

# WORKBOOK

IF YOU



COULD LIVE

ANYWHERE



MELODY  
WARNICK



# Crafting Your Location Strategy

**So how do you decide where you're most likely to thrive?** The process can be as clinical or emotional or well organized or stressed out or hopeful as whoever's doing the deciding.

Some Anywhereists build spreadsheets.

Some dive down spiraling rabbit holes of internet research.

Some interview everyone they've ever known who's lived in a particular city.

Some make meticulous site visits.

Some close their eyes, spin a globe, and point.

Some pray.

Some wish they could just stay put.

In studies, most Anywhereists admit to being relatively practical as they choose a new place to move to. They care about the things you'd think they should: quality schools, good hospitals, affordable homes. Yet as I interviewed over a hundred people for this book, regularly asking them what drew them to the place they're currently living, the answers were surprisingly esoteric. "My family lives nearby" makes sense. But what about "I like the weather"? Or "There are great local hiking trails"? Or "I enjoy the art scene here"? Or "The taxes are low"? What about "I just wanted to check it out"?

To want an inexpensive spot of land to raise chickens, like Amy Hebdon did, feels reasonable. But how much weight do the chickens get among other factors? Do chickens trump weather or expenses? Should chickens outrank good schools for a couple who doesn't have kids but might in the future?

Maybe you're considering the basic elements and amenities that constitute a community, but you don't always know how to rank those competing interests. Something tells you that you should care more about public transportation than poultry, yet psychologically, chickens keep roosting at the top of the decision-making ladder.

Making it more fraught is that you're not Starbucks. You don't get to plunk down multiple storefronts all over the world. Only about 6 percent of Americans own a second home; the rest of us have to make do with one. That alone can make the decision feel portentous.



# Crafting Your Location Strategy cont...

Even though they'd been gearing up for literally years to become Anywhereists and move away from Seattle, once Amy and James Hebdon were confronted with the expansiveness of their decision, fear set in. "That lack of constraints can make it really, really hard and give you a lot of anxiety when it comes to making a choice," Amy said.

That can lead to ineffective approaches to decision-making, like impulsiveness, when you close your eyes and point just to get it over with, or deflection, when you avoid the decision for as long as you can to keep from getting overwhelmed.

How do you come up with your own location strategy? In the rest of this chapter, we're going to work through some exercises together that will help you decide what matters most to you in a place. Easier said than done. No one can tell you what to think, not even me. You'll have to do some soul searching to figure out what kind of community would offer the best fit right now for you (and possibly your partner, kids, or anyone else who'll be making the move with you).

## Exercise 1: Should You Move?

1. Do you have a compelling reason to move right now? Do you have a compelling reason to stay put?

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2. How often do you find yourself thinking about moving?

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3. Do you have another destination in mind?

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4. Can you see yourself living in your current place in five years? What about in twenty?

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## Exercise 1: Should You Move? cont...

5. Does it feel like a good fit with who you are as a person? With who you hope to be?

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6. What are your dominant emotions in your current location? Joy? Anger? Calm? Stress? Inspiration? Do you think that would change elsewhere? What about your environment draws those feelings out?

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7. How have you changed since moving to your current location? Do you feel like you're emotionally healthier than you used to be?

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8. What makes you happy in your current location? How long is the list of things you enjoy?

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9. What are the top five things you complain about in your current location? Are any of them unsuitable for your long-term living situation?

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10. Do you feel certain that your biggest annoyances about living in your current location won't also be present in a new place?

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## Exercise 1: Should You Move? cont...

11. Are you running away from things you don't like or running toward something you're excited about?

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12. Are you financially able to manage living in your current place?

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13. Who in your current community would you miss if you left next week?

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14. Does your current place provide what you need or want at this point in your life?

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15. Will you be able to achieve your personal goals and ambitions living here?

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16. How do the members of your family feel about moving? Will they be supportive? If not, are the potential benefits worth their temporary unhappiness?

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## Exercise 1: Should You Move? cont...

17. How do you think your life would be different elsewhere? Is there a way you could achieve some of those changes without a long-distance move? Would moving to a new house locally rather than to a new location be sufficient?

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18. What do you risk by moving? (Loss of relationships or social capital, for instance.) What do you risk by not moving? (Perhaps the chance for proximity to family or financial savings.)

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19. What regrets can you imagine having if you do move? If you don't?

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20. If you make a pros and cons lists for staying vs. moving, which is longer?

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The process of thinking about these questions hopefully evoked feelings and ideas that can help you understand whether you have more to gain by relocating or by doubling down in your current community. Still confused? That's okay. Work through the next exercises, and see if you gain more clarity.



## Exercise 2: What's Your Geographic History?

1. Start by making a chronological list of all the places you've lived.

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2. For each place you remember living, write down the first three words that come to mind about that location.

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3. Dig deeper into what really worked for you in these locations.

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4. Think about what didn't work for you.

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5. Construct a love/hate list of common factors that emerge.

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## Exercise 3: What Are Your Place Values?

From the following list, choose the five values that matter most to you in your location strategy.

Abundance

Achievement

Adventure

Ambition

Autonomy

Balance

Beauty

Belonging

Calmness

Charity

Civic engagement

Collaboration

Commitment

Community

Contribution

Cooperation

Creativity

Culture

Diversity

Environment

Excellence

Fairness

Faith

Family

Flexibility

Friendship

Fun

Generosity

Growth

Happiness

Health

Independence

Individuality

Joy

Kindness

Leadership

Learning

Love

Making a difference

Motivation

Open-mindedness

Originality

Peace

Power

Preparedness

Purpose

Recognition

Relationships

Security

Self-control

Service

Simplicity

Spirituality

Stability

Success

Teamwork

Tradition

Vision

Well-being

Work





## Exercise 5: What Are Your Deal Breakers?

To get a bit more into the weeds if you're struggling with a location decision, create your own rank-order system by grading each item on a scale from 1 to 10 based on how important you think it is to your future location, with 1 meaning you really couldn't care less about it and 10 meaning it's absolutely vital to your well-being in a place.

### The Basics

- **Infrastructure:** Are local roads, highways, bridges, sewer, water, and electric lines in good repair? Does the community fund public goods sufficiently? Are services affordable?
- **Internet access:** Is there fiber or broadband? How fast are internet speeds in town, both for uploads and downloads? What does it cost?
- **Safety:** How common are different kinds of crimes, from burglaries to assaults? Is the local police force effective?
- **Medical care:** How close is a healthcare facility for emergency treatment? For specialized care?

### Cost of Living

- **Overall cost of living:** How expensive is the city? Compared to where you live now? Compared to the nation (or the world) as a whole?
- **Housing affordability:** Could you afford the average rent here? Could you afford to buy a home? How available is affordable housing?
- **Housing stock:** What do homes look like? Can you afford the amenities you value, like a backyard or a basement?
- **Taxes:** What state and local taxes will you pay?
- **Other expenses:** Could you afford other things you care about, like restaurant meals or entertainment? Are there new expenses you haven't accounted for, like air-conditioning or heating oil?

### Fun

- **Wellness:** Are there places to exercise in the way you prefer?
- **Food:** Will you have access to the kinds of food and experiences you most enjoy?
- **Culture:** Will it be easy and affordable to go to movies, concerts, art exhibits, plays, or live performances?
- **Shopping:** Can you buy what you need, want, or enjoy in your town?
- **Proximity to a regional metro area:** How close is the nearest large city? What amenities does it offer?
- **Engagement opportunities:** How easy is it to volunteer locally, run for civic office, or otherwise get engaged?



## Exercise 5: What Are Your Deal Breakers? cont...

### Fun continued...

- **Spirituality:** Is a faith community of your religious tradition available?

### Transportation

- **Public transportation:** Is there easy, affordable access to reliable public transportation like buses or a metro system?
- **Traffic:** Does the community regularly experience traffic backups? Will you need to drive often on a freeway or on major thoroughfares to get to services you need?
- **Walkability:** Can you walk or bike to services you need?
- **Accessibility:** How easy is the community to navigate for someone who has a disability or is in a wheelchair?
- **Proximity to a major airport:** How close is the nearest international airport? Is it a hub? How expensive is it to travel from there?

### Work and Education

- **Education:** What are local schools like? How are they ranked?
- **Extracurriculars:** Are there activity options for children and adults, like classes, camps, and community sports leagues?
- **Local business community:** Are there opportunities for in-person networking or career development? Is the local economy vibrant and growing? Does it welcome newcomers?
- **Colleagues:** Are there people who do what you do in the community already? Are there coworking spaces?
- **Job markets:** Are there options for in-person work in your field nearby? Could your children find after-school or summer jobs when they're old enough?
- **University:** Is there a university nearby? Does it offer opportunities for continuing education? Are there public lectures and concerts on campus?
- **Certifications:** Would you need a new certification or license to work in another place (as a teacher or a lawyer, for instance)?
- **Library:** Is the public library well funded, well stocked, and well used?
- **Child care:** What kind of child care is available here? What does it cost?



## Exercise 5: What Are Your Deal Breakers? cont...

### Environment

- **Climate:** What's the average weather here? How extreme are seasonal changes? How is the climate expected to change in the next ten or twenty years? What are the average temperatures throughout the year and the extreme highs and lows? How much precipitation is typical?
- **Natural disasters:** What disasters is this area prone to? How common are they? What would dealing with them require (like paying for flood insurance or prepping to evacuate in wildfire season)? Is climate change expected to affect these events in the near future?
- **Beauty:** What is the local landscape like? Do the aesthetics of the area, including the housing stock and the local buildings, appeal to you and meet your needs? How close is a beach or mountains? Are there trees and flowers in natural and built areas?
- **Outdoor amenities:** How easy is recreational access to the outdoors, like trails, rivers, parks, or lakes? Are these resources properly cared for? Well used?
- **Sustainability:** Are there easy ways to recycle? Is there access to alternative energy sources, like solar, wind power, or electric car charging stations?
- **Air quality:** How clean is the air? Are there ongoing sources of pollution?

### People

- **Size:** How many people live here? How dense is the local population?
- **Proximity of family and existing friends:** How close would the important people in your life be: parents, grandparents, siblings, adult children, best friends, old college roommates?
- **Demographics:** How old is the average resident? Are more of them married or single? How many have children? How many are senior citizens?
- **Diversity:** How diverse is the community in terms of race, culture, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender identity, sexuality, politics, religion? Will you be in the majority or the minority? How open is the community to people like you? To people who are not like you?
- **Politics:** How did this community vote in the last election? Do residents fall to one extreme side of the political spectrum, or are opinions diverse? Do civic leaders like the mayor run with a political affiliation? Is the city council politically diverse?
- **Friendship:** What are the entry points for newcomers (clubs, community events)? How easily do you imagine making your first friend?
- **Relationships:** If you're single, what is the dating pool like? Are there potential mates? Sensible ways to meet people?
- **Personality:** What are community members like? What appears to matter to them? Do you imagine having things in common?

# What Matters Now?

## Recognition

Does this place offer incentives to move there? Are there recruitment efforts locally to attract remote workers? Are there programs to welcome you to the community or help you connect with locals? Is there an easy way to contact the local economic development authority or the chamber of commerce to ask for advice? Does this town make it clear that they want you here?

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## Wealth

Will geographic arbitrage help you in this new city? Is housing less expensive than where you live now? Will other expenses go up or down? What about your taxes? Are there other counties that might serve you better financially? How will moving costs affect your financial outcomes?

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## Opportunity

Will this city help you become more or less ambitious? More or less focused on personal growth and success? Is there an entrepreneurial ecosystem that encourages good ideas? Can you imagine bringing your own good idea to fruition here? Are there holes in the market you could fill? Will there be mentors to guide you? Sources of capital? Do you envision that the community here might rally around you? What resources are available for small business owners or remote workers?

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# What Matters Now?

## Connection

Are there coworking spaces in the city? Community gathering spaces? Are there people who do what you do for a living, or work in adjacent fields, who might become a support network? Are there networking opportunities or activities that help you build career connections, like writers' groups? Are there coliving spaces if you're interested in that? Do you have a plan for finding friends in this new place? Are there entry points into the community, like clubs or career- or hobby-related groups?

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## Creativity

Will this place inspire your creativity? If you're in a creative field, are there local markets for your work? A community of fellow creatives? Is the focus on craft or on success? Are there mentors or others who can support your work? Housing for creatives? Places to exhibit work? Places to create work? An arts council to provide resources and support?

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## Adventure

Are there interesting things to do here? Will you have chances to experience novelty and excitement in your daily life? Would moving to this place feel comfortable or adventurous? Can you imagine using your work flexibility to have fun and dispel tedium? Have you considered moving abroad? Is there a country offering a nomad visa that you'd consider living in?

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# What Matters Now?

## Learning

What is the per-student spending in this state or community? Are there resources for upskilling or reskilling if you need a career shift? Are there internship or work opportunities for your children? Do schools here prep children with career-readiness skills? Are there programs here that might help you become a more skilled remote worker or find a remote job? Are there good public universities that might make college more affordable for your kids? Will you be living in a larger work ecosystem, with career opportunities within a reasonable drive if you need or want them? Would you live in your college town?

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## Purpose

Can you identify ways you'd like to have an impact here? Does this place need you? Would you feel comfortable getting involved here? Are there ways for you to use your work skills in service of your community? What kinds of needs do you envision having now or in the future that your community could support you through? How do you envision establishing that community? How diverse is this new community? In what ways will you add to its diversity? How can you help create more equity where you live? Are there things here that you'd like to save or invest in? Can you thrive here economically? Can others?

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## Happiness

How will this place help you live your best life? Will you be able to keep your work in perspective? What would living here tell you about who you are and who you're trying to become? How will your place values show up here in positive ways? How will you find joy and perspective here? Rest? Positive experiences?





# Location Strategy Chart

By now, you should have a better sense of what you're actually looking for in a place and a life. You've analyzed your own values and translated those into a location strategy. Now, to turn your touchy-feely epiphanies into boots-on-the-ground decision-making, you can systematize what you've discovered.

Along the top of the grid, write your ten must-haves—place qualities you can't live without. Next, along the spreadsheet's y-axis, add ten candidate places—cities you're curious about, towns you love or heard you might.

Place an X in the box if the location has the given quality. Pay attention to the locations with the most Xs!


