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**Summary of
Findings**

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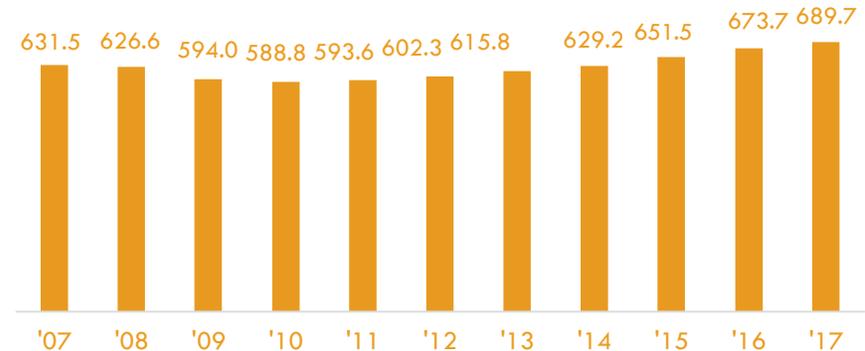
The theme of **strong economic momentum alongside potential growth-related challenges** surfaces throughout this **Economic Assessment & Community Benchmarking** report. As the first report of four that will comprise the Elevate Northeast Florida Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, this report contains the foundation of research on which a plan of action for the next five years will be established. From the data analysis and to-date input, it is clear that **the region will need an intentional and strategic approach to maintaining progress** – even more so than the approach set forth in the region’s last strategic plan, the 2012 Innovate Northeast Florida Strategy.

The following pages describe top drivers of the region’s economy and provide context for the rest of this report. This summary of findings is followed by a SWOT analysis, which highlights research findings that will inspire the Elevate Strategy’s framework.

Northeast Florida has experienced a strong wave of growth in recent years. The seven-county region has increased employment 14.5% since 2012 and added 100,000 new jobs in the past seven years. Since 2010 – the lowest point in the recession – Northeast Florida has enjoyed nearly uninterrupted growth across nearly all of its industries. Job creation has occurred at a pace that is more than 50% higher than the US average.

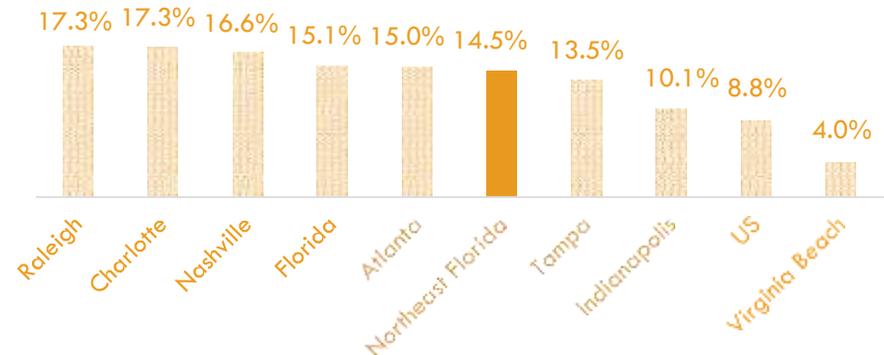
The pace of regional job growth is accelerating. Between 2016 and 2017, employment in Northeast Florida rose 2.4%. Among benchmark regions, only Nashville experienced a greater rate of job growth during this period.

NORTHEAST FLORIDA EMPLOYMENT
(THOUSANDS OF JOBS)



SOURCE: AVALANCHE CONSULTING / EMSI

EMPLOYMENT GROWTH
2012 – 2017



SOURCE: AVALANCHE CONSULTING / EMSI



Job gains have also contributed to record unemployment levels. Unemployment in Northeast Florida is quickly approaching a 10-year low, which is positive news for residents but more challenging news for businesses. In focus groups and interviews conducted for this Economic Assessment & Community Benchmarking report, some employers expressed concerns about their ability to fill job openings with skilled talent, a concern that mirrors what national employers are feeling.

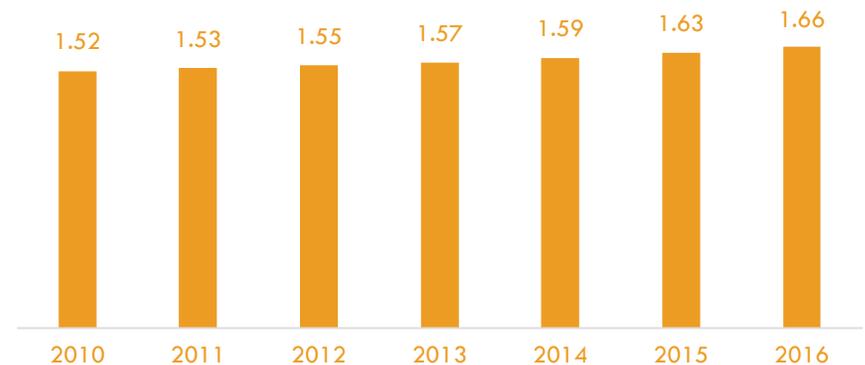
Reassurance for employers comes from the region's healthy population growth and large labor shed. Currently, Northeast Florida is home to nearly 1.7 million residents. **Since 2010, the region's population has grown by more than 140,000 individuals**, a 9.4% increase. During this period, the region's population increased at a faster pace than the national average.

NORTHEAST FLORIDA UNEMPLOYMENT RATE



SOURCE: AVALANCHE CONSULTING / BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS

NORTHEAST FLORIDA POPULATION (MILLIONS)



SOURCE: AVALANCHE CONSULTING / US CENSUS BUREAU



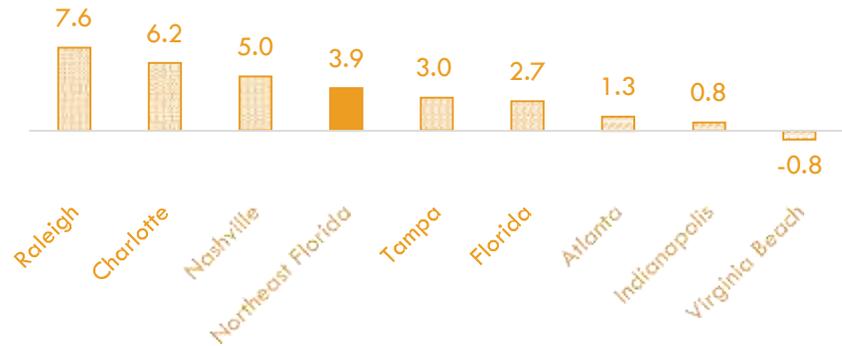
Northeast Florida’s strong job growth, affordability, and quality of life have helped attract college-educated talent into the region.

The influx of talent into Northeast Florida is helping the region close educational attainment gaps, and quickly. In 2012 when the Innovate Northeast Florida strategy was completed, the share of population with an Associate’s degree was less than 9%, and the share with a Bachelor’s degree was 26%. Since then, the number of residents with Bachelor’s degrees has increased 10.5% and number with Associate’s degrees is up 10%. As the charts to the right illustrate, 10% of the adult population now has an Associate’s degree and 28% have a Bachelor’s degree or higher. While still lagging some competitors, this is remarkable change in a short amount of time.

Northeast Florida is attracting working-age professionals at a faster pace than a majority of other Florida communities and the nation as a whole. In fact, 17.5% of the region’s population growth was fueled by residents between the ages of 25 and 44. Nationally, this group was responsible for less than 14% of total population growth.

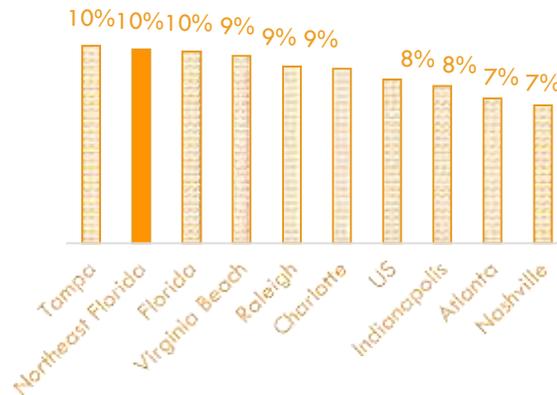
Northeast Florida looks well positioned to enjoy an increase in young professionals in the years ahead. **During the past five years, the number of Northeast Florida residents younger than 25 years old increased 1.7%. Nationally, this cohort grew just 0.3% during this period.** If Northeast Florida continues to recruit talent and can simultaneously retain its youth in the years ahead, the region economic competitiveness will further increase.

NET INFLUX OF COLLEGE-EDUCATED DOMESTIC MIGRANTS INTO REGION (PER 1,000 RESIDENTS), 2016

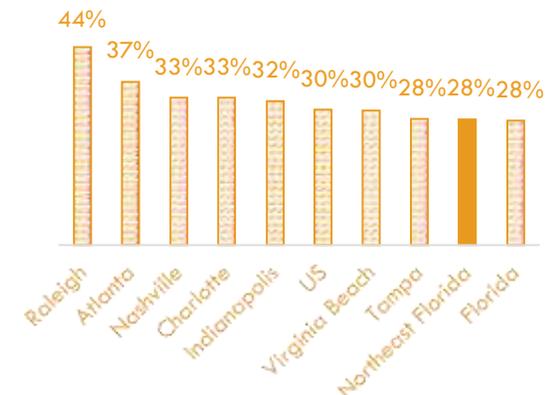


SOURCE: AVALANCHE CONSULTING / US CENSUS BUREAU

SHARE OF 25 YEARS+ POPULATION W/ ASSOCIATE’S DEGREE, 2016



SHARE OF 25 YEARS+ POPULATION W/ A BACHELOR’S DEGREE OR HIGHER, 2016



SOURCE: AVALANCHE CONSULTING / US CENSUS BUREAU

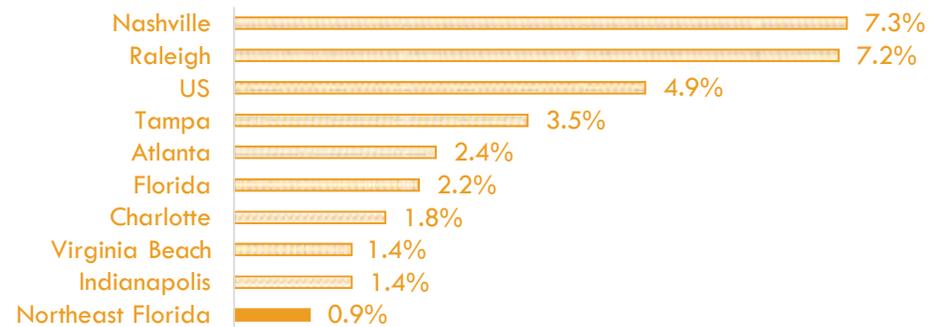


Strong employment and population growth has not translated into significant household income growth. During the past five years, incomes in the region have increased at a slower pace than benchmark communities. In addition, income levels vary greatly by demographic segment. On average, Black/African-American residents' household incomes are 60% the level of White Non-Hispanic household incomes.

Although cost of living is a frequently cited regional advantage, some residents feel pressure on their pocketbooks, especially related to housing costs. **While income levels have barely budged, home prices have increased by more than 75% since 2012.** Over 30% of homeowners in the metro now spend more than 30% of their income on their mortgage payment each month. More than 50% of renters are cost-burdened, spending greater than 30% of their income on rent.

Helping residents increase their incomes and afford quality housing not only depends on growing higher wage jobs in the region, but also connecting residents with viable career pathways. One of the most revealing data points gathered through the Elevate Northeast Florida resident survey is that **42% of those surveyed are not aware of career opportunities or pathways in the region.** Getting residents into higher and higher paying jobs will begin with informing them of their options.

CHANGE IN MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME 2011 - 2016



SOURCE: AVALANCHE CONSULTING / BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS

JACKSONVILLE METRO MEDIAN SALES PRICE OF EXISTING SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES (IN THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS)



SOURCE: AVALANCHE CONSULTING / NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS



Given the interconnectedness of the region’s workforce, ensuring an efficient transportation system is vital.

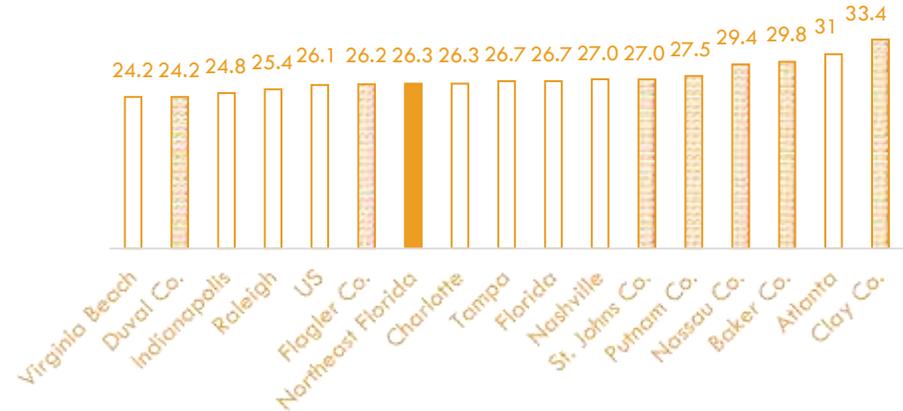
In a survey of 1,340 residents conducted for this Strategy, **nearly 50% of participants listed transportation/transit options as the region’s most pressing challenge.** These survey results represent a notable shift compared to the 2012 Innovate Northeast Florida survey. In the Innovate survey, transportation infrastructure was rated as a less pressing issue than preK-12 schools, career/job opportunities, economy, government/political leadership, and workforce/talent.

Pressure on transportation networks is not surprising given the region’s strong population growth and percentage of people commuting outside of their home county for work. With continued economic momentum, one can expect congestion to increase unless there are changes in commuting patterns or further investments in transportation infrastructure and regional transit options. Average travel time to work for the region as a whole is on par with benchmark communities, but it creeping upward for counties located farther from Duval County.

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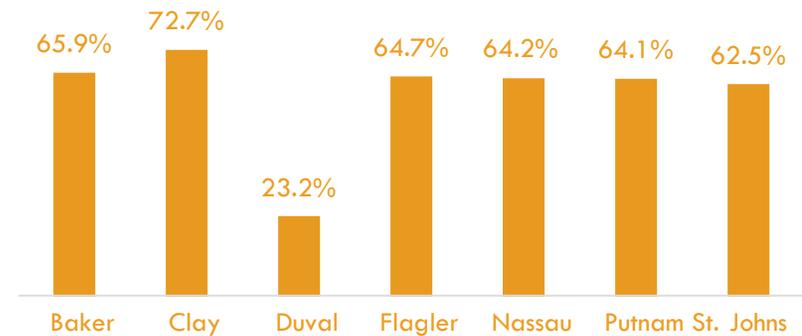
The following section, the **SWOT Analysis**, shares a more granular summary of Elevate Northeast Florida’s to-date research findings. The SWOT is organized around five topics: economic momentum; talent, education, and workforce; infrastructure and real estate; quality of place; and entrepreneurship and innovation. It highlights truly differentiating regional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The list of strengths can be incorporated into sales messages and marketing content. Weaknesses and threats may inspire action. Opportunities, similarly, may evolve into goals and recommendations in the Elevate Action Plan.

**AVERAGE TRAVEL TIME TO WORK IN MINUTES
2016**



SOURCE: AVALANCHE CONSULTING / US CENSUS BUREAU

**SHARE OF RESIDENT WORKERS EMPLOYED
OUTSIDE THE COUNTY, 2015**



SOURCE: AVALANCHE CONSULTING / US CENSUS BUREAU

