

Economy Not Key in Residents' Love for Philadelphia

Trabian Shorters 02 October 2009

What makes people love where they live? A study by Gallup and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation offers new insight on the issue – and a perspective that could have an impact on local economic growth.

The Soul of the Community study, conducted in Philadelphia and 25 other U.S. communities, was designed to explore this connection between economic growth and residents' emotional attachment to their community. The latest results suggest a significant correlation between the two.

Knight Foundation learned that the worst economic crisis in decades is not a key factor in residents' passion and loyalty for Philadelphia.

“While the pain from the recession is deep, other factors far outweigh economics when it comes to determining how emotionally attached people are to their communities,” said Warren Wright, managing partner for Gallup, which conducted the study with funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

While the current economic crisis doesn't seem to make a difference in residents' love for their community, the study found that positive feelings do have a connection to local GDP growth over a longer-term period.

Within a smaller microcosm, such as a company, Gallup has been able to show that increasing employees' emotional connection to their company leads to improved financial performance of the organization. Researchers continue to explore if the emotional connection to the place where one lives drives economic growth for these communities in a similar way.

"The findings are particularly important in a globalized economy made more competitive by the economic crisis," said Paula Ellis, Knight Foundation's vice president for strategic initiatives. "Local leaders, urban planners and residents can use the study's results to better understand their community.

"We hope that this information helps places like Philadelphia fight for the innovative, creative and productive talent needed to build healthy communities."

In the Philadelphia area, the study has pinpointed three main factors that emotionally attach residents to the area:

- openness (how welcoming a place is),
- social offerings (fun places to gather) and
- aesthetics (an area's physical beauty and green spaces).

The study found that Philadelphia's aesthetics is a community strength. However, resident perceptions of social offerings and openness were found to need improvement to encourage resident attachment to the area.

In Philadelphia, Knight Foundation is already funding projects with direct ties to the study's recommendations. Those include grants to increase social offerings by transforming Benjamin Franklin Parkway into a pedestrian-friendly cultural destination, and other funds dedicated to helping stem the area's brain drain by making the community more welcoming to local college graduates.

The Knight Foundation will continue to invest in the historic City of Philadelphia and intends to make strategic investments that – using data from the Soul of the Community study – can increase residents' emotional attachment to their community.

For complete survey findings on Philadelphia, visit www.soulofthecommunity.org.

Follow Soul of the Community on Twitter: [@SOTC09](https://twitter.com/SOTC09).

About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
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