

redevelopment ready
communities®

DEVELOPING A MARKETING PLAN

A tool for Michigan communities to establish the foundation
of an effective marketing strategy and plan

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Marketing is a key component to economic development success.

An effective marketing plan is as important as a community's economic development strategy. With a strong marketing plan, communities are better equipped to attract and retain talent, attract business investment and improve their image while building community pride. To be effective, communities should proactively engage with partners to ensure a streamlined approach to marketing their city, town or region.

A marketing plan is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Each community is unique and should use its existing resources to develop an effective and personalized marketing plan.

This guide will equip communities with the steps they can take to effectively promote themselves through the creation of a basic marketing plan. The guide provides direction for how communities may undertake a modest marketing effort, recognizing that such efforts can require far more time and resources, and are ongoing and evolving. Some communities may have the resources to use a marketing firm, but for those who don't, this guide is intended a starting point.

This guide assists communities in meeting Redevelopment Ready Communities® (RRC) Best Practice 5.2. To view the criteria in detail, see page 17 of the "RRC Best Practices Guide."

GLOSSARY

The following glossary of terms are provided to assist communities as they read through this how-to guide for developing a marketing plan. Please note: these terms are specific to this guide, and may or may not apply to other RRC guides or resources.

Champion: a person designated by the community to spearhead the development and implementation of the community's marketing plan.

Core messages: key messages a community wants its target audiences to hear and remember. Messages should align with the marketing strategies and distinctly address each target audience.

Goals: broad, tangible and descriptive statements of an outcome to be reached. Goals are focused on the end result and are usually associated with several measurable objectives.

Industry: a sector that produces related goods and/or services within an economy, i.e., automotive, health care, technology.

Marketing collateral: a collection of media items used to support the sale or promotion of products and/or services. This can include brochures, newspaper ads, websites, signage, etc.

Marketing plan: a comprehensive document that outlines a community's overall marketing effort.

Marketing strategies: an approach or method that explains how you will achieve your goals and objectives.

Objectives: actions that should be taken to accomplish a goal. They are specific, measurable over a period of time, actionable and realistic.

Partner: an individual or group that actively participates in the planning and/or implementation of the marketing plan.

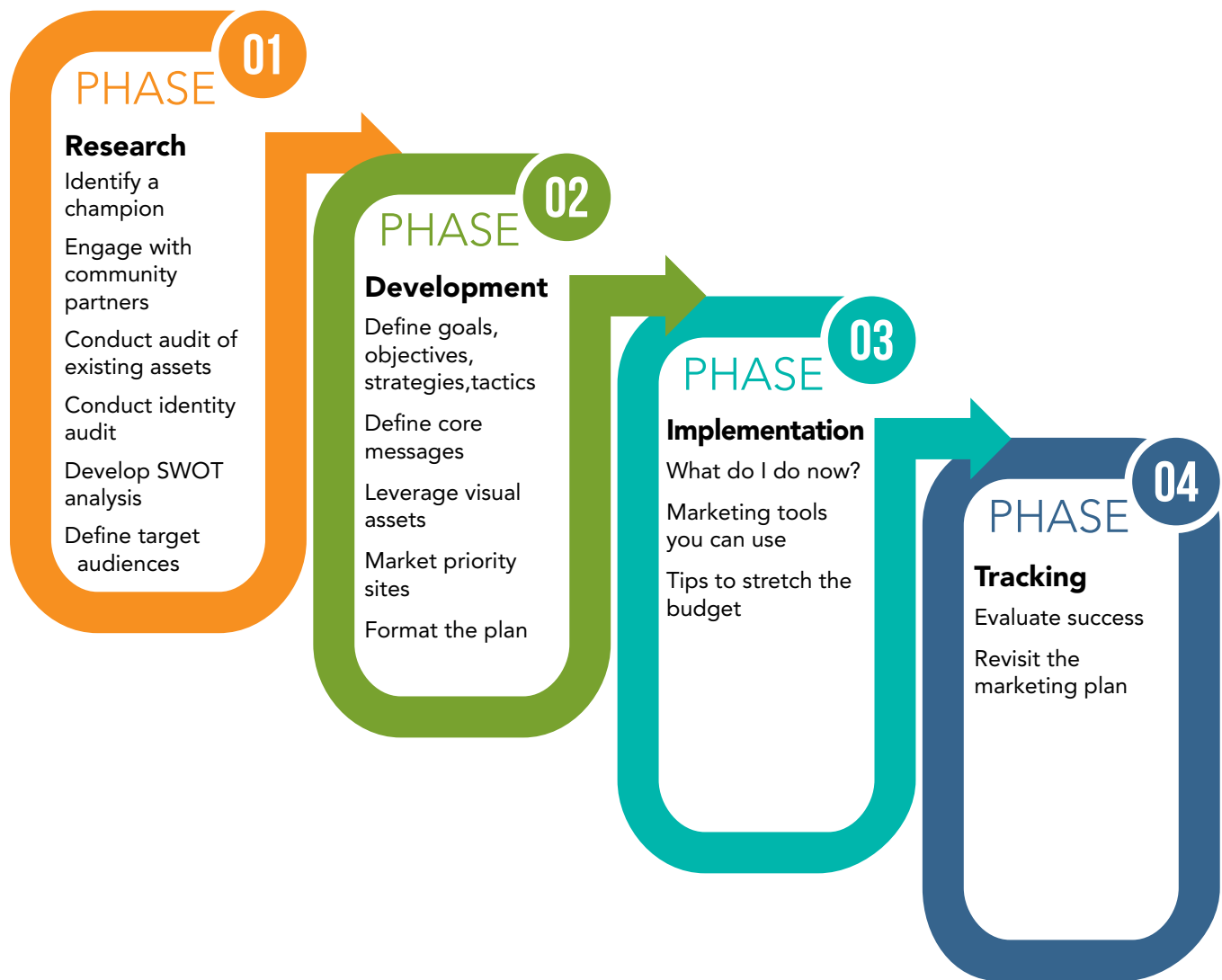
Stakeholder: an individual or group that has an interest in and/or may be impacted by the marketing plan but isn't necessarily involved in the development and implementation of the plan.

SWOT analysis: a tool for auditing an organization and its environment. It is the first stage of planning and helps marketers focus on key issues by identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Tactics: the actionable methods a community plans to implement for advertising, public relations, direct mail, trade shows and special promotions.

Target audience: a specific group of people a community wants to reach with a set of core messages.

ROADMAP TO DEVELOPING YOUR MARKETING PLAN



DEVELOPING YOUR MARKETING PLAN

A marketing plan defines deliberate steps to promote and offer information about community assets, attributes and economic opportunity. It demonstrates a community's intention regarding how it is perceived by its target audience and stakeholders. Rather than leaving things to chance, a marketing plan identifies steps to highlight

community attributes and opportunities with intention.

There are four phases associated with developing a marketing plan. These phases are intended to help provide structure and sequencing of efforts to help organize efforts.

PHASE 1: RESEARCH

STEP 1: Identify a champion

Identify a champion that is going to spearhead the development and implementation of the community's marketing plan. This person can be an employee of the municipality, board member, partner or volunteer. It will be important for the champion to manage the project from start to finish, including plan maintenance, while maintaining good relationships with partners and stakeholders and delegating tasks to ensure the work gets done.

STEP 2: Engage with community partners

A community should take the time to meet with local and regional partners and stakeholders to collect insight and feedback before starting the process of developing a marketing plan. It's important to have buy-in from both groups as communities begin developing their marketing plan. This will allow a community to understand how it is perceived prior to this effort.

Communities should also consider coordinating their marketing efforts with local, regional and state partners to effectively implement their marketing plan. Marketing should be a collaborative effort. Everything the community does at the local level to market itself, affects the region and the state.

STEP 3: Conduct audit of existing assets

Communities should begin their audit by taking an inventory of their existing physical and anecdotal assets, as well as marketing and partner resources.

Think about what assets make people want to visit, work, live in and explore the community. Consider utilizing existing resources when developing a marketing plan—these are the foundations of a community's marketing plan.

Physical assets

- Consider assets such as workforce, location, space, incentives, market, infrastructure, proximity to medical care, quality of life (i.e., natural resources, parks and recreation) and cost of doing business (i.e., cost of living, utility costs).
- Pull together existing community adopted plans, i.e., master plan, downtown plan, economic development strategy (EDS) to consider additional assets. Communities should refer to these plans to make sure their marketing efforts are in alignment with and support the various plan initiatives. Examples include strategic methods to attract businesses, residents, visitors and real estate developers to the community or to market priority sites.

Anecdotal assets

- Interview local, regional and state partners (real estate agents, local businesses, residents, convention and visitors bureau (CVB), chambers of commerce, counties, economic development organizations (EDO), downtown development authorities (DDA), neighborhood or industry associations) to identify what they believe makes the community great.

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PHASE 1: RESEARCH *continued*

- Talk to local businesses and find out why they choose to stay and what significant challenges they face. Use this opportunity to identify different industry types and opportunities to attract talent to the area.

Resources

- Review the community's existing marketing plan and all corresponding collateral, including all print and digital assets. Here are some questions to ask yourself:
 - » Do you have a social media presence? How responsive are you?
 - » What type of collateral have you produced?
 - » What other channels of communication do you use to communicate with your residents, businesses or other stakeholders?
- Evaluate metrics from the community's past marketing efforts to be used as a baseline for setting future marketing goals, i.e., website, marketing campaign, social media, advertising.
- Evaluate local organizations' marketing efforts, i.e., chamber of commerce, DDA and CVB. Determine how the community can align its marketing plan with existing ones from local partner organizations.
- Identify regional marketing plans. Determine what's worked in the past in other neighboring communities and partnering organizations. Does the community have assets that it can tout from a regional standpoint?

STEP 4: Conduct identity audit

Think about how the public identifies with the community. When people mention the community, what do they think of? Here are some questions to consider:

- How do residents perceive the community?

- How do visitors and neighboring communities perceive the community?
- Set the tone. What does the community want to be known for? How do residents want their community to be described?
- Do people have pride in their community? If so, what are the positives this is associated with? If not, where are there opportunities to improve?
- Does the community have existing branding?
 - » Is the branding consistent among assets? (Logo, colors, seal, typeface, voice, personality, etc.)
- Does the community have a logo or seal?
- What are the community's identifying colors?
- Does the community have existing brand

Tip: Now is a great opportunity to redefine your community's voice.

guidelines? If not: While developing a brand is not required for RRC certification, the community may wish to assess the feasibility of hiring an outside company to help them with their brand strategy. Here is an example of brand guidelines: *Pure Michigan Brand Guidelines*.

- How would you describe your community's voice? Casual, formal, quirky?
- Communities can easily identify their voice by reviewing existing marketing collateral, business letters, social media posts, website content, etc.

STEP 5: Develop SWOT analysis

SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. A SWOT analysis is an auditing tool to help communities focus on key issues as they develop their marketing plan. This analysis helps determine what strengths and weaknesses a community may have, as well as any opportunities for growth, and threats that could hinder progress. This exercise is a great way to get a snapshot of a community's current situation in a way that's helpful and manageable. The community's economic development SWOT should be used as a resource.

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PHASE 1: RESEARCH *continued*

Conduct competitive analysis

As a community develops its SWOT, it will be helpful to conduct a competitive analysis. Communities are becoming increasingly competitive, so it is important to consider what unique “selling” points other municipalities have that your community does not. A community will also want to consider regional assets — what your community shares with surrounding municipalities that you can tout on a regional level. A SWOT analysis can help determine a community’s selling points so partners can leverage these assets in their community’s marketing efforts from a tourist attraction, talent recruitment, priority site marketing, etc., standpoint.

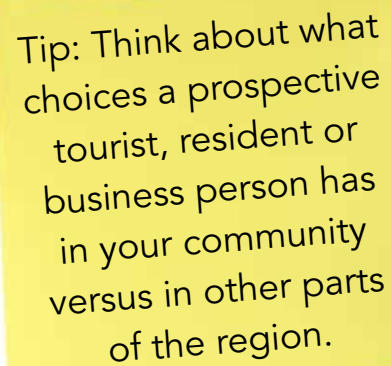
SWOT Example (this is only meant to generate ideas; it may/may not represent your community and is not intended to be a complete SWOT):

Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engaged residents• Sense of community pride• Businesses actively involved in creating sense of place	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inconsistent messaging across stakeholders• Lack of resources to drive a marketing strategy
Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Distinct assets have potential to draw businesses, visitors, future residents• Priority sites identified have potential to draw investors	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of diversity of businesses• No traditional downtown• Infrastructure issues

STEP 6: Define target audiences

Communities should review target audiences as defined in the master plan, downtown plan, economic development strategy and public participation plan. After reviewing, develop a list of target audiences with a description of the target audience that includes demographics, such as age, gender, occupation, education level or any other important characteristics.

Next, identify each target audience group’s goals, motivations and interests in the community and in general. By going through this exercise, a community can better identify what strategies they’ll use to reach each audience type and what the compelling core messages will be.



Tip: Think about what choices a prospective tourist, resident or business person has in your community versus in other parts of the region.

DEVELOPING YOUR MARKETING PLAN

PHASE II: DEVELOPMENT OF MARKETING PLAN

STEP 1: Define goals, objectives, strategies and tactics

The marketing plan that a community develops should be designed to align with the community's long-term foundational goals. For example, if a community wants a better reputation, more engagement, more transparency, etc., a plan should be developed with these goals in mind. The marketing plan should align with the master plan, economic development strategy, and the rest of the RRC Best Practice milestones the community is working to complete for the Redevelopment Ready Communities® certification. Communities may use any of their existing assets and resources to develop their plan.

- **Goals:** broad, tangible and descriptive statements of an outcome to be reached. Goals are focused on the end result and are usually associated with several measurable objectives. *Example: Position [COMMUNITY] as a food destination across the region and state.*
- **Objectives:** actions that should be taken to accomplish a goal. They are specific, measurable over a period of time, actionable and realistic. *Example: Increase the number of food-related small businesses to the downtown area by 20 percent in five years.*
- **Strategies:** an approach or method that explains how you will achieve your goals and objectives. *Example: Educate investors and developers on the benefits of locating a food-related business in [COMMUNITY].*
- **Tactics:** the actionable methods a community plans to implement for advertising, public relations, direct mail, trade shows and special promotions. (Take what you learned about your target audience in Phase 1 and apply it here. *Example: Develop educational materials including site profiles, video and fact sheet.*

Tip: Make sure to include goals that will attract businesses, developers and talent to the state.

STEP 2: Define core messages

A significant part of the marketing plan is the core messaging. Therefore, it will be important for a community to identify and develop its core messages and then solicit feedback from local partners, i.e., chamber of commerce, convention and visitor's bureau or economic development organization, where possible. After completing the audit under Phase I, the community should have a good idea of the types of messages its partners and stakeholders are using and can align its own core messages with these. Marketing efforts have greater impact when core messages are consistent from multiple sources.

A community should define core messages it'll consistently convey to its target audiences, i.e., business owners, entrepreneurs, residents, investors, developers and tourists. The core messages should align with the community's marketing goals and strategies. A community will want to customize core messages for the different target audience groups where appropriate.

Here's a sampling of core messages by possible target audiences related to the example listed in Step 1 above:

- **Entrepreneur/new business owner:** "As a local food and shopping destination in our region, [COMMUNITY] boasts a business-friendly environment by providing transparent and predictable permitting processes, access to local market data and trends and a robust entrepreneurial support system."
- **Developers/investors:** "The downtown is becoming the food destination in our region. [COMMUNITY] has a diversity of historic buildings and redevelopment ready properties to accommodate your food-related business. We'll help cut the red tape, so you don't have to."

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PHASE II: DEVELOPMENT OF MARKETING PLAN *cont.*

- **Tourists:** “Looking for unique food finds? We are serving up diverse fare, plus stay a while and shop at our distinctive retailers and see a show at one of our arts and cultural venues. Downtown [COMMUNITY] is your food destination.”
- **Residents:** “Come experience downtown again like it was the first time. [COMMUNITY] offers plenty for you and your family to do from unique restaurants and bars to arts and cultural events and an ever-expanding farmers market with local fare.”

STEP 3: Leverage your visual assets

Community image: A community’s image, or identity, defines what makes it unique, differentiating itself from its competition. Marketing efforts should include the consistent use of the image, which may include the logo, city seal, identifying colors, tag line, etc., to develop and maintain an appealing community identity.

Signage: Apart from use on the community’s website, letterhead, business cards, vehicles, etc., a community’s image can be used on identification signage for public buildings, banners, elevated water towers and gateway signage at major community entrances. Such steps can support many community goals, but it also reinforces a community’s presence and drives home the impression that a community is a unique place with opportunity and redevelopment readiness.

Photos: A picture can say a thousand words about a community and its assets. Photos can be low cost and an effective marketing tool. Consider developing a photo waiver when either taking photos or requesting photos from other individuals, businesses or organizations. Determine a common place to store all photos, waivers and photo credit information electronically for later use.

STEP 4: Determine how to market priority sites

Through the RRC program, the community has worked hard to streamline the development process, making sure efficient planning practices are put in place and a list of redevelopment ready sites has been developed. It is important to be consistent on developing a property information package and advertising priority sites.

- Have a web presence
 - » Have a dedicated web page to market priority sites. For example, “Doing business in [Community]”
 - » Website should have a point of contact for available sites in the community
- Develop a property information package
 - » Make sure the information provided is consistent for all sites. To view the criteria in detail, see page 19 of the “RRC Best Practices Guide”
- Tie in core messaging with target audiences. Make sure messaging is consistent and comprehensible to audiences
- Use the existing RRC *online resource library* to develop guidelines for formatting property information packages

STEP 5: Format the plan...putting it all together

Once all ideas are captured, it’s time to put the plan together. A marketing plan does not have to be professionally designed, it just needs to be easy to read and follow. The goal is to structure it in such a way that anyone can pick it up and use it to help market the community. For examples of marketing strategies from other RRC certified communities, visit RRC’s *online resource library*.

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PHASE III: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN

Now that the marketing plan has been developed and formatted, it's time to begin implementation: putting the marketing strategies and plans into action. There are ways to help make this step as successful as possible.

The implementation phase involves assignments addressing the who, where, when and how of reaching the goals and objectives of a community. Marketing implementation involves putting the marketing design, execution and scheduling into development. This phase requires the giving of specific tasks and timelines to individuals and groups.

In Phase 1: Step 1, the community was encouraged to identify a champion who will carry forward the marketing plan. This person/group should be responsible for communicating the necessary steps of the implementation process to the various partners involved and to get “buy in” from all parties.

MARKETING TOOLS YOU CAN USE

The following are marketing tools and communication channels that can be used as part of the marketing plan:

- Website
- Social media
- Newspapers
- Magazines
- Wayfinding signs
- Newsletters
- Flyers
- Events
- Community organizations
- Business associations

TIPS TO STRETCH THE BUDGET

When resources are limited, here are some tips to help stretch the budget. It will be important for a community to develop relationships and maintain an ongoing dialogue with existing stakeholders to help support its marketing efforts.

- **Tag along:** Identify opportunities to participate in local, regional and state partners' marketing efforts. Maintain an ongoing dialogue so when opportunities arise, you can jump at the chance to tag along.
- **Seek partnerships with local companies:** Identify opportunities to partner with businesses on advertising and other promotional efforts to increase community awareness.
- **Electronic marketing:** Share information efficiently and cost-effectively using the Internet—take advantage of opportunities to increase followers, shares, likes and tweets. Consistency in posting new and original content is key.
- **Media promotion:** Identify opportunities for free promotion. Ask a community partner or stakeholder to write an editorial for a local newspaper's op-ed section; reach out to a reporter with a story idea about a new business moving into downtown; or invite the local TV station to a big cultural event or ribbon cutting. Taking the time to build trusting relationships with the media is critical to getting the word out.
- **State partners:** Identify opportunities to work with state agencies, such as the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) or Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), to ask about wayfinding signs as a marketing tool.

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PHASE IV: TRACKING

Change is inevitable. As technology continues to evolve and new methods of public outreach are discovered or priorities change, it will be important for the community to adjust its marketing plan accordingly.

Ensure the community's champion or responsible party is keeping up with changes to the marketing plan document. Consider establishing a system for tracking and monitoring the plan at least annually to ensure goals and objectives are being met, and that it gets updated as needed.

STEP 1: Evaluate success

The community's champion or responsible party is not only responsible for ensuring the marketing plan gets implemented but also that progress toward all goals is monitored, and results are measured.

Here are some questions a community can ask itself when determining how it will evaluate its marketing success:

- What does success look like to your community?
- How do you plan to measure success?
 - » Survey
 - » Engagement
 - » Public meeting attendance
 - » Call volume tracking
 - » Earned media
 - » Advertising
 - » Shares or engagement on Facebook
 - » Event attendance
 - » Google analytics
- How will you share your success with your stakeholders?
 - » Social media
 - » Website
 - » Newspapers and broadcast opportunities
 - » Annual report information
 - » Announcements at governing body meetings

STEP 2: Revisit the marketing plan

A community should revisit its marketing plan at least once per year, as well as its other plans that will have been completed as part of the RRC Best Practices criteria. Consider the different parts of the plan, i.e., marketing collateral, logo, core messaging, etc., and the frequency at which these elements should be updated. Here are some questions to consider:

- Has your master plan or economic development strategy been updated?
- Have there been any updates to your logo, brand, voice, identify, etc.?
- Have there been any technology changes, i.e., website, social media platforms?
- Have you had a brand refresh?
- Has your community's vision changed?