment out of state for major health issues."
- "How the lack of funding for local infrastructure has negatively impacted my desire to live here... If the basics of what keeps a community viable aren't a concern, what is?"
- "Our Public education is flawed... Public education doesn't teach for financial self-sufficiency."
- "At a recent talking session I attended in Gillette... they all brought up healthcare as a concern."
- "As I look at the proposed HBs and SFs, many of them cut funding to public services and programs, including education."

- "I am worried about the services provided by the local governments and if they'll be able to keep growing."
 - "K-12 Education and Healthcare. We can't support families without access to high-quality services... I'll encourage my own children to leave if there are not improvements here."
 - "Coming from Sweetwater County, we would leave because of the school district."
 - "We are in a medical crisis in Wyoming, when there is an emergency you have to travel out of state."
 - "Defunding Wyoming Public Education affect on communities."
 - "Actions by the Legislature such as defunding UW, not supporting public education... and not supporting increasing the Hathaway are driving our kids away."
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4. POLITICAL CLIMATE AND REPRESENTATION

Summary: Responses in this category called for a more inclusive, forward-facing government that actively represents the values and perspectives of young families.

- "Wyoming is rich with opportunity, yet legislative choices repeatedly undercut that promise. Attacks on institutions that nurture young people... only shrink an already limited talent pool."
- "Legislators seem much more concerned with cutting taxes and saving money for wealthy "retired move ins" rather than focusing on our future and the youth of Wyoming."
- "Young people are leaving because they aren't safe physically and mentally... focus on issues that seriously compromise the quality of life."
- "Legislative attacks on the exact institutions and programs that young people and families care about most."
- "Different political beliefs and possibility of being labeled different in some areas."
- "I feel that the 'old cowboy' perspective can be a big turn off for young people in the state."
- "The environment is increasingly inviting to retirees who often have much different priorities."
- "Listen to the people, not the political party. It's clear that many of the legislature's talking points have nothing to do with the daily lives of Wyomingites."
- "They need to realize that by actively refusing to acknowledge that there are different views and different ways of living they are enacting policies that are driving people like my daughter away."

- "It seems like policy decisions are being based on the desires of older folks to keep taxes low... and social values very conservative."
 - "There's an attitude of NIMBY-ism toward everything. The old, upper middle class had the system work well for them, and they want to defend it to the death."
 - "Right now policy makers seem to prioritize the needs of high-income, out-of-state retirees moving here than the young people and families trying to make a life."
 - "My peers have expressed their concerns that Wyoming is "stuck in the past" and not forward facing."
 - "The culture is so rigid mindset, that new ideas get torn down."
 - "Treating young people as disposable is helping drive them away."
 - "A political climate that often feels one-sided."
 - "They need to understand that people want amenities, not just minimal government."
 - "As a literal one political party state, it has to be very difficult for young people to explore and develop their own beliefs."
 - "Wyoming is too myopic, too afraid of entertaining ideas of economic growth."
 - "Always talking about 'protecting Wyoming's way of life' is a really abstract, loaded idea that sometimes comes off as 'we don't want anything to change so you should love it or leave it.'"
 - "Creating and implementing a vision that includes young people and fosters a diversity of life styles and beliefs."
 - "Many decisions from elected officials at all levels... attack young people and their values. Wyoming's future can be inclusive or unwelcoming."
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5. QUALITY OF LIFE

Summary: Responses in this category highlighted the importance of fostering vibrant, welcoming communities through social amenities, "third spaces," and accessible year-round recreational opportunities.

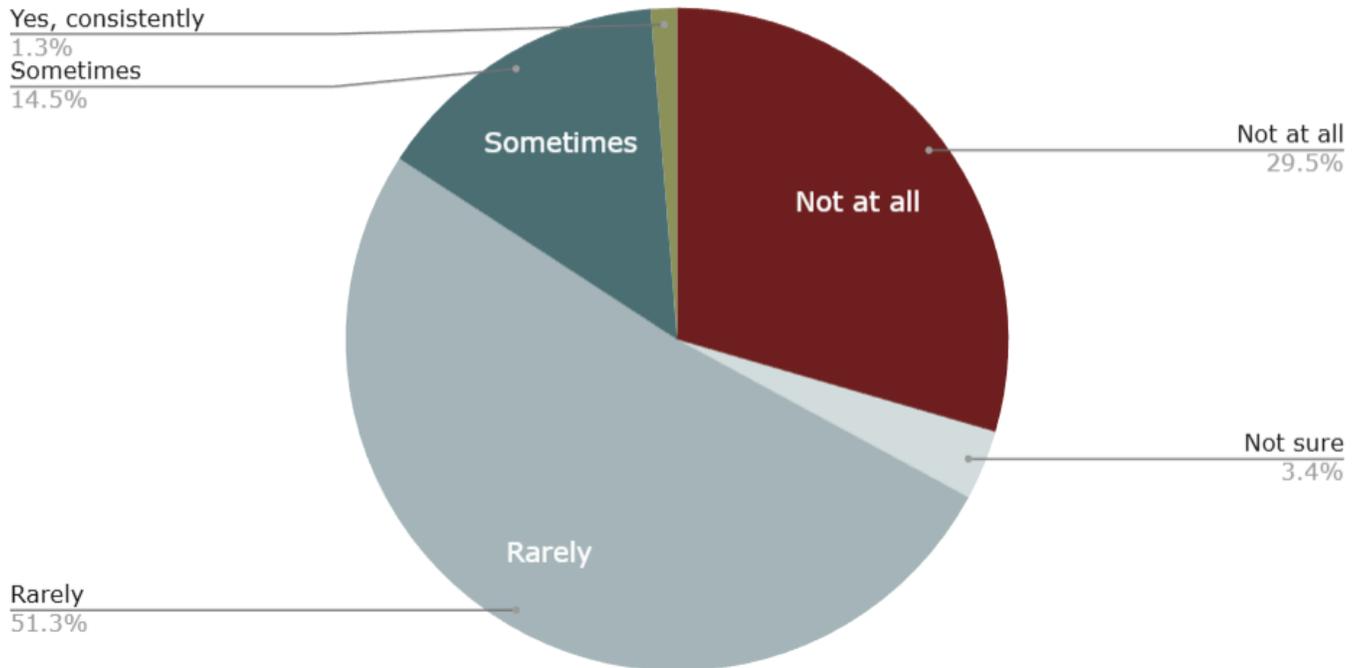
- "Sounds like it comes down quite often to the sense of belonging."
- "I personally left due to lack of community, it was very hard to find my place."
- "Young people provide a healthy vibrancy in all of our communities. Their input and perspective is something that we should value."
- "Young people today are not searching for the same things in life that young people were 30 years ago. They are weighing all of the things in a community before choosing to live there."

- "Community spaces for the younger generations."
- "These decisions tend to be centered around livable communities, not just finances. Low taxes are great. Good jobs are great. But people will pay more in taxes... if the life they would lead here is better."
- "That being a part of a tight-knit community... does not mean shunning change or new ideas."
- "When people see policymakers divesting in community amenities and infrastructure it sends a clear message about who is welcome."
- "Dating and social life in small towns, few entertainment options beyond bars and breweries."
- "Not making this place more attractive through cultural offerings, better supermarkets, etc is what's driving young people out."
- "Sense of community and belonging."
- "Lack of recreational opportunities in some areas that could use help."
- "Low taxes equate to less opportunities for recreational activities."
- "Investing in our youth especially with family friendly recreation options is crucial."
- "Young people today... care about their mental health as well as their physical health."
- "Lack of resources (e.g., recreation, transportation) for the next generation."
- "All young people need access to opportunities (ie entertainment)."
- "How do you invest in the future of Wyoming without investing in public amenities, such as, schools, rec centers, free state park access, etc.?"
- "We want to be able to live and recreate in this beautiful place without struggling."
- "Wyoming gives an opportunity... for those that stay to benefit from Wyoming offering the 'harder' lifestyle. And those young people are essential to everyone else."

ADDITIONAL POLL RESULTS

Poll: Perceived Consideration of Young People's Perspectives

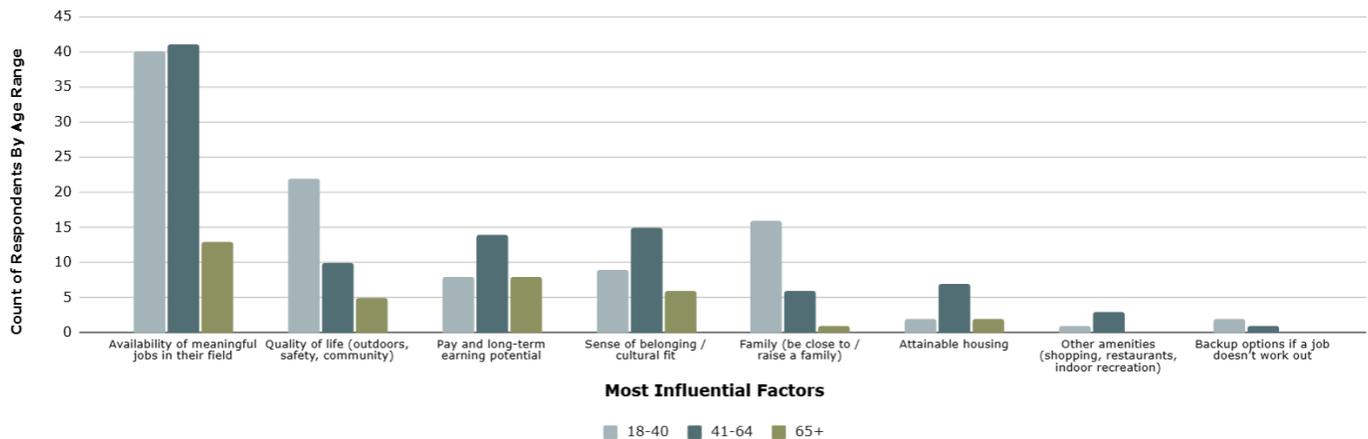
Question: Do you feel that young people's perspectives are considered in Wyoming's public decision-making today?



Summary: Webinar attendees overwhelmingly feel that young Wyomingites' perspectives are not being considered, reporting a sense of being unseen, unheard, or undervalued by state policymakers, which is a significant theme contributing to the desire to leave the state. Elected officials must actively seek and integrate the voices of younger generations on topics like economic opportunity, education, and housing to foster a more inclusive and welcoming environment.

Poll: Most Influential Factors for Staying/Returning by Age

Question: If you had to name ONE factor that most influences a young person's decision to stay in or return to Wyoming, what is it?



Summary: The most critical factor influencing a young person's decision to stay in or return to Wyoming is economic: specifically, the lack of diverse, high-quality, and competitively-paid jobs, combined with the high cost of housing relative to available wages. To successfully retain and attract young talent, policymakers should prioritize comprehensive economic diversification, competitive compensation, and tangible investments in both affordable housing and community infrastructure.