



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2024.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

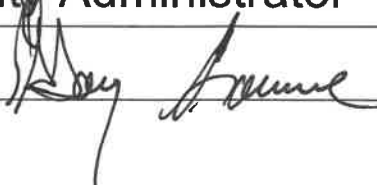
PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Botetourt County
Program Title: Supporting Remote Workers in Botetourt County
Program Category: Customer Service

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Gary Larrowe
Title: County Administrator
Signature: 



Virginia Association of Counties Achievement Awards Application 2024 Building a Remote Work-Ready Community in Botetourt County -

Executive Summary:

Botetourt County spans 546 square miles located in beautiful Southwest Virginia, nestled between the Blue Ridge and the Appalachian Mountains. It is predominantly rural, with 98% of its land undeveloped and about 70% extremely rural. The county has approximately 33,000 residents and has attracted a significant remote workforce of approximately 1,800 individuals (10.2% of the workforce), demonstrating a valuable economic return on prior investments in broadband.

The "Building A Remote Work Ready Community" initiative aims to establish Botetourt County as a Certified Remote Work Community by understanding and addressing the needs of its considerable remote workforce while preserving and celebrating the local culture and the region's natural beauty.

The emergence of remote work as a significant sector in Botetourt County underscores the changing dynamics of rural economies. With Botetourt's strategic investments in broadband connectivity, the county is not only enhancing its appeal to remote workers but also setting a precedent for rural areas nationwide. This digital infrastructure, combined with the county's natural beauty and strategic location near Roanoke, positions Botetourt County as an ideal destination for those seeking the balance of rural living with modern work demands, further solidifying its role in the future of work and community and economic development.



Our approach to building a certified "Remote Work Ready Community" in Botetourt County involved a strategy that leveraged key community assets and strategic partnerships that are proving pivotal to our success.

Botetourt County, along with the Roanoke Regional Partnership and the Rural Growth Initiative began developing a toolkit that would provide guidelines and performance indicators to help localities become a certified "Remote Work Ready Community". The "Remote Work Ready Community" is a new concept that is in development. The partnerships between Botetourt County, the Roanoke Regional Partnership, and the Rural Growth Initiative provided not only the technical expertise needed but have also enabled us to develop a framework for sustainable community and economic development that is adapted to the growing trend for remote work. As a baseline, we conducted a survey and over 400 remote workers responded providing us with valuable insights and actionable intelligence that is allowing us to proceed with the "Remote Work Ready Community" designation concept.

Background and Program:

Botetourt County has been working diligently with stakeholders, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and internet service providers to provide universal broadband coverage for our residents, businesses, and visitors. We are on the brink of making this essential utility accessible to everyone, encouraging more people to choose remote work in our community.



In 2023, Botetourt County formed a Remote Worker Focus Group to identify and support remote workers living in the county as well as be an attractive place to reside for the remote workforce. Our goal was to develop initiatives to support remote workers, attract new talent to the area, and make Botetourt County a State Certified Remote Work Community.

The first step in identifying these workers and determining their needs was to launch a survey. Botetourt County collaborated with the Roanoke Regional Partnership (RRP) to develop the survey. The goal was to capture accurate data and honest answers from those who work remotely in our community. Before we dove into the results of the survey, it was important to do some research on remote work. According to the Census Bureau, the number of home-based workers more than tripled between 2019 and 2021, from 5.7% (roughly 9 million workers) to 17.9% (about 28 million workers). A variety of Census sources show estimates of 1,200-2,000+ remote workers living in Botetourt County, but it is difficult to determine a true number because the Census uses a sampling method that may not account for hybrid workers.

431 people participated in the survey and 397 people (92%) considered themselves to be remote workers. The first thing that we needed to find out was where the respondents lived within our county. Troutville had the largest number of respondents followed by Buchanan, Daleville, Blue Ridge, Fincastle, Cloverdale, and Eagle Rock. Five percent of the participants lived outside of Botetourt County.



Over 200 remote workers identified their employers. Large companies in the Roanoke Valley were represented as well as smaller companies and institutions throughout the Mid-Atlantic. Several Fortune 500 companies (without a local physical presence) also employ Botetourt County Residents (i.e.: Google).

Other highlights included:

- 57% of the remote workers have lived in Botetourt County for 10 years or more.
- 33% of remote workers said their job was remote before the pandemic, thus 57% of people responding to the survey indicated they switched to some type of remote work.
- 90% of remote workers are employed by a company (vs being self-employed)
- 52% of remote workers are 100% home-based while the remaining 48% work a hybrid schedule.
- 77% work Monday-Friday during regular business hours while 16% set their own schedule. This data suggests a continuation of traditional work hours for the majority.
- Workers indicated that the lack of social interactions and distractions were negatives to remote work.
- 45% of remote workers indicated that they don't need a co-working space.
- 64% of remote workers say they don't need community activities to connect to other remote workers.
- 3% of new residents moved to Botetourt because of remote work.
- When asked if respondents would want to work from home if their job permitted, 50% had a resounding yes, while the other 50% said no.



Preferred Work Environment:

- It's interesting that 57% of respondents sometimes want to work from their home office. This suggests a preference for a balance between remote work and office-based work.
- The fact that 46% of respondents weren't interested in working at a coffee shop or café indicates that the majority prefer a more structured and private work environment.
- The 50% interest in a collaborative or co-working space highlights a desire for community and shared workspaces.
- The desire of 60% to travel while working suggests that flexibility in work location is important to a significant portion of the respondents.

Attraction to Botetourt County:

- The resources mentioned to better support or attract workers (improved internet, career opportunities for spouses, childcare, affordable housing, networking events, and co-working spaces) provide insight into what factors are important for attracting and retaining remote workers to the area.
- The limited number of respondents who knew of remote workers wanting to relocate to Botetourt County (4 out of the total surveyed) suggests that while there may be some interest, it might not be a widespread trend.
- Overall, the data provides a nuanced view of remote work preferences, expectations, and existing conditions in Botetourt County. This information could be useful for local



businesses, policymakers, and community organizations looking to support and engage remote workers in the area.

Key Challenges of Remote Workers:

- Access to reliable high-speed internet.
- Childcare options during working hours.
- Finding quiet and private workspaces.
- Managing distractions at home.
- Maintaining work-life separation.
- Lack of social interactions.
- Balancing work hours and taking breaks.
- Need for better flight options from the local airport.

Botetourt County is now utilizing this data to better address the needs of our remote workers. In May 2024, the county was invited to present our findings at the Saving Rural America Conference held in Roanoke, VA. While there we showcased our unique work and shared our findings with other localities.

Persons and Organizations Involved:

Botetourt County has partnered with the Roanoke Regional Partnership and the Rural Growth Initiative to support our remote workers and build a remote work-ready community.

The Roanoke Regional Partnership serves the cities of Roanoke and Salem, the town of Covington,



and the counties of Alleghany, Botetourt, Franklin, and Roanoke, acting as the main contact for businesses considering relocation or expansion in the greater Roanoke region.

The Rural Growth Initiative was founded by individuals passionate about supporting rural communities, the foundation works with communities across the south providing strategic planning support and preparing communities for growth amid the remote work revolution.

Expected Outcomes and Results:

Following the implementation of the Remote Worker Survey, the county acknowledged the necessity for extra resources to thoroughly examine the findings and delve deeper into the specific support required by our remote workforce. That's when we began the collaboration with the Rural Growth Initiative. This partnership provided more bandwidth for the county to explore exactly why our remote workers moved to the county and what they needed to be successful in their day-to-day lives.

Findings revealed that more than 1,800 of our citizens are working remotely, which is 10% of our workforce in the county. Through discussions with 13 remote workers who had been in the county for less than two years, we discovered that they represent a wide array of fields and are seeking a sense of place. Additionally, they expressed a desire to be more engaged in community initiatives.

Some of the lessons we have learned so far:



- The survey underscored the critical role of public-private collaborations in providing essential services and infrastructure that the county alone cannot offer, highlighting the need for such partnerships to support the remote work ecosystem effectively.
- Insights from the survey pointed to the importance of social amenities, like community spaces and events.
- Our analysis revealed significant gaps in local services, such as childcare, shopping, and dining, as well as the challenges remote workers face with delivery and ride-sharing services in rural areas, highlighting areas for improvement and demand for private and public sector solutions to make the county more self-sufficient and attractive for remote workers.

Beneficiaries of the Program:

The goal of this initiative is to support residents of Botetourt County who work remotely and to attract more remote workers to our community by addressing their needs and providing better broadband resources, childcare, and affordable housing. It was important to hear from these workers rather than assume what their needs were.

In January 2024, we collaborated with the Rural Growth Initiative to host a "Remote Workers" coffee event, fostering social bonds among participants. We also interviewed 13 remote workers from diverse backgrounds who have lived in Botetourt County for three years or less. By listening to their feedback, we developed a comprehensive strategy to support and attract remote workers.



Replication:

Botetourt County shared our findings and the remote work support initiative at the 2024 Investing in Rural America Conference in Roanoke, VA, in May 2024. Details about remote workers in our community and our support strategies are available on our website at www.botetourtva.gov/remotework .

The impact report on remote workers, compiled by the Rural Growth Initiative, is accessible by [clicking here](#). This report provided Botetourt County with a conceptual draft to enhance our remote worker attraction strategy and offered performance indicators for other communities to measure their support for this workforce sector.

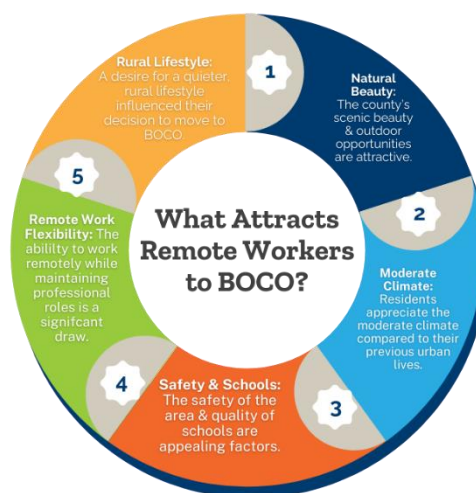


Conclusion:

In conclusion, Botetourt County will continue to support our remote workers and strive to become a certified remote work community by:

- Developing a remote worker attraction strategy to enhance the county's appeal to remote professionals while also ensuring community buy-in and awareness of the value of these work-from-home professionals.
- Complete the "Certified Remote Work Community" framework, self-assessment, and performance indicators and seek new partnerships to expand its reach.
- Explore the role the county can play in facilitating a stronger sense of community to support and enrich the lives of individuals who primarily work from home, enhancing social connections and community bonds.

To learn more about remote work in Botetourt County, visit www.botetourtva.gov/remotework.





Building A Remote Work Ready Community in Botetourt County

The "Building A Remote Work Ready Community" initiative aims to establish Botetourt County as a Certified Remote Work Community by understanding and addressing the needs of its considerable remote workforce while preserving and celebrating the local culture and the region's natural beauty.

Tiffany Bradbury, Botetourt County / Paul Daniele, Rural Growth Initiative



Botetourt County (pronounced bot'-uh-tot) is one of Virginia's most scenic and historically significant counties. A blended rural and suburban community nestled just north of Roanoke, Virginia, Botetourt offers American history blended with nature and modern attractions.

When it was first established, the county extended to the Mississippi River, covering parts of seven present-day states. Botetourt offers a slice of America, with charming small towns, traditions, and southern hospitality of life in Virginia's Blue Ridge.

Roanoke Regional Partnership: This organization serves the cities of Roanoke and Salem, the town of Covington, and the counties of Alleghany, Botetourt, Franklin, and Roanoke, acting as the main contact for businesses considering relocation or expansion in the greater Roanoke region.

The Rural Growth Initiative: Founded by individuals passionate about supporting rural communities, the foundation works with communities across the south providing strategic planning support and preparing communities for growth amid the remote work revolution.

Use the QR code below to visit Botetourt County's website and learn more about their work.

www.botetourtva.gov/remotework

CONTACT

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OPPORTUNITY

Between 2019 and 2021, the number of people primarily working from home in the United States nearly tripled. In 2019, approximately 5.7% of the workforce worked from home, in 2022 this reached 15.2%. This project aims to develop a toolkit to help rural communities better understand the needs and challenges faced by remote workers in their communities. By doing so, Botetourt County not only aims to enhance its own appeal to remote professionals but also hopes that other rural communities can learn from its experience. The goal is to recognize and tap into the valuable asset that remotely working residents have become to the county, fostering an environment where they can flourish and positively impact the local economy.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Botetourt County spans 546 square miles in Virginia, nestled between the Blue Ridge and the Appalachian Mountains. It is predominantly rural, with 98% of its land undeveloped and about 70% extremely rural. The county has approximately 33,000 residents and has attracted a significant remote workforce of approximately 1,800 individuals (10.2% of the workforce), demonstrating a valuable economic return on prior investments in broadband.

This emergence of remote work as a significant sector in Botetourt County underscores the changing dynamics of rural economies. With Botetourt's strategic investments in broadband connectivity, the county is not only enhancing its appeal to remote workers but also setting a precedent for rural areas nationwide. This digital infrastructure, combined with the county's natural beauty and strategic location near Roanoke, positions Botetourt as an ideal destination for those seeking the balance of rural living with modern work demands, further solidifying its role in the future of work and community development.



Meetings at a local coffee shop were organized to actively listen to remote workers and understand their needs.

STRATEGY

Our approach to building a certified "Remote Work Ready Community" in Botetourt County involved a strategy that leverages key community assets and strategic partnerships that are proving pivotal to our success.

Botetourt County, along with the Roanoke Regional Partnership and the Rural Growth Initiative are in the process of developing a toolkit that would provide guidelines and performance indicators to help localities become a certified "Remote Work Ready Community". The "Remote Work Ready Community" is a new concept that is in development. The partnerships between Botetourt County, the Roanoke Regional Partnership, and the Rural Growth Initiative provided not only the technical expertise needed but have also enabled us to develop a framework for sustainable community development that is adapted to the growing trend for remote work. As a baseline, we conducted a survey and over 400 remote workers responded providing us with valuable insights and actionable intelligence that will allow us to proceed with the "Remote Work Ready Community" designation concept.

OUTCOMES SO FAR

Following the implementation of the Remote Worker Survey, the county acknowledged the necessity for extra resources to thoroughly examine the findings and delve deeper into the specific support required by our remote workforce. That's when we began the collaboration with the Rural Growth Initiative. This partnership provided more bandwidth for the county to explore exactly why our remote workers moved to the county and what they needed to be successful in their day-to-day lives.

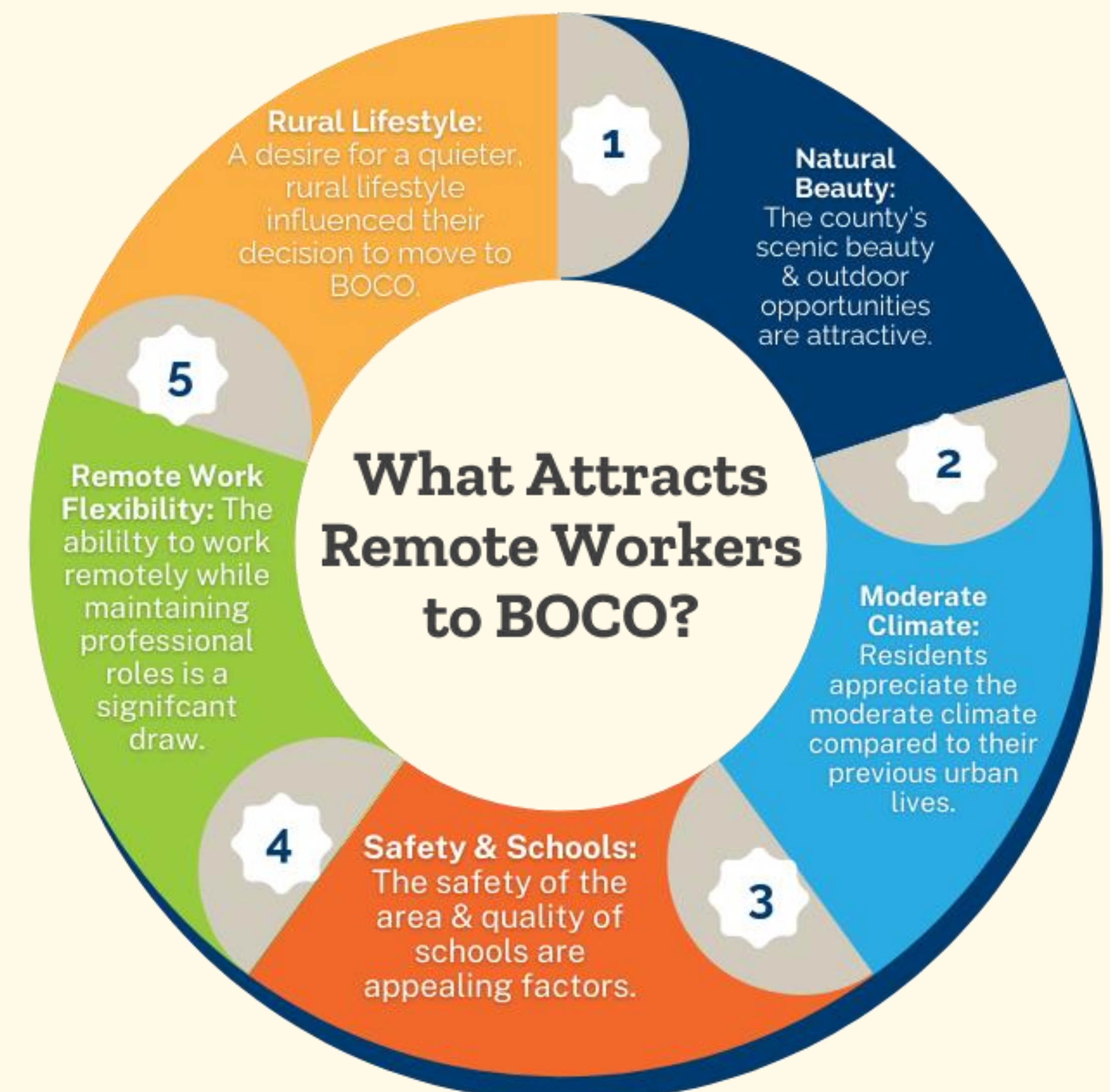
Our findings revealed that more than 1,800 of our citizens are working remotely which is 10% of our workforce in the county. Through discussions with 13 remote workers who had been in the county for less than two years, we discovered that they represent a wide array of fields and are seeking a sense of place. Additionally, they expressed a desire to be more engaged in community initiatives.

LESSONS LEARNED SO FAR

- The survey underscored the critical role of public-private collaborations in providing essential services and infrastructure that the county alone cannot offer, highlighting the need for such partnerships to support the remote work ecosystem effectively.
- Insights from the survey pointed to the importance of social amenities, like community spaces and events.
- Our analysis revealed significant gaps in local services, such as childcare, shopping, and dining, as well as the challenges remote workers face with delivery and ride-sharing services in rural areas, highlighting areas for improvement and demand for private and public sector solutions to make the county more self-sufficient and attractive for remote workers.

NEXT STEPS

- Develop a remote worker attraction strategy to enhance the county's appeal to remote professionals while also ensuring community buy-in and awareness of the value of these work-from-home professionals.
- Complete the "Certified Remote Work Community" framework, self assessment and performance indicators and seek new partnerships to expand its reach.
- Explore the role the county can play in facilitating a stronger sense of community to support and enrich the lives of individuals who primarily work from home, enhancing social connections and community bonds.



Challenges Highlighted by Botetourt County Remote Workers

INTERNET CONNECTIVITY: SOME RESIDENTS FACED CHALLENGES WITH INTERNET CONNECTIVITY, EMPHASIZING THE NEED FOR BROADBAND EXPANSION.	SOCIALIZATION: BUILDING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS CAN BE CHALLENGING FOR REMOTE WORKERS, LEADING TO SUGGESTIONS FOR MORE ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES.	CHILD CARE: AVAILABILITY AND AFFORDABILITY OF CHILD CARE SERVICES ARE CONCERNS FOR FAMILIES.	AMENITIES: RESIDENTS DESIRE MORE DIVERSE GROCERY OPTIONS AND SPECIALTY STORES.	PROFESSIONAL SPACES: THERE'S A NEED FOR PROFESSIONAL MEETING SPACES AND CO-WORKING OPTIONS.	TRANSPORTATION: LIMITED PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION AND ACCESS TO RIDE-SHARING FOOD DELIVERY SERVICES POSE CHALLENGES.