



Talent Recruitment & Relocation Amidst A Pandemic: Where Top Talent May Want to Live in 2021 and Beyond

While we still do not know precisely how COVID-19 will change the ways we work and live into the future, we do see that for many, the unrelenting endurance and impact of the pandemic has played a role in the making of major life decisions including those pertaining to relocation. With markedly low mortgage rates and more people being able to work from virtually anywhere, COVID-19 has reframed how the desirability of a given location is viewed and thus, influenced where people have chosen to move.

It is also important to acknowledge that the impact of the pandemic has created uncertainty. Compared to this time last year, there are fewer homes for sale overall, while more homeowners are choosing to refinance their current homes. Job security is also a major factor to consider when looking at how the pandemic has and continues to impact the decisions people make regarding home buying, home selling, and relocation. What is for many, the largest purchase in their lifetimes may be tempered by concern for their future employment status. Importantly, this line of thinking is backed up by the predictive data of the Federal National Mortgage Association which has said that as a result of COVID-19, [15% fewer homes](#) will be sold this spring than last. At the same time, what we ended up seeing across many locations in the United States last year was that people were moving in historic numbers, reinforcing just how differently individuals across the country are impacted by the pandemic.

In this piece, we use our consumer moving data to discuss and dissect the moving trends of 2020. From a recruitment and retention standpoint, this data and its analysis provides valuable insight about where your current and future employees may be wanting to live, and ultimately, may aid in subsequent decision making regarding your in-person/remote mix, office locations, and relocation or [delocation](#) as an incentive for top talent. As the increase in remote work continues to flatten the labor market, making more companies able to recruit the same employee regardless of their location, companies need to be thinking about how they can attract and retain top candidates. Location choice and relocation benefits are one way to do just that, especially if companies think creatively to truly meet the moment.

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2020 vs. 2019: How Many People Are Moving From Specific Cities?

While many may think that the [lockdowns](#) and “shelter in place” mandates that have become commonplace may have resulted in virtually no one moving in 2020, this was not the case.

Like most industries, moving has felt the impact of the pandemic but not to the degree that one may have anticipated. In some areas, in fact, such as larger cities, moving actually increased in 2020 when compared to 2019. Comparing apples to apples, the graphic below shows the comparison of how many individuals moved from specific cities in 2020 and 2019.

The surge in remote working spurred by COVID-19 has provided millions in the workforce an opportunity to work from anywhere, and the pattern that has resulted has been clear. By and large, individuals and families alike are leaving urban locations in favor of nearby suburban and [rural](#) communities. More space and a lower cost of living are suddenly in reach for many who were previously anchored to cities for the sake of proximity to work.

This data is also supported by the reports of people electing to flee their cramped, urban lockdown quarters by getting outdoors more and exploring, thus potentially presenting the question, “Why not just move here?”. However, there are some of the mind that in certain cases, especially as it pertains to harder hit cities like San Francisco and New York, these moves may be [temporary](#). Regardless, the fact that population density and proximity to other people showed itself to be a driving force in the spread of COVID-19, it is no wonder that cramped city living not only may have lost its appeal for some, but may have proved too risky to bear.

Not all of those who moved in 2020 traded in the city for wide open spaces, however. There were also plenty of people who left behind one urban area for another, in some cases areas equal in population density. There was also the trend of single adults leaving New York City



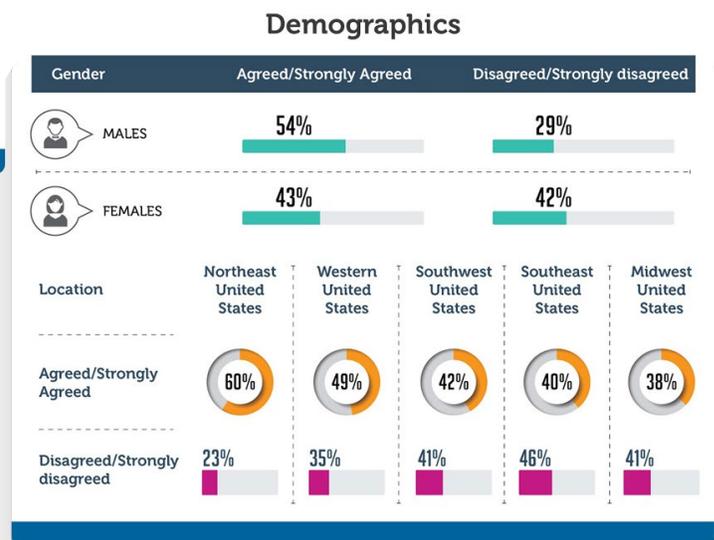
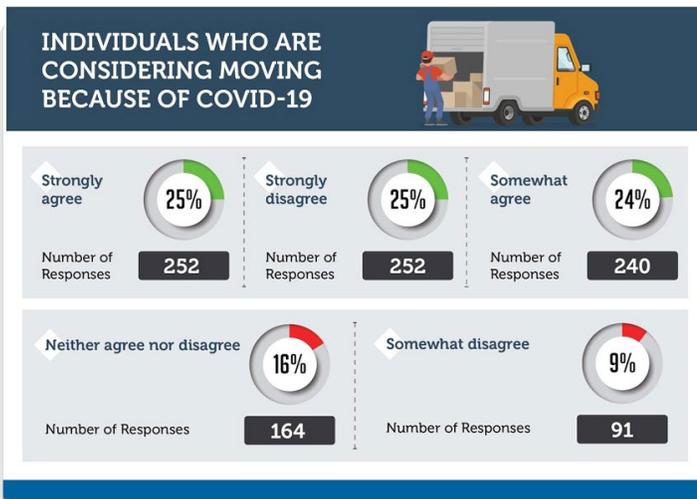
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and the surrounding area to move home with family during the lockdowns. In other cases, many school closures resulted in college students needing to leave and [move back home](#) to complete their classes online.

To learn more about the moving trends uncovered by our 2020 data, download our guide, "[2020 Moving Trends & Analysis](#)". In it you will find out which states are gaining and losing the most residents and why.

Looking to the Future: Attitudes About Moving

When it comes to future moving plans, people have shown that they are evenly divided on whether or not the pandemic will cause them to stay or move. The results of a recent survey show 25% of respondents stated that concerns surrounding the pandemic may prompt a future move while another 25% reported that due to the pandemic, they do not anticipate moving in the near future. Below you will find a graphic that illustrates the various opinions of those surveyed on their attitudes towards moving in light of the pandemic.



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COVID-19: Why People Move

It is estimated that [22% of people in the U.S.](#) have moved in the past six months. Of those surveyed, one-third said that the move was primarily motivated by the need to move to a safer area amidst the pandemic.

Other reasons cited for moving that may have been influenced by the pandemic included:

- Desiring a less densely populated area
- Having to care for an elderly family member
- Improved work prospects to replace income lost due to COVID-19
- Safer, less impacted transportation

As previously mentioned, the pandemic has affected everyone differently depending on their work, living, and family situations. As a result, peoples' attitudes about moving and other major life decisions have varied. However, despite there being some data out there attempting to show that COVID has not been a major catalyst for the frequency, location, or reasoning behind moving, the highly respected Pew Research Center has [released data showing](#) that COVID really has been a major driving force for moves across the country.

Of the 20 percent of survey respondents who reported COVID moving plans, these were their top reasons:

- 35% of moves were initiated by the need for more indoor space.
- 34% of moves occurred because they needed a new building.
- 31% of moves were prompted by a need or desire for more outdoor space.
- 23% of moves were caused by the need to find more affordable housing.
- 23% of moves took place to bring families back together during lockdown.

Clearly, space is a major concern for people who moved as a result of the pandemic. With so many working from home, many families found that their existing living space was simply insufficient to accommodate two adults working from home, and in some cases, having children at home simultaneously.

This may be the reason why the strongest potential to make another COVID-related move in the near future is found in individuals aged 24-55, the prime workforce years.

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The Moving Industry: COVID-19 Impacts

While we have been focused until now on how COVID-19 has affected individuals' moving habits and attitudes, we have not touched on how the pandemic has impacted the industry that moves these individuals. What about the [moving industry](#)? Have moving companies and the professionals who work at them been negatively impacted by the pandemic?

Unsurprisingly, those in the moving industry are concerned about its economic health. This is sensible when viewed through a risk management lens, especially considering that [74% of moving industry professionals](#) have seen some type of downsizing in the last year. In the same survey, 72% of respondents confirmed a slowdown in the near-past as a result of the pandemic and lockdown orders.

During this same period, however, as illustrated by the data previously cited here, moves are still underway. In fact, sometimes, the moves have been prompted by the same type of downsizing that is provoking concern within our industry.

Unlike the 2008 Financial Crisis, the underlying cause for this economic downturn is different. The global economy has never experienced a downturn of this magnitude due to what feels like an unstoppable virus. This pandemic has changed our way of life for perhaps forever. This means that what data we do have from the last year only provides a baseline estimate at best for what may come in the years ahead.

One thing we know almost certainly is that the surge in remote work will have its own unique impact on the moving industry and yet, not one we are capable of accurately predicting. Though the data we do have is not doom and gloom as one may expect. According to those surveyed by Real Trends, 42% of respondents said they do not intend to ever self-move again. Perhaps even more notably, 91% of respondents stated that they felt capable and prepared to move again. This is a strong showing for professional moving companies, illustrating that the value provided by professional movers will remain in demand for near-future moves and perhaps that demand may very well increase as COVID continues to play out in front of our eyes. It also further reinforces the importance of companies partnering with trusted relocation providers to ensure that they and their relocating employees have experience in their corner during these unpredictable times. What's more, our [existing trucker and subsequent capacity shortage](#) as a nation may be felt even more profoundly during our wrestling with this virus, shutdowns, restrictions, and downsizing. Planning ahead and forming strong relationships with relocation providers can go a long way in facilitating a hitch-free move.



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COVID-Related & Non-COVID Moves: Facts About Moving

In this section, we look at data surrounding how individuals prepare and plan for a move, regardless of the impetus behind the move itself (COVID or other reasons).

Finding The Right Moving Service is Important

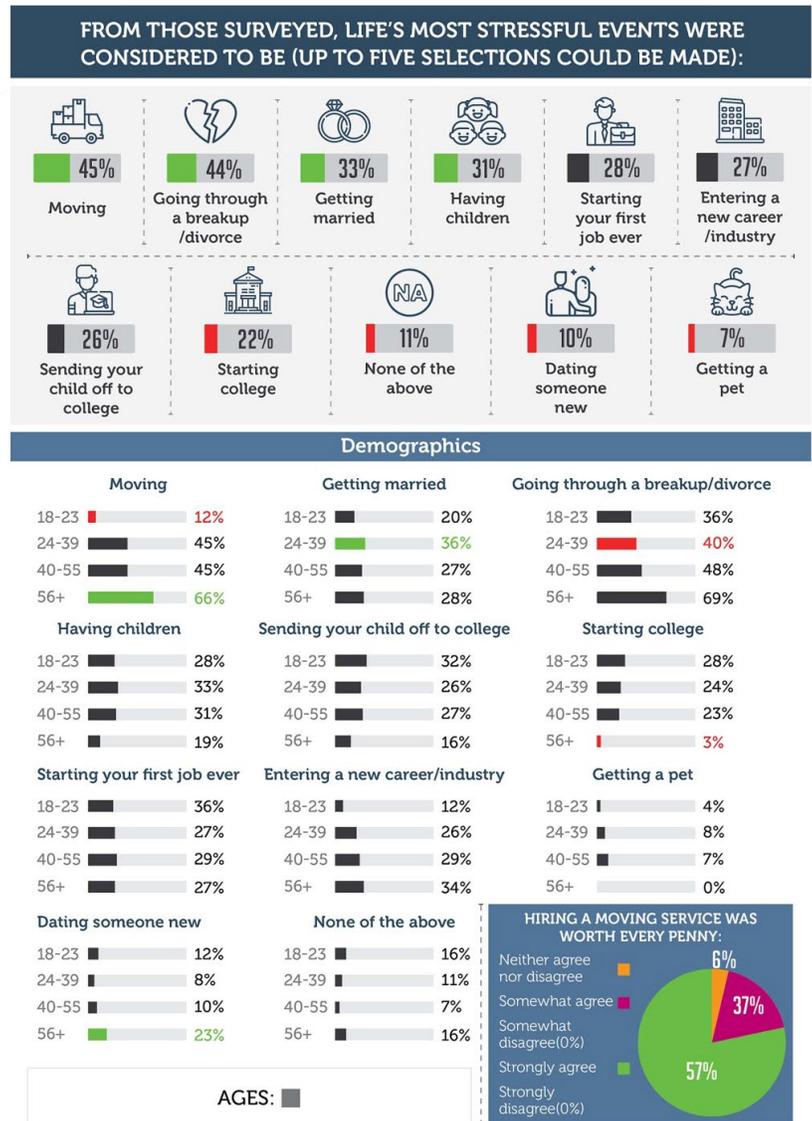
72% of survey respondents said it took up to six months prior to their move date to select a moving service.

Only **18%** of respondents stated that it took them a few weeks or a month to choose a moving service ahead of their move date.

Moving is an Even Higher Stress Life Event For Older Adults

45% of surveyed adults aged 55 years or younger reported that moving was one of the “most stressful” life events. While high, the numbers went up as age increased. For respondents 56 years of age and older, **66%** said that moving was one of the “most stressful” life events.

In both age groups, moving outranked every other option in terms of the stress it causes. This further drives home the importance for companies who include relocation in their offers to potential new hires to aim for the easiest moving experience possible. Offering a full-service relocation program is the best way to ensure that employees are moved safely and with the least amount of stress possible.





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Moving Safely During COVID-19

While many Americans are uncertain about the [safety of moving](#) during COVID-19, statistics show that many continue to both make and fulfill moving plans as best as they can around spiking infection rates and lockdowns.

As shown through the data in the previous section, moving will always be a stressful event even in ideal circumstances. It is understandable that many people reported heightened stress when moving during the pandemic.

As we have shown, however, the pandemic is not stopping people from moving. Instead, what is occurring is a steady shift in moving habits, reasons for moving, and frequency of moving. How enduring these changes will be is yet to be seen. It is possible that this will become the new normal for the moving industry.

Regardless of how trends either shift or remain, the most important thing to focus on right now is identifying the best practices for the safest possible move during the COVID-19 pandemic. Below are helpful tips to share with your relocating employees.

Social Distancing is Still Crucial

Despite COVID vaccines becoming available to certain segments of the population, social distancing will remain paramount alongside handwashing and masking. This is true for several reasons including the fact that there are new, strengthening variants of the virus, there is still no vaccine for children, and the vaccine rollout is still working out its kinks.

It remains essential for each person who is involved in a move to practice the [maximum personal protective measures](#) in order to remain uninfected. Be sure to stress to your relocating employees how they may best protect themselves and their families from infection during a move.

COVID-Related Regulations and Requirements Vary by State & Municipality:

For regional and interstate moves, it will be necessary for those moving to stay informed on COVID requirements and updates occurring in their new destination. Encourage your relocating employees to stay informed to ensure that they are in keeping with the guidelines of their new locale.

Staying flexible is also important. During these unpredictable times, it is possible that a move will need to be delayed or rescheduled if infection rates at the destination suddenly skyrocket.

Relocating employees and the firms that move them should be prepared for possible delays or disruptions due to COVID-19 and should plan accordingly.

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The Timing of a Move is Important

While many Americans have reported moving due to a desire or need to care for a loved one or be closer to family during lockdown, these same motivations may be a cause for some to delay a move.

As local hospitals have been frequently overwhelmed, those at higher risk for complications due to COVID-19 may want to consider delaying a move should infection rates rise approaching their move date. Additionally, with mandatory quarantine between moves being 14 days or more, delaying a move may actually prove more sensible in the long run.

In addition to the move itself, encourage your employees to consider the safest transportation options available to them and anyone in their moving party who may be at heightened risk. Travelling by certain modes of transport such as air, bus, train, taxi, and rideshare may increase their risk of exposure.

Are Moving Services Essential?

It depends who you ask. States and municipalities determine what is deemed an [essential service](#) in their specific area. Depending on location, the reasoning behind a move may or may not impact how the rules and regulations apply. This is helpful information to provide to your relocating employees ahead of their move date.

Due to the possibility of an unforeseen lockdown or other mitigating circumstances that may impact the viability of a move, it is ideal to have somewhat flexible moving dates if at all possible. This is something that should be worked out between the company and the relocating employee ahead of time to ensure there is an appropriate buffer to avoid any major disruptions to their work responsibilities.

Moving Plans may be Impacted by COVID in Various Unanticipated Ways

With the exception of 2019, which saw only [9.8% of the population move](#), typically 10% of the United States population will move in a given year. Some of these people will be moving for the first time in their lives. Even experienced and frequently relocating individuals may find that their moving experience is very different due to COVID than in previous years. Since so much of normal life has changed, it is important that your relocating employees understand that there may be disruptions and unexpected challenges that arise.

Everything from grabbing a bite to eat along the way, to how many movers they will have available to aid in packing and unpacking, may be slightly different or complicated by COVID restrictions. That is why it is so important for those planning a move to have alternate plans and backups. As we have seen this past year, restrictions or disruptions can crop up at any time. So while all may seem manageable in the lead up to a move, it is possible that it will shift on or during the move itself. This is also yet another reason why selecting a professional, reputable moving company is so important. Seasoned moving professionals are better equipped to respond to last minute changes and are well-trained to aim for a customer-centric solution wherever possible.

If and when these events occur, this can also cause longer wait times to reach the customer service department at the moving company as many moves that are already in progress need to be re-routed at the same time.

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The New Sanitation and Safety Procedures Implemented by The Moving Industry

The moving company that your firm or relocating employee chooses to work with is more important than ever. When it comes to safety during a move, selecting a moving provider who takes the threat of COVID very seriously is crucial. COVID-19 safety measures should be enacted and clearly demonstrated before, during, and after the move. [Online surveys](#) are also a great tool that are offered by many moving companies. These give the person moving the opportunity to share helpful information that aids the movers in better working around the space. During COVID-19, this tells the movers where to enter and exit the home and provides scheduling information to best adhere to social distancing guidelines.

Look for the Following Safety Measures When Selecting a Moving Provider:

- The trucks and all moving equipment is disinfected before and after each use.
- Moving professionals are masked and gloved.
- Moving professionals are equipped with all available PPE, including booties.
- During the move, there is an emphasis on adequate airflow, frequent hand washing, and use of disinfecting wipes.
- The health of all workers is closely monitored by the moving company, ensuring no one is sick at work.
- Company offers “no contact” estimates, moves, and packing/unpacking services, not “by request” but as the only option.
- Company is familiar with and complies with all [COVID protocols](#) at your destination.
- Add-on services are offered, including post-move COVID clean-up for increased safety.



Partnering with an established relocation partner ensures that the moving companies charged with moving your talent are following the recommended sanitizing, social distancing, and additional measures for a safe and healthy moving experience, quelling anxieties about virus spread.

COVID has and will continue to have a major impact on how often, where, when and how people move in the U.S. What is clear, however, is that the moving industry is making every effort to accommodate customer safety requests and special needs to provide safe and timely moving services on demand.

As with all aspects of daily life, COVID-19 will continue to influence the moving industry and where, when, and how people move across the United States. The moving industry as a whole is making a major effort to accommodate customer safety requests and special needs alongside new safety and sanitation procedures.

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Based on the data shared here, we have learned that despite COVID-19, people are still moving and in some cases, in record numbers. In general, the patterns have shown that the pandemic coupled with remote work has caused many to leave major cities in favor of more suburban or rural communities. People are searching for a way to find some positives in all of this and one may be their newfound ability to acquire more land and square footage, while lowering their cost of living. We also see that moving more than ever is viewed as a stressful experience and that those who have done a DIY move in the past would rather never do it again. In looking at peoples' future moving plans, we have found that while they are divided in terms of how they are foreseeing their response to the pandemic (not moving as a result of COVID vs. moving as a direct result of COVID), there remain a substantial number of individuals who are considering moving due to COVID-19 but have yet to do so. Taken together, we see that people are not going to stop moving and that when they do move, they want a professional moving experience.

While many companies are still ironing out the details of how they will structure their workforce in light of the ongoing pandemic, many are experimenting with various levels of remote work and in-person mixtures, with some going [fully remote](#) for the near future. We have also seen [many companies](#) deciding to move their offices out of higher cost cities in favor of more affordable locations. This has brought about a discussion on [delocation](#) as a benefit to existing and prospective employees in order to attract new talent and support retention in this increasingly flattened labor market that knows no state lines. Delocation is a benefit that involves the company financing an employee's move to a new location. Often these programs have been used to help employees who can work remotely escape the high costs of the cities that their companies were headquartered in. With the surge in remote work, this is a space to watch.

These are all trends that we have our eye on and are investigating through further research that will be shared through an upcoming whitepaper. We think that employee relocation will remain a valuable recruiting tool for companies to attract top talent whether through traditional means of moving them to the city in which the company is located or the more avant garde, delocation concept. Certainly, this is a place worth watching and one that companies will need to respond to in order to remain competitive. Regardless of the relocation strategy your firm chooses to move forward with in a post-COVID landscape, one thing is certain: a trusted relocation partner can vastly improve the quality, predictability, and cost effectiveness of a well-run employee relocation program.

To learn more about how our corporate relocation programs can help your company weather uncertainty, control costs, and improve employee satisfaction email Bobbi Maniglia at bobbi.maniglia@northamerican.com.

For more information visit: northamerican.com

