



Elevating a Region on the Rise

A Marketing Blueprint to Attract Talent to Greater Cedar Rapids



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Executive Summary

Following a competitive RFP (Request For Proposal) process, the City of Cedar Rapids and its partners in the Greater Cedar Rapids Metro engaged Development Counsellors International (DCI), a leading place marketing agency, to develop a comprehensive marketing strategy to attract talent to the region. The first phase of what is envisioned to be a multi-phase, ongoing initiative, this report provides a robust data-driven research framework along with a tactical marketing strategy to ensure that Greater Cedar Rapids can meet the current and future needs of its businesses by continuing to grow the region's pipeline of working-age individuals.

The following Executive Summary recaps four months of focused work from November 1, 2023 to February 29, 2024.

Research & Discovery

To gain an in-depth understanding of existing perceptions of Greater Cedar Rapids, as well as the region's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, DCI conducted internal and external research that reached nearly 2,500 people in key target audiences. Through analysis of secondary data, DCI identified five "best bet" markets for Greater Cedar Rapids to recruit from and surveyed more than 300 people per market. DCI also surveyed in-market working-age individuals and out-of-state corporate executives and their advisors, and conducted six focus groups and an immersion tour in Greater Cedar Rapids. The research revealed that national awareness of the region's assets is lacking and foundational messaging is needed to educate both internal and external audiences about the benefits of living, working, and doing business in Greater Cedar Rapids.

Marketing Blueprint

Following an in-depth research and discovery phase, DCI developed the Marketing Blueprint, which is intended to guide all aspects of the talent attraction and retention campaign over the first three years. It includes:

- **Marketing Strategy Goals & Audiences:**
The Marketing Blueprint outlines two overarching goals and five key audiences, encompassing both internal and external talent and stakeholders. The goals are to elevate perceptions of Greater Cedar Rapids as a place to live, work and make an impact among working-age talent in target markets; and to promote a unified regional identity for Greater Cedar Rapids among key talent audiences, both internal and external, to ultimately attract and retain talent. The marketing tactic recommendations were designed with these goals and audiences in mind.
- **Marketing Tactic Recommendations:**
In order to achieve the outlined goals and utilize the foundational messaging to target the recommended key audiences, DCI recommends 10 primary marketing tactics and four big ideas for Greater Cedar Rapids to implement. Tactics span both internal and external and range from organizational structure recommendations to creating a brand and website and launching organic social media and digital advertising campaigns. Each tactic includes specific recommendations and best practices, including case studies from other regional talent campaigns, to inform the implementation of the marketing plan.
- **SWOT Analysis and Brand Foundation:**
Leveraging the internal and external research, DCI developed a SWOT analysis and foundational brand messaging that can be used to market the region as a whole to talent. The messaging focuses on positioning the region as affordable, safe and ripe with job opportunities. DCI also recommends referring to the region as Greater Cedar Rapids in all messaging and marketing, building on the greater name recognition of the region's largest city.

Executive Summary (cont.)

Implementation Guidelines

The marketing blueprint is designed to be implemented immediately. With that in mind, DCI outlines:

- **Timeline:** A three-year timeline, with annual goals for each proposed tactic.
- **Budget:** A three-year budget with “adequate” and “optimal” levels for each year, ranging from around \$500K to \$1.3M per year.
- **Key Performance Indicators:** Four overarching KPIs to measure the success of this initiative, with supporting metrics and benchmarks to track the marketing campaign specifically. At a high level, the goals are to:
 1. Generate Interest in Greater Cedar Rapids as a Place to Live and Work
 2. Connect Talent with Greater Cedar Rapids Employers
 3. Improve Perceptions of Greater Cedar Rapids
 4. Maintain Working-Age Population Growth

On behalf of the DCI team, we would like to thank the entire Greater Cedar Rapids region and its stakeholders for collaborating with us on this important project. The project results would not have been possible without the direction and support from City of Cedar Rapids, Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance, City of Marion, Marion Economic Development Corporation, City of Hiawatha and Hiawatha Economic Development Corporation, and their stakeholders and partners. Thank you!

Research & Discovery

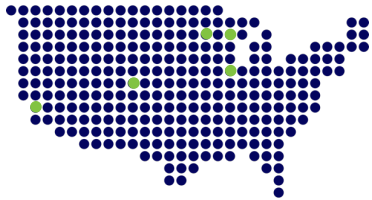
DCI firmly believes that all good marketing is rooted in research. With that in mind, we engaged in extensive research, both internal and external, over the course of two and a half months at the outset of this project. In total, we reached nearly 2,500 individuals. A high-level, visual summary of the research conducted is included on the next two pages, followed by a written summary. For a full summary of research results, please refer to Appendices A and B.

Research Summary At A Glance

Greater Cedar Rapids is largely a blank slate to external audiences which will allow internal stakeholders to control the messaging and narrative on strengths of and opportunities in the region.

Recommended Target Audience

The following were identified as “best bet” talent target markets for Greater Cedar Rapids, based on an analysis of key secondary data sources.



Wisconsin	Statewide
Illinois	Chicago - Naperville - Elgin
Minnesota	Minneapolis - St. Paul - Bloomington
Colorado	Denver - Aurora - Lakewood
California	LA - Long Beach - Southern California

Key Industries

Internal and external talent, as well as external executives and site selectors, associate the following industries with Greater Cedar Rapids.



Manufacturing

All talent surveys revealed manufacturing as the top association for Greater Cedar Rapids.



Food Sciences & Processing

82% of site selectors and 32% of external talent associate Greater Cedar Rapids with Food Sciences and Processing.



Logistics & Distribution

Logistics and distribution skillsets are in high demand according to local stakeholders.



Office Functions

30-40% of internal and external talent associate office functions including HQ with the region.



Life Sciences

20% of external talent and 7% of internal talent associate Life Sciences with Greater Cedar Rapids.

Corporate executives and site selectors cited **“limited talent pool and pipeline, particularly diverse”** as a top concern about Greater Cedar Rapids.



Of external talent could not identify where Greater Cedar Rapids is located on a map.

21%

Of external talent are unfamiliar with Greater Cedar Rapids as a place to work or have no association.

Top Career Factors

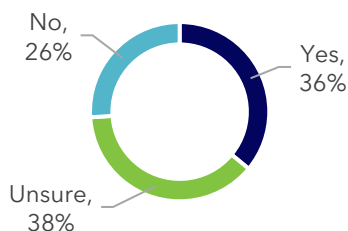
The following career/professional development factors were identified as most important to external talent when evaluating a relocation.

- 1 Salary and benefits
- 2 Job opportunities that match skillset
- 3 Work-life balance
- 4 Alternative job & advancement opportunities
- 5 Job opportunities for partner/spouse

Willingness to Relocate

36%

of external talent would consider relocating to Greater Cedar Rapids if offered a job that matched their skill and salary requirements.



The most helpful relocation tools include **first-hand experience**, **industry connections**, and **relocation information**.

55%

of those willing to relocate are familiar with Greater Cedar Rapids, underscoring the importance of visitation and friends and family connections.

Most Important Lifestyle Factors

Messaging should address the following top lifestyle factors considered in relocation decisions and how Greater Cedar Rapids can solve these pain points.



Cost of Living & Housing



Safety & Security



Housing Availability



Quality of Healthcare



Welcoming Population

25%



of internal talent are not planning or are unsure if they will stay in Greater Cedar Rapids after the next three to five years.



Entry Level

Mid-Level

Senior/Executive

66%

Of internal talent are interested in formal training to upgrade or shift their career path.

Safe

Family-friendly

Affordable

One person's **stagnant** is another person's **stability**.

Greater Cedar Rapids should leverage perceptions of a safe and affordable location despite being seen as relatively "average".

Target Market Identification

To ensure talent attraction efforts are focused on the right locations and to provide the greatest return on investment in your marketing efforts, DCI began the research phase by identifying “best bet” regions, metro areas or states where Greater Cedar Rapids will have the greatest success from which to recruit talent.

This research took into account multiple factors, including: strong patterns of past in- and out-migration; alumni concentrations; occupational concentrations in target sectors; targeted age groups and other demographic factors; top visitor markets; and competitive advantages on select livability and career-related factors.

By analyzing these and other factors, DCI created an index to prioritize the recommended regions. Ultimately, the following markets were identified:

- Wisconsin (Statewide)
- Illinois (Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI)
- Minnesota (Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI)
- Colorado (Denver-Aurora-Lakewood, CO)
- California (Southern California/Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA CSA)

To review the full analysis, please refer to Appendix A.

Perception Studies

To understand current perceptions of Greater Cedar Rapids among internal and external talent, as well as corporate executives and site selection consultants, DCI conducted three perception studies.

Internal Talent Perceptions

To understand the strengths, challenges, and opportunities that Greater Cedar Rapids faces from an internal perspective, DCI surveyed 745 working-age individuals from the region. The survey was distributed to working talent with the help of regional partners, including entities throughout Cedar Rapids, Marion and Hiawatha, and to current students via Kirkwood Community College.

In summary, there is an opportunity to enhance internal perceptions as ratings on the factors most important to relocating talent are only moderately positive.

- In-region talent views Greater Cedar Rapids as a good place to raise a family and live. However, the region is perceived less favorably as a place to work, advance one’s career or visit.
- Greater Cedar Rapids is viewed as a “safe” area – both from a personal safety perspective and as an area that offers stability, but is relatively “bland.” It is perceived as a welcoming community with access to quality healthcare and post-secondary educational offerings. It is also perceived as offering good initial job opportunities.
- Internal talent is not confident that alternative opportunities to grow professionally are available in Greater Cedar Rapids, which could cause them to consider relocation.
- While Greater Cedar Rapids is viewed as accepting and inclusive, there is also concern of a “trickle-down” impact from state policies that could impact the ability to attract and retain a diverse workforce.



Internal Talent Perceptions (cont.)

Overall, there is a good foundation to build on, but more messaging and engagement with internal talent is needed. To use an analogy from business, keeping an existing client is more cost- and time-effective than gaining a new one; the same is true with your existing talent pool, underscoring the importance of talent retention efforts. For a full summary of the internal talent perception survey findings, please refer to pages 26-40 of Appendix B.

External Talent Perceptions

To understand current perceptions of Greater Cedar Rapids as a place to live and work from an external perspective, DCI surveyed 1,509 working-age individuals in the five markets identified through the Target Market Identification exercise. In total, we reached more than 300 qualified respondents per market in Wisconsin; Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI; Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI; Denver-Aurora-Lakewood, CO; and Southern California/Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA CSA.

In summary, Greater Cedar Rapids is largely a blank slate to external audiences, which will allow internal stakeholders to control the messaging and narrative on strengths of and opportunities in the region.

- Widespread foundational messaging is needed to educate external audiences on select livability and career-related factors.
- Talent prioritizes very practical factors, including housing availability and cost, cost of living, jobs and salaries. Interest is high in messaging on how locations can address talent's "pain points."
- One person's stagnant is another person's stability. Greater Cedar Rapids should leverage perceptions of a safe and affordable location, despite being seen as relatively "average." However, less associated personality traits include "progressive," "inclusive," or "innovative," which could limit the ability to attract and retain diverse talent.

“

Greater Cedar Rapids is largely **a blank slate** to external audiences. This allows internal stakeholders to control the narrative of the region's strengths and opportunities.”

External Talent Study

Importance of Lifestyle & Career Factors

Top Lifestyle Factors

1. Cost of Living
2. Housing Cost
3. Safety/Security
4. Housing Availability
5. Quality of Healthcare/Hospitals
6. Welcoming/Friendly Population

Top Career Factors

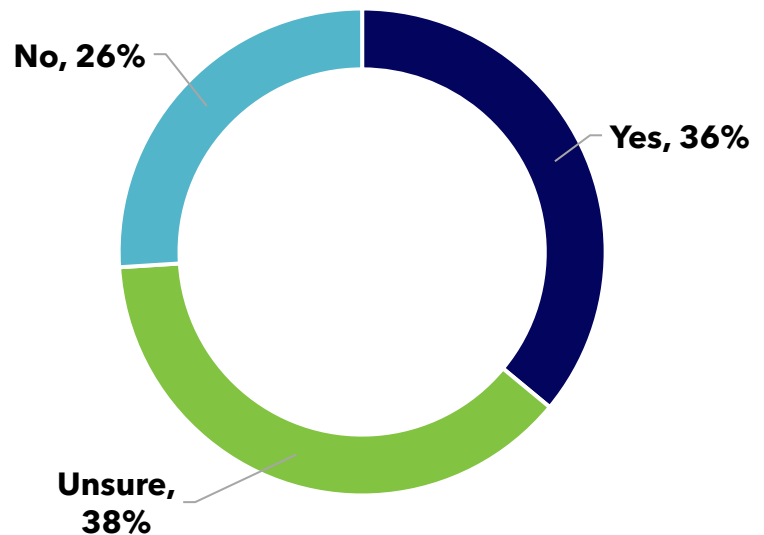
1. Salary and benefits offered in the area
2. A job opportunity that matches skillset
3. Culture of good work-life balance
4. Alternative job/advancement opportunities for self in industry
5. Job opportunities for spouse/partner

External Talent Study

Willingness to Relocate to Greater Cedar Rapids

Among external respondents, 36% would be willing to relocate to the Greater Cedar Rapids area if offered a job that matched their skill and salary requirements, while 26% would not be willing and 38% are unsure. Among those who would be willing to relocate to the region, 55% are familiar with Greater Cedar Rapids, underscoring the importance of first-hand experience and friends and family connections when it comes to forming perceptions of a location. Respondents willing to relocate are characterized as follows:

- **86%** are currently employed full/part-time
- **65%** live with a spouse/partner and/or children
- **43%** have a Bachelor's degree or higher
- **62%** have household income of \$75k+
- Perceptions are strongly influenced by first-hand experience, general internet research and friends/family in or near the area.
- For job and career information, postings on job boards, company websites and employment/staffing agencies are relied on.
- Most helpful relocation tools include visiting the location for first-hand experience, ability to talk to someone in the industry currently living/working there and relocation packages/information about living and working there.



For a full summary of the external talent perception survey findings, please refer to pages 42-60 of Appendix B.

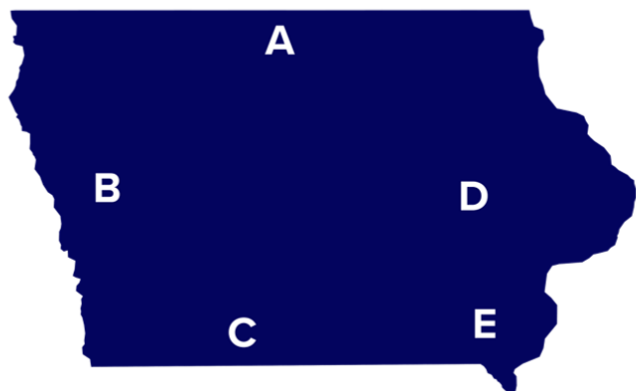
Corporate Executive & Site Selection Consultant Perceptions

DCI also conducted a survey to determine the perceptions of corporate executives and their advisors about Greater Cedar Rapids as a place to do business. Notably, the strength of the local workforce is the leading factor in corporate location decisions, underscoring the importance of a concerted talent attraction and retention effort as part of the goal to continue to attract investment and jobs to the region. In total, we reached 117 respondents, including 50 out-of-state corporate executives and 67 U.S.-based site selection consultants.

In summary, perceptions of the region's business climate are moderate among executives and their advisors, driven largely by a lack of confidence in the ability to recruit and attract a diverse talent pool.

- The rating of the region's business climate is moderate and falls below the perceptions of other key competitor locations. Concerns around accessibility and, by extension, proximity to customers and suppliers, the depth of the talent pool and the overall size of the market are cited as potential challenges.
- Perceived strengths include cost-related factors (i.e., cost of living, cost of labor, overall operating costs), the depth of the manufacturing industry and the state's regulatory and tax climate.
- There is a negative differential between the importance of select "must-have" factors and how Greater Cedar Rapids rates on these factors:
 - Incentive policies
 - Location/accessibility
 - Ability to attract diverse and skilled talent (a concern shared by internal talent).
- Advisors estimate that 75% of "agnostic" projects will locate in the Southeast/Sunbelt region. Locations that are more "top-of-mind" are located in these U.S. regions primarily because they are doing strong job of addressing executive pain points.

Awareness of Cedar Rapids' Location



Corporate Executives: 40%



Site Selection Consultants: 65%

For a full summary of the corporate executive and site selection consultant survey findings, please refer to pages 62-72 of Appendix B.

Immersion Tour & Focus Groups

To gain an understanding of the region's assets and challenges first-hand, DCI conducted an immersion tour in Greater Cedar Rapids over the course of November 7-9, 2023. As part of the immersion tour, we participated in three community tours – of Cedar Rapids, Marion and Hiawatha – and conducted six focus groups, reaching 110+ local employers, HR professionals, community stakeholders, young professionals and transplants.

To summarize stakeholders' view of the region's image:

- Sentiment on the Greater Cedar Rapids area's current image as a place to live is largely positive/neutral. The brand voice is described as welcoming, humble, approachable and warm. Stakeholders emphasize connectivity, resiliency and unique community offerings as assets in attracting talent.
- Sentiment on the Greater Cedar Rapids area's current image as a place to work is largely positive/neutral, skewing slightly more positive than as a place to live. Industry associations lean traditional, with food processing/agriculture as the highest associated industry, followed by manufacturing.
- While many themes emerged across all groups, we observed a difference in responses between Major Employers and Young Professionals, two key audiences for this initiative. Overall, Major Employers rate the region's image as a place to live and work as more positive than Young Professionals.
- Focus group participants describe the region as safe, family-friendly and affordable, noting that cost of living and K-12 education are the region's greatest assets to attracting talent, while reputation/image and diverse and inclusive culture are the greatest challenges. This was consistent across all groups.

Importantly, we also assessed what stakeholders would like to see come out of this initiative and future phases. In summary:

- Considering the target audience for a talent attraction campaign, a "perfect fit" for the Greater Cedar Rapids area is someone who is family-oriented, values hard work, but also fun and balance, and wants to be a catalyst for change. Active families and community-minded late 20's/early 30s individuals would thrive in the region, according to stakeholders.
- The skillsets in highest demand largely fall within the manufacturing and logistics sectors (engineers, skilled trades, CDL drivers), but also include healthcare workers and police officers.
- As a result of this initiative, stakeholders would like to see a unified voice and message for the entire region, a results-oriented strategy with specific goals to attract and retain talent, and ultimately the tools to do so (video, website, marketing collateral).
- Leadership of this initiative are looking for an actionable strategy that generates positive sentiment among internal and external talent and ultimately fosters a larger and more diverse workforce.

For a full summary of focus group findings, please refer to pages 5-22 of Appendix B.

“

We need to find the right strategy to **market the 'real'** and not try to sell something that isn't reality.”

–Focus Group Participant

Marketing Blueprint

Leveraging findings from the robust Research & Discovery phase, DCI developed the following SWOT Analysis, Brand Foundation & Messaging, Marketing Strategy Goals & Audiences and Marketing Tactics to guide the implementation of a talent attraction and retention campaign for Greater Cedar Rapids.

SWOT Analysis

Synthesizing existing and new primary research, as well as on-the-ground findings from our immersion tour and focus groups, DCI developed a succinct top-line analysis of the region's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT).

STRENGTHS

- Cost of living
- Diverse housing options
- Service-oriented/community pride
- Family friendly
- Short commute time/Walkability
- Culture of work-life balance
- Public school system
- Home ownership prospects
- Safety and stability

WEAKNESSES

- External perception and name recognition
- Lack of unified message
- Depth and breadth of job opportunities for all skills and levels
- Perception of lack of nightlife/attractions for young adults

OPPORTUNITIES

- Current and future development
- Publicizing the strength of healthcare systems
- Embracing talent without 4-year degrees
- Earn-while-you-learn programs
- Ability to make an impact/serve on boards
- Community resiliency

THREATS

- "Friendly but not welcoming"
- Trickle-down perceptions from state
- Family-friendly to a fault
- Retention of young professionals
- Retaining talent past 3 years
- Highly competitive environment for talent attraction and retention

Brand Foundation & Messaging

The Brand Foundation & Messaging is intended to serve as a guide for all future marketing efforts and can be used by partners in the region as part of the implementation of this strategy. Specifically, the following positioning should serve as the foundation for the development of a creative campaign to market the region to talent.

Naming the Region

While the next phase of this effort will focus on the development of a campaign to market the region, the region must first align upon a unified place identity with which to market itself to external talent. In other words, what should we call this region encompassing Cedar Rapids, Marion, Hiawatha and the broader metro area?

We are major proponents of smart, regional marketing and we commend you for coming together as three communities to position yourselves as a larger, cohesive region to talent. Our recommendation is to keep it simple and clear, while leveraging the existing name recognition of the region's largest city, rather than trying to create a brand identity from scratch. Considering the need for foundational awareness-building uncovered in the research, it needs to be clear to talent where this region is that we are talking about.

In all messaging and marketing, we recommend referring to the region as: **Greater Cedar Rapids.**

Greater Cedar Rapids
Iowa | USA

Greater Cedar Rapids
Cedar Rapids, Marion, Hiawatha | Iowa | USA

As part of the development of the campaign's visual identity, we recommend somehow incorporating "Iowa" to ensure that it's clear what state we're talking about - whether that be with the word itself or in visual representation. Depending on the use case, it may be appropriate to also incorporate the names of the three communities for additional context - but the most important thing is to maintain consistency with referring to the region as "Greater Cedar Rapids."

In all messaging and marketing, we
recommend referring to the region as
Greater Cedar Rapids.

Brand Elements

Greater Cedar Rapids' Brand Voice, Brand Promise and Value Proposition articulate the value or experience that your "customers" - in this case, talent - can expect every single time they interact with your brand, and the tone with which you communicate it. These foundational brand elements won't necessarily be seen by external audiences verbatim, but instead will serve as an internal guide for all messaging and marketing materials.

Brand Voice

When Greater Cedar Rapids talks, it sounds...



Brand Promise

Greater Cedar Rapids promises a region where Midwest charm meets meaningful careers, family-friendly amenities, affordable living, short commute times, and, more importantly, **the time to really enjoy them all.**

Value Proposition

Greater Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Rapidly Rising

At the heart of the Midwest is one of the fastest-growing midsized communities in the nation - Greater Cedar Rapids. Home to three vibrant cities - Cedar Rapids, Marion and Hiawatha - and conveniently situated between six major Midwestern cities, Greater Cedar Rapids is fast becoming a destination for those looking for an ideal balance of small-town charm, first-class amenities and space to grow. The second largest metro in Iowa, the region is home to nearly 48,000 well-paying jobs across the manufacturing, food sciences and processing, logistics and distribution, tech and finance and insurance industries. Paired with a cost of living 18.2% below the national average, you'll get more value for your dollar, no matter how you crunch the numbers. For rising career professionals, families, entrepreneurs and business leaders, our doors are wide open. Come see for yourself.

Key Messages

Greater Cedar Rapids' Key Messages are your elevator speeches. They serve as the "top reasons" why the area is a unique and ideal location to live and work and are meant to quickly capture the attention of your target audiences in situations where time or space is limited, such as meetings, presentations and marketing materials. All text in the key messages can be used verbally or in written materials. Importantly, these key messages serve to establish top-of-funnel awareness of Greater Cedar Rapids that will inspire talent to dig deeper into the specifics of the region, its communities and its assets.

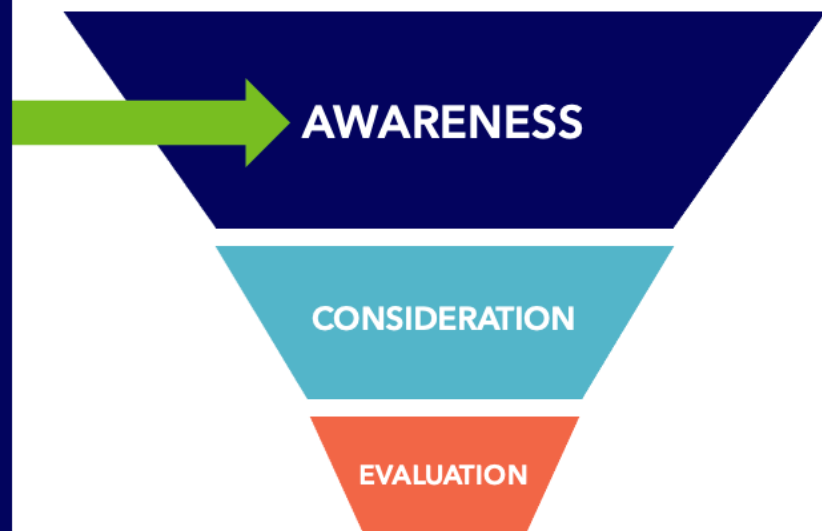
Three Cities. Five Seasons.

In Greater Cedar Rapids, we experience all four seasons and even a fifth – the time to enjoy them all. We were named one of the top 100 places to live by [Livability](#). Now, it could be because of our more than [4,000 acres](#) of green space, or that we're home to miles of hiking and biking trails that connect us to neighboring communities, or our mural and public art-lined streets, but we think it's our small-town feel with big city access that makes us a great place to be. As the second-largest metro in Iowa, our days don't stop after our 9-5s. Instead, you can find our residents enjoying local music and craft cocktails at Ideal Theater and Bar in Czech Village, meeting friends to catch a Hawkeye's game over craving-satisfying eats at The Lucky Penny, trying their hand at standup comedy at the Giving Tree Theater, or shopping for fresh produce at our Market After Dark in NewBo. With so many choices, the most challenging thing about living here is choosing how to spend your newly-earned free time.

Homeownership Within Reach

In Greater Cedar Rapids, buying a home isn't a myth of the American dream – it's a reality for more than [64.8% of our population](#), well above the national average. With [median home prices at \\$184,900](#) and communities regularly ranked as some of the most affordable in the nation, your hard-earned dollars can go towards your dream home, whether that's a converted loft apartment in NewBo, a new construction-craftsman home with acreage in Hiawatha or a restored Victorian steps from Marion's main street. And our options just keep growing, with 750+ new housing units already in the works. Not ready to take the plunge into homeownership? No problem. We were named the No. 14 best place to rent in America by [WalletHub](#). New rental properties are under construction and opening across the area, with the median monthly rent for two-bedroom apartments being [less than \\$1,000](#).

The goal of our key messages is to get people at the **top of the funnel**



Don't Just Make a Living - Make a Life

Here in Greater Cedar Rapids, you won't just climb the career ladder; you'll have the ability to make an impact in your industry and the time to cultivate a meaningful life outside of work. Whether you're seasoned in your field or just getting started, you'll have more access to build your resume than you would in a larger market, with more opportunities to serve on boards and get involved in the local business community. Greater Cedar Rapids is home to one of the best job markets in the nation, according to [SmartAsset](#), thanks to global leaders like BAE, Collins Aerospace, Transamerica, Freund-Vector and General Mills. Here, a career in mechanics means spending your days repairing airplane landing gears that keep air travel moving and safe, and a job in food science means nourishing the nation with household staples like Quaker Oatmeal. With nearly [48,000](#) well-paying jobs across manufacturing, food sciences and processing, logistics and distribution, tech and finance, and insurance, we're a diverse and stable place to advance your career. But don't just take it from us, we were rated the No. 2 most recession-resistant city nationwide by [SmartAsset](#).

Where Families Breathe Easier

Your kids grow up within the blink of an eye. Why spend that precious time stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic or behind a screen when you could make memories to last a lifetime instead? Recently ranked the [No. 23 best place to raise a family in the nation](#) and the [No. 23 safest city in the U.S.](#) by WalletHub, Greater Cedar Rapids is home to a variety of affordable education options to meet your child's needs and more than 20 higher education institutions within 100 miles of the region. When your kids aren't busy securing a top-notch education, they can enjoy our more than 70 parks, take in some history and culture at the Paramount Theatre or National Czech & Slovak Museum or make friends through our more than [1,500 recreational programs](#). You can breathe easier here, and we mean that literally. Forbes Health recently ranked us as the No. 4 city with the best air quality in the nation. So, you can breathe a sigh of relief knowing that your kids are safe, sound, and set up for success.

Advance and Upskill While You Earn

In Greater Cedar Rapids, you can shift or launch a meaningful career without years of experience on your resume. Our companies actively invest in your future by partnering with regional educational institutions to provide accelerated pathways and on-the-job training at little or no expense. Kirkwood Community College's hospitality management program provides students with the opportunity for side-by-side learning with industry professionals at the Hotel at Kirkwood Center, the only luxury teaching hotel in the country. Looking to break into the healthcare field? Mercy Medical Center, one of the state's top-rated hospital systems, partners with Coe College to provide financial assistance, part-time jobs, and a guaranteed full-time registered nurse position post-graduation.



For the Community by the Community

We make things here – and we don’t just mean autonomous solutions that advance the manufacturing industry or our beloved Cap’n Crunch Crunch Berries. Greater Cedar Rapids is home to hardworking neighbors who show up for each other and visionary leadership passionate about making our home a better place to live and thrive. When residents expressed interest in elevating the downtown events scene, the region banded together to craft plans for a \$3.8 million investment to rebuild the Czech Village Roundhouse, a historic theater in the heart of Cedar Rapids. That’s just one example of the many ways we work together to make life here even better. When inspiration strikes, we have the big city amenities paired with a close-knit community that will help you bring it to life.

Welcome Is Our Language

In Greater Cedar Rapids, our strengths are in what makes us different, and no matter how you identify, we’re sure you’ll find your community here. In fact, Cedar Rapids received a perfect 100 score on the municipal equality index released by the [Human Rights Commission](#), which rates cities for inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community. More than 70 languages are spoken at our public schools, and we offer free English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at Kirkwood Community College. The region is also home to the African American Museum of Iowa, the only statewide museum focused on preserving and promoting African American history and culture. We celebrate our diversity year-round through events such as AsianFest, which elevates our Asian community and celebrates our rich Asian culture, the Intercultural Festival which celebrates the culture of more than 30 countries present in the region, and the Houby Days Festival, which celebrates the Czech tradition of mushroom gathering and our roots as a hub for Czech immigrants.

A Home for Healthcare Excellence

In Greater Cedar Rapids, high-quality healthcare is never more than a short drive away. The region is home to MedQuarter, an award-winning medical district in the heart of Cedar Rapids. The facility is home to UnityPoint Health – St. Luke’s Hospital, named one of the [world’s best hospitals](#) by Newsweek and Mercy Medical Center, [a top 50 cardiovascular hospital](#) – both providing access to emergency care through the addition of new urgent care facilities in Hiawatha and Marion. Looking to start a family? St. Luke’s Women’s and Children’s Center is the first center in the nation to receive the [award for outstanding family-centered maternity care](#). Our central location also puts you within a 30-minute drive to the University of Iowa’s Stead Family Children’s Hospital, the state’s No. 1 Children’s hospital. No matter what you’re searching for, our more than 500 skilled medical professionals are here to get you the care you deserve.



Marketing Strategy Goals & Audiences

Informed by extensive interviews with stakeholders and an in-depth knowledge of the national talent attraction landscape in the U.S., DCI recommends the following overarching goals and target audiences for this strategy. The subsequent tactics and implementation guidelines outlined herein are designed with these goals and audiences in mind.

Overarching Goals

- Elevate perceptions of Greater Cedar Rapids as a place to live, work and make an impact among working-age talent in target markets.
- Promote a unified regional identity for Greater Cedar Rapids among key talent audiences, both internal and external, to ultimately attract and retain talent.

Target Audiences

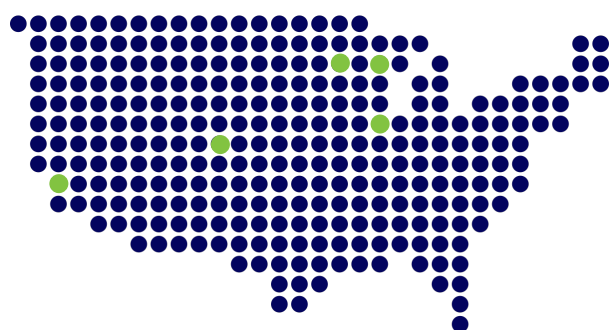
External:

- Working-age individuals in target markets in manufacturing, food sciences and processing, logistics and distribution, tech and finance, and insurance industries.
- Potential boomerangs - working-age individuals and families with existing ties to Greater Cedar Rapids.

Internal:

- Graduating high school, college and certificate students at regional education institutions.
- Existing talent, with a focus on ages 21-44.
- Local employers and stakeholders across workforce, education, economic development, tourism and community development.

External Target Markets



Wisconsin

Statewide

Illinois

Chicago - Naperville - Elgin

Minnesota

Minneapolis - St. Paul - Bloomington

Colorado

Denver - Aurora - Lakewood

California

LA - Long Beach - Southern California



Marketing Tactics

In order to launch a regional talent attraction and retention initiative for Greater Cedar Rapids, we recommend the following internal and external marketing tactics and best practices.

Internal Tactics

Any successful place-marketing campaign must first start by gaining buy-in and adoption from its own stakeholders and engaging its residents and businesses. Existing talent, students and stakeholders, across workforce, education, economic development, tourism and community development, are key audiences for this initiative, so it will be important to engage them from the outset. Following are our recommendations for internal tactics to support the development and launch of an external campaign.

Organizational Structure Best Practices

In order to ensure that this campaign will be not only focused and strategic but also long-lasting and effective, it will be important to determine which organization will spearhead these efforts. While continued regional collaboration is key, one organization must “drive the ship,” so to speak, when it comes to managing the budget, staff resources and the overarching strategy and outcomes. While many different types of entities can lead successful talent campaigns, we have found through our work with dozens of entities that regional public-private partnerships are very well suited to lead regional talent efforts. Consider the following points:

- **Regional Perspective:** A regional organization is best positioned to market the best of the region to external talent, while still representing the best interests of all within the region. Lack of consensus is a sure way to stop a campaign in its tracks, so it's important to designate a strong final decision-maker. The leading entity must be prepared to do what's best for the audiences of the campaign, while managing expectations internally.
- **Funding Sources:** The ability to leverage both public and private funding will allow for maximum impact with the talent campaign. In particular, local major employers, who already spend on marketing to recruit talent, are likely to be motivated to invest in a cohesive effort that will increase their pipeline externally and, ultimately, the pool of skilled talent to draw from within the region.

Organizational Structure Best Practices (cont.)

- **Agility & Sustainability:** Non-partisan economic development and/or chamber organizations are well-positioned to lead a sustained campaign. They have the benefit of being tapped into the business community, allowing them to better serve the talent needs of employers, while also maintaining the agility necessary to continually manage the program and pivot as necessary, without cumbersome procedures or restrictions. Talent attraction does not happen overnight, so it's important that this is a sustained effort that does not die out as individual city priorities shift.
- **Staffing:** It is our strong recommendation that the leading entity hire for or designate a senior staff person to serve as Talent Director, not only to oversee the marketing, but also to manage the leads that come in through the campaign, serving as a connector between interested talent and employers, realtors, schools and other key partners. In an ideal world, this would be a full-time job, but many organizations pair this role with overall marketing or strategic projects depending upon their needs and the skillsets of the individual.

Case Studies

- The [Upstate SC Alliance](#), a public/private regional economic development organization representing 10 counties in northwest South Carolina, leads the [MoveUpstateSC](#) campaign together with regional partners known as #TeamUpstate. The Alliance designated a full-time Talent & Strategic Projects Manager to oversee the campaign and serve as Chief Talent Ambassador for talent interested in locating in the region.
- [Hello West Michigan](#) was formed when a peer group convened by [The Right Place](#) in Grand Rapids, MI realized they were all experiencing a talent challenge. One of the first organizations of its kind in the country, Hello West Michigan is a non-profit, employer driven organization with two full-time staff that markets West Michigan to talent.
- [More in the Core](#) is a regional talent initiative of the Piedmont Triad Partnership (PTP) and its partners across Greensboro, High Point and Winston-Salem, NC. Spearheaded by PTP with input and funding provided in part by its partners, the initiative markets the "NC Carolina Core," a 120+ mile stretch of central North Carolina, to external talent.
- [The Cleveland Talent Alliance](#) is a consortium of public, private and nonprofit organizations dedicated to growing Cleveland's talent pipeline. The Alliance's Director is housed out of Destination Cleveland, the region's destination marketing organization. Through a workshop, it was determined that the DMO is best suited to market the region to talent, while its 12 partners across city, region and state economic development, chamber and young professional organizations provide the necessary connection to the business community and other key talent resources.

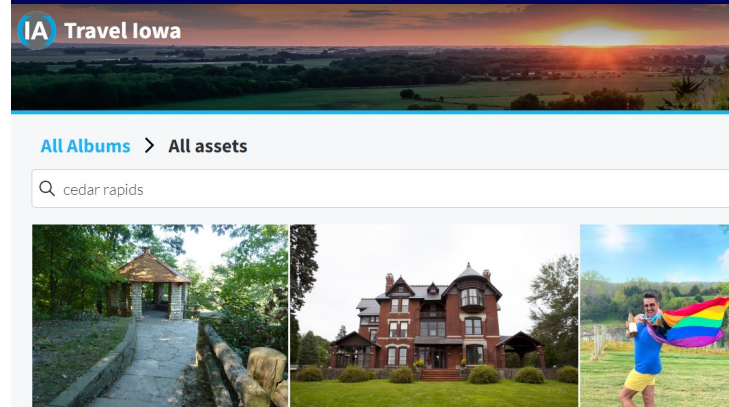
Regional & Statewide Alignment

We recommend the following to ensure that the new talent campaign is cohesive and effective from a regional perspective as well as aligned with the statewide talent campaign.

- **Establish a Regional Talent Advisory Committee:** We recommend establishing a working group of organizations throughout the region with a key interest in the regional talent pipeline that can serve as a sounding board for the talent campaign. This group should consist of a mix of public and private executives from throughout the region, which could include senior executives and HR representatives from major employers, elected officials, economic development and tourism leaders, and other key community officials. It is crucial that major employers are represented to ensure that the campaign not only fits the needs of the regional job market, but also that it is successful in placing interested talent in jobs in the region. In addition, given the regional nature of this campaign, each community should have public and private representatives at the table. While having as many perspectives as possible may seem attractive, we would caution against having “too many cooks in the kitchen.” Make sure that you have the right representatives to best serve your audiences. We recommend establishing a quarterly cadence of meetings to start, particularly in the campaign development phase, where the Advisory Committee can provide feedback and collaborate with the leading organization on solutions.
- **Align with This Is Iowa Statewide Campaign:** The “This Is Iowa” campaign is already doing work to raise awareness and interest in Iowa as a place to live and work. Perception shifts can happen at the state level, but ultimately location decisions happen at the local and regional level. Make sure that Greater Cedar Rapids is represented in the best way possible so that when interested talent come in through the state campaign, they are more likely to consider your region. Specifically, we recommend:

- **Brand Sharing:** Once the branding has been finalized for the new regional campaign, share the messaging and visual assets with This Is Iowa. It’s important that they are aware of how the region is currently positioning itself so that any communications from the state level are aligned. There may be opportunities to incorporate the updated messaging in their marketing materials. Offer to be a partner and to provide what they need to ensure branding alignment.
- **Strategic Linking:** Once the website for the regional talent campaign is live, work with This Is Iowa to link to it from their website – and make suggestions for how to regionalize the communities content to encompass Greater Cedar Rapids, removing reference to ICR, and updating the video featured on the current page, which is specific to City of Cedar Rapids.
- **Image Assets:** In the external marketing section of this strategy, we recommend investing in a robust talent image library to showcase the diversity of lifestyles and careers possible in Greater Cedar Rapids. Contribute your imagery to the Travel Iowa Photo Library, which currently lacks diverse imagery of the region, to ensure that their marketing materials closely align with your visual identity and the amenities you would like to showcase state-wide.

The screenshot below provides a look at the Greater Cedar Rapids image assets available to media through Travel Iowa. There are no images for Marion and Hiawatha.



Regional Promotion

When a new place-marketing campaign launches externally, there should be no surprises locally. Buy-in and engagement from your regional stakeholders are crucial to the success of the campaign. We recommend the following tactics to that end.

- **Regional Public Relations:** Create a regional PR strategy with the goal to earn positive coverage of the new campaign in regional media. Create an embargoed release with details of the campaign and the launch event to share with key regional media contacts in advance to ensure that it's on their radar. We can be our own worst critics and the same could be said about local and regional media, so be sure to stress the benefit for the region as a whole and the importance of being proactive to attract and retain talent – and why their local readers should care about this effort. Offer one-one-one interviews prior to or during the event. Consider identifying multiple spokespeople: a representative from the lead organization, a company spokesperson who is heavily involved in the effort, and a local young professional who has been tapped to serve as an ambassador.
- **Regional Employer Engagement:** Beyond establishing the Talent Advisory Committee, it will be important to engage with regional employers on an ongoing basis. To start, host a Talent Workshop with regional employers and HR executives to familiarize them with the campaign and train them on how to leverage the new messaging when talking about Greater Cedar Rapids to external job candidates. Showcase the website and other marketing materials to make them aware of the tools that they have at their disposal when recruiting for positions externally. This will also be a good opportunity to solicit feedback and suggestions for other “wish list” items they would like to see from the campaign in the future.
- **Local Talent Engagement:** Your existing regional talent pool is a key audience for this initiative that should not be overlooked. In the first three years of the program, we recommend engaging this audience in the following ways:
 - Look for opportunities to engage and **reengage young professionals** who were involved in the research phase of this project, such as hosting a working group happy hour (or sponsoring an existing event) to unveil the campaign, engage them in the effort by providing ways that they can get involved and solicit ideas. At a minimum, make sure there is a concerted effort to invite and engage this audience in the launch event.
 - **Work with area schools** such as Kirkwood Community College to uncover opportunities to make students aware of the great job opportunities available in the region, whether through the new marketing materials or events, such as a career fair.
 - Tap select individuals to **serve as ambassadors** for the new talent campaign. Interview them for profiles on the website and other marketing materials and hold a photoshoot to get new photography of the ambassadors doing what they love in the region. Be mindful when selecting ambassadors to showcase diverse representation – in terms of race/ethnicity, industry of employment, location where they live and where they are originally from, age/life stage, etc. More detail is included in the website section of the external tactics.

Regional Promotion (cont.)

- **Regional Brand Launch:** Host a “launch party” to unveil the new campaign and generate local buzz. Consider incorporating a brief recap of the research and work done to arrive at the campaign, followed by presentation of the visuals, perhaps along with a “brand anthem” video, and the plan for what’s ahead. Follow this with a panel or “fireside chat” with local talent ambassadors and/or employers to illustrate how the campaign will help solve the talent challenge for employers and continue to attract and retain amazing talent to the region. Provide some fun swag and a photo booth to get attendees excited about the new brand.

When a new place-marketing campaign launches externally, there should be no surprises locally.

Buy-in and engagement from your regional stakeholders are **crucial** to the success of the campaign.

Case Study

The launch of the MoveUpstateSC campaign featured a fun photo booth and swag to get stakeholders in the region excited about the campaign.





External Tactics

The following pages outline a series of actionable marketing tactics that can be taken to elevate the perceptions and identity of Greater Cedar Rapids as a place to live, work and make an impact among working-age talent in target markets.

Branding

As part of this project, DCI produced regional messaging to elevate awareness of the region as a place to live, work and make an impact. These messages lay a strong foundation for this campaign, providing regional stakeholders with talking points and a unified voice to utilize when selling the region to talent. To further build upon this foundation, DCI recommends prioritizing in the following branding tactics:

Create a Regional Talent Brand Campaign

As a next stage in this process, DCI recommends creating a talent-facing identity to serve as an overarching regional brand. The new visual and verbal identity will be used across all talent attraction materials with the goal to capture the attention of external talent audiences and promote a unified regional identity for Greater Cedar Rapids.

DCI's best practice recommendation is that talent attraction campaigns should have a separate brand identity from that of economic development, city, chamber, and tourism marketing campaigns due to their very different audiences and needs, though in some cases, they can effectively build on the success of existing brands. DCI recommends the following:

- **Establish a Brand Task Force:** Establish a "Brand Task Force" comprised of 5-7 local creative/marketing leaders who can weigh in on the brand development with a local, experienced, and credible marketing perspective. Once this group has been established, schedule consistent touchpoints with this team to ensure continued collaboration throughout the branding process.
- **Campaign Concepts:** Using your key messaging as a guide, craft a series of unique campaign concepts that can be utilized across all marketing channels, from digital ads to print activations. Typically, we recommend starting with 4-5 concepts and narrowing it down to 2-3 to explore in design. We find that creating mock-ups of the campaign concepts in action are the best way to illustrate how they would come to life. Leverage your Brand Task Force to weigh in on the concepts and design iterations.

Create a Regional Talent Brand (cont.)

- **Brand Testing:** Once 2-3 strong concepts have been developed, consider conducting brand testing before finalizing the brand to ensure that the brand identity resonates with internal and external audiences. Survey talent in the same target markets surveyed in the 2023 external perception survey and tap into your internal survey audience to weigh in from a local perspective.
- **Visual Identity:** Once the final concept has been identified, build out a visual identity that can be utilized across your website, social media, and marketing assets, including brandmark/logo, color palette, typography, iconography and image guidelines. The visual identity/brand should be adaptable so that partner entities and communities within Greater Cedar Rapids will embrace and activate it.
- **Invest in Branded Collateral:** Once a regional talent brand has been developed, activate the brand through the creation of the following strategic materials:
 - **Regional Relocation Guide:** Create a regional overview booklet that provides a high-level look into life in Greater Cedar Rapids, including the region's cost of living, housing options, and livability assets. Encourage employers to share the booklet with prospective talent and tourism stakeholders (hotels, event spaces, etc.) to include in lobby brochure kiosks and include a digital version on the website.
 - **Rebrand Economic Alliance Talent Materials:** The Economic Alliance has a strong bank of talent-facing collateral. Once the brand has been created, take inventory of existing assets and consider rebranding select materials with the new regional brand and refreshing messaging to utilize your new key messages.
 - **RAYGUN Merch:** RAYGUN is known for its quirky and eye-catching merch. Work with the local vendor to create a series of fun t-shirts, water bottles, and even bike frame bags to appeal to visiting bikers passing through during RAGBRAI. Get creative with the types of pieces you produce; the more unique and authentic to Greater Cedar Rapids, the better. We recommend distributing merch at the brand launch event to begin to build local adoption

Case Study

Wilmington, NC learned through national research that their region was largely seen favorably as a place to live and visit, but there was little to no awareness of the jobs and career assets available there. Building upon its well-known coastal identity, Wilmington launched the [NC Career Coast campaign](#) to brand itself as a jobs hub, where you can live like you're on vacation and still pursue a fulfilling career. The campaign was designed to be versatile to hit on multiple key messages and to be customized depending on the audience (i.e. NC's Startup Coast, NC's Chill Out Coast).



Website

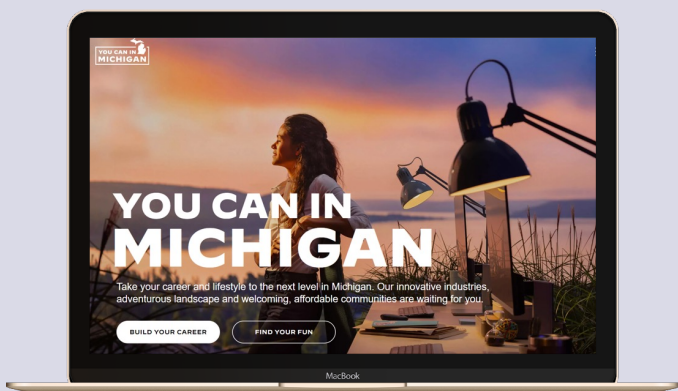
Your website is your digital welcome mat and can connect users from across the world to Greater Cedar Rapids. Increasingly, people are turning to the internet when making relocation decisions. In fact, DCI's national research finds that the internet is the top source for forming impressions of a location, ahead of first-hand experience, and a website with information about living and working in a region was identified as a highly useful relocation tool. Additionally, it is crucial for any marketing campaign to have an optimized web presence to drive users to as they move down the funnel from awareness to exploration and evaluation to conversion.

Create a Talent Website

Collaborative Growth Initiative partner websites feature strong information on living and working in Greater Cedar Rapids, but the region lacks a cohesive and centralized resource for users to visit to learn about the region as a whole as a place to live and work. To simplify the user experience, DCI recommends creating a separate talent attraction website to serve as a centralized resource for all things living and working in Greater Cedar Rapids, leveraging the new brand.

Case Study

In 2023, Michigan Economic Development Corporation launched an interactive talent attraction website that features a cost of living calculator and community quiz.



Website Functionality Recommendations

The days of the “brochure site” are long gone as users crave more engaging experiences online and are less likely to engage with long-form content. Based on our research and digital best practices for talent attraction campaigns, we recommend integrating the following tools:

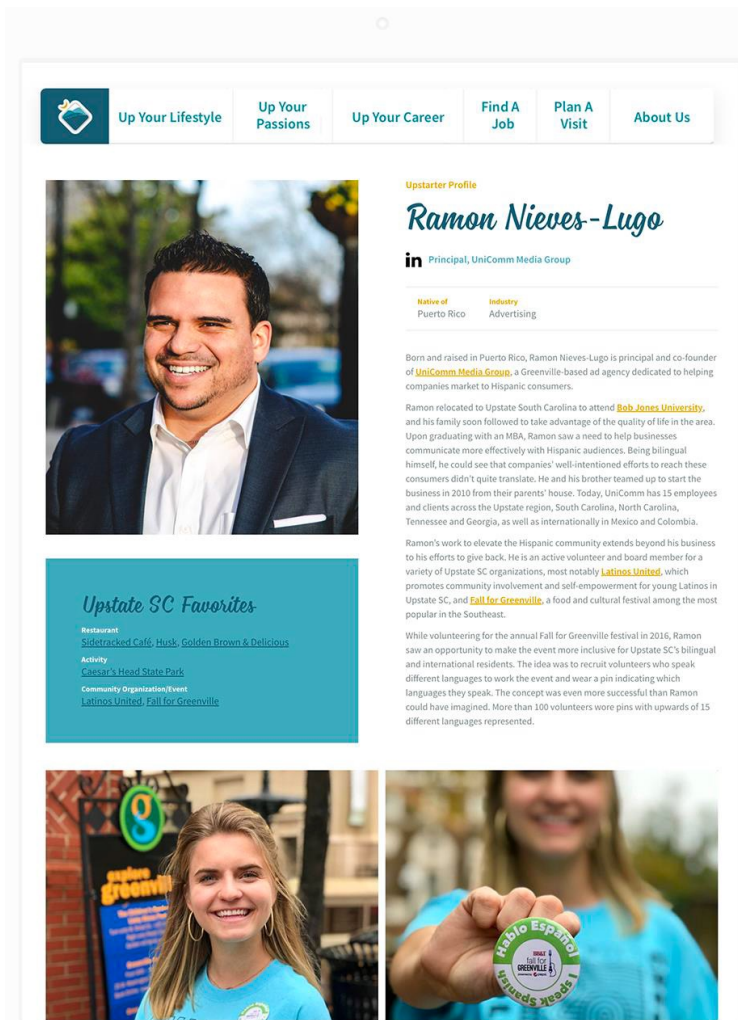
- **Cost of Living Calculator:** Greater Cedar Rapids boasts a cost of living below the national average and provides potential residents with the attractive proposition of home ownership. Integrate a cost of living calculator, such as one built on the highly respected C2ER Cost of Living Index, that allows users to compare their cost of living in Greater Cedar Rapids to their current location, and how far their current salary will go, including direct comparisons of the cost of housing, groceries, and even healthcare.
- **Jobs Board:** Showcasing the breadth and depth of job opportunities available in Greater Cedar Rapids will be a crucial strategy to attracting talent to the region. Integrate a jobs board that pulls job postings automatically from sites like Indeed within the target occupation clusters to take the guesswork out for users. This tool will be useful not only to attract prospective residents but also to retain current residents. To connect talent directly to regional employers, supplement the jobs board by integrating employer logos and website links on relevant industry pages.
- **Community Quiz:** Cedar Rapids, Marion and Hiawatha each offer their own unique personality and assets. Help talent find the right fit for them through a “Find Your Community” quiz, which guides the user through a series of questions to find the area that best suits their needs and preferences.

Website Functionality Recommendations (cont.)

- **Interactive Map:** Our external research found that only 27% of respondents could pinpoint where Greater Cedar Rapids is on a map. Location awareness-building will be a key component of the campaign. Also, given the importance of ensuring that Cedar Rapids, Hiawatha and Marion are represented as part of this initiative, DCI recommends creating a regional map to showcase the region and each community. At the regional level, the map can drive users to a unique profile on each community with information on employers, housing, lifestyle, schools, and more. To make the map engaging and interactive, consider leveraging Google Maps or Map Box as the foundation for the designed map.
- **Ambassador Features:** When asked to identify the most helpful relocation tools, 59% of the external audience rated the ability to talk to someone who currently lives and works in a region as a top tool. With that in mind, we recommend building out an ambassador section on your website, highlighting success stories of talent already living and working in the area. This feature provides local talent with the opportunity to share their career growth, favorite local businesses and more, as well as for potential residents to see the type of success possible in Greater Cedar Rapids. With their permission, add the option to connect with the ambassadors on LinkedIn or reach out to them directly.

Case Study

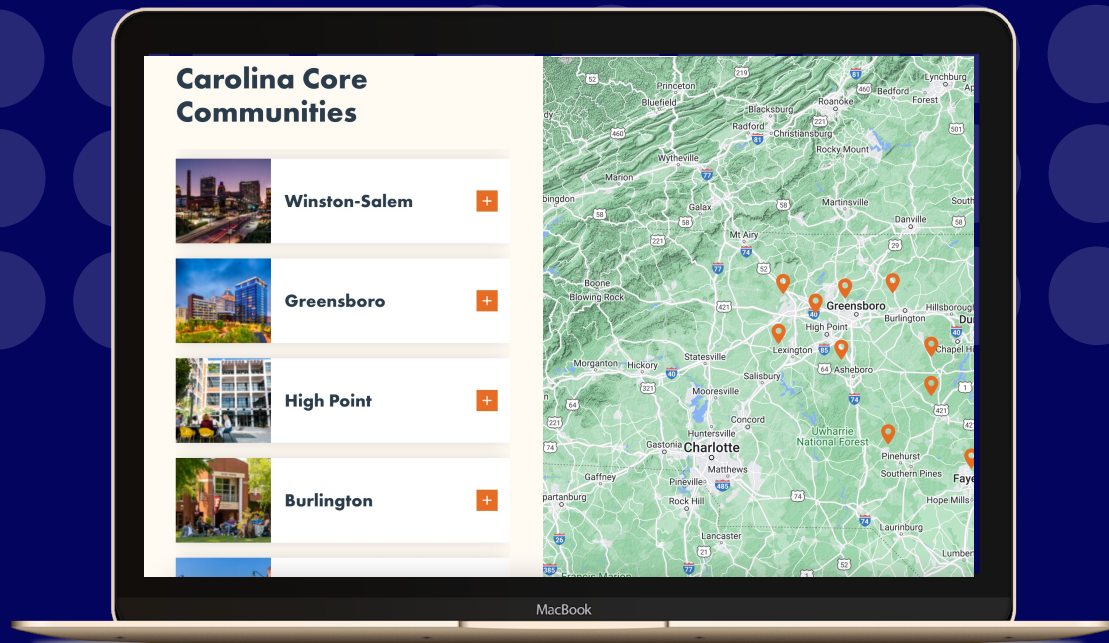
MoveUpstateSC recruited locals who successfully relocated to join “The Upstarters,” a group of ambassadors who tell their stories on the website and are open to being contacted by potential transplants looking to talk to someone who made the move.



47%

of external talent can't place Greater Cedar Rapids on a map.

—External Survey



Case Study

Anchored by three cities – Winston-Salem, Greensboro and High Point – and a range of smaller communities, the Carolina Core region needed a way to visually represent the various communities in the region to talent, while also showcasing its strategic position between Charlotte and Raleigh. An interactive map, with profiles on each community, was the solution.

When users click on each respective community, they're directed to learn more about each community, including their unique lifestyle amenities, industries and job opportunities.



Winston-Salem



As the fourth-largest Metropolitan area in North Carolina, Winston-Salem is an innovation hub at the heart of the state. This city is not only one of the fastest growing urban districts in the United States – home to the corporate headquarters of HanesBrands, Inc. and Lowes Food Stores – but it also serves its community through a variety of artistic attractions, such as the Piedmont Opera Theater and the Winston-Salem Symphony, and two of the top universities in the nation, the University of North Carolina School of the Arts and Wake Forest University.

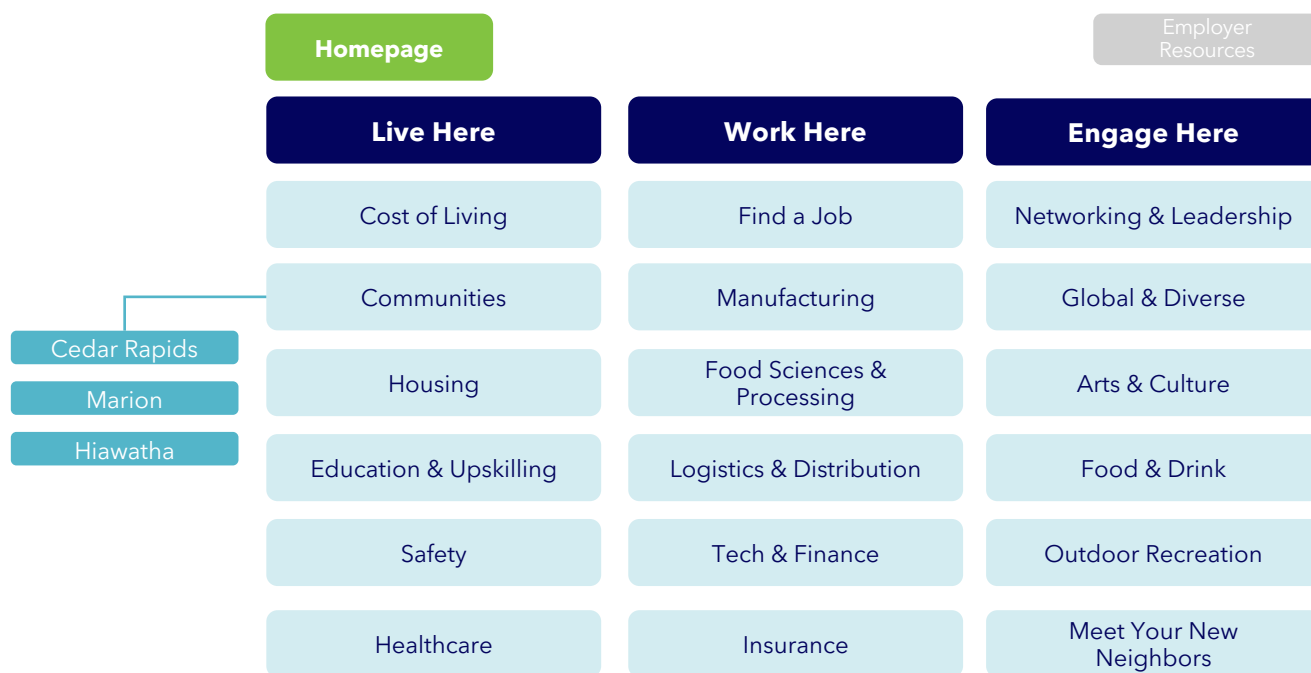
More Resources:

Winston-Salem Lifestyle

Content Recommendations

Your website allows talent to dive deeper and learn more about your region and your unique communities. Considering the factors most important to talent, paired with the strengths and opportunities of Greater Cedar Rapids, we recommend the following sample sitemap for the website.

Sample Navigation & Sitemap



Website Maintenance Best Practices

- **Prioritize SEO:** Your website should be built with search engine optimization (SEO) best practices in mind. A website is like a garden; once it is up and running, it's important to continue to nurture it to help it grow and reach users through search engines. Prioritize annual SEO maintenance and optimization strategies to keep your website at the top of search engines.
- **Make Regular Updates:** To ensure that your content stays fresh, and that search engines continue to consider your content valuable, we recommend making updates on a regular basis. To keep stats and facts up-to-date, we recommend making updates as they are available, or on a quarterly basis, as resources allow. Consider adding a blog or newsroom to the site to post updates and useful content monthly.
- **Prioritize ADA Compliance:** ADA compliance should be a priority for your talent attraction website to ensure that the content is accessible for all users and passes accessibility guidelines. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines have three levels: A, AA, and AAA. To balance modern design and accessibility for all users, DCI recommends aiming for Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) "A" level compliance in your website design, meaning that you prioritize high-contrast colors and text legibility, among other factors. Additionally, when uploading imagery, always be sure to include alt-text that describes the images for screen readers.

Media Relations

Our perception research identified a general lack of awareness of Greater Cedar Rapids among external talent in target markets. Despite this lack of awareness, Greater Cedar Rapids is no stranger to national rankings and is frequently rated among the best places to live, work, and raise a family. Continue to build upon this momentum and increase national awareness, particularly among talent in target markets, through a robust media relations campaign. DCI recommends your program include the following:

- **Press Trips:** We know from the research that your target audience heavily values first-hand experience when it comes to forming perceptions about a place to live and work. The same is true for journalists; their time on the ground is an invaluable asset in their storytelling. Bring reporters to Greater Cedar Rapids to provide them with a first-hand look at the region's growth, momentum, and the type of life that is possible in the region. As part of these trips, DCI recommends having reporters meet with employers, regional talent and local stakeholders to hear directly from your community members about their experience of living and working in the area. Consider partnering with Cedar Rapids Tourism and Travel Iowa to leverage existing media connections and planned trips.
- **Proactive Pitching:** A robust media relations program relies on building strong and consistent relationships with key media contacts. While reactive pitching is strategic when there is breaking news or announcements, those stories don't come along daily. Maintain a steady drumbeat of media coverage by implementing a proactive pitching strategy, reaching out to target reporters with story ideas and spokespeople. Proactive pitching provides year-round opportunities to get key themelines in front of reporters.

To guide your media relations strategy, DCI has outlined a series of media themelines, potential spokespeople and a target media list.

Your target audience heavily values first-hand experience when it comes to forming perceptions about a place to live and work.

The same is true for journalists; their time on the ground is an invaluable asset in their storytelling.

Initial Media Themelines and Spokespeople

For a media relations campaign to be successful, it is essential to showcase the unique assets and events that set Greater Cedar Rapids apart from similar-midsized communities. Come up with a pitch plan, incorporating the dates of key events and national holidays/news hooks with key themelines. DCI recommends prioritizing the following themelines and considering the following spokespeople during year one of your media relations program:

Home Ownership a Reality in This Midwestern Region

In many American cities, home ownership is no longer a reality of the American dream. In Greater Cedar Rapids, more than 64.8% of the population own their home, well above the national average. With median home prices at \$184,900 and communities regularly ranked as some of the most affordable in the nation, people are flocking to this Midwestern region to take advantage of diverse options and affordability. With 750+ housing units in the works, the region is proactively creating the supply to meet the demand. Use a milestone in a major housing development as the hook to pitch this story. Considering tying into the broader theme of the Midwest and/or mid-sized communities as destinations as Americans are priced out of other markets.

Suggested Spokespeople:

- Annie Kaestner, Skogman Realty and President, Cedar Rapids Area Association of Realtors
- Arron Wulfekuhle, Precision Builders
- Nancy Hill-Davis, Vice Chair of Affordable Housing Network, Inc.

Beyond Downtowns: Greater Cedar Rapids Invests in New Gathering Places

The pandemic has tested and reshaped the heart of American cities: the Downtown. In Greater Cedar Rapids, one of the fastest-growing midsized communities in the nation, community leaders recognize that downtowns are no longer what they used to be and, instead, are investing in connectivity, live-work-place spaces, state-of-the-art libraries and community centers, and revitalizing cultural centers in their region, including a \$3.8 million regional investment and initiative to create a more walkable downtown and revive a historic arts district in the heart of the city. With dozens of community development projects in the works, Greater Cedar Rapids is transforming itself into a destination for relocation in the Midwest and serves as a case study of how mid-sized communities are setting themselves up to thrive in the new normal. *Leverage a milestone in a major community development project as the hook to pitch this overarching story.*

Suggested Spokespeople:

- Tiffany O'Donnell, Mayor of Cedar Rapids
- Jennifer Pratt, Community Development Director, City of Cedar Rapids
- Nicolas AbouAssaly, Mayor of Marion
- Brooke Prouty, Director of Uptown Marion Main Street District
- Liz Mathis, Economic Development Coordinator, Hiawatha Economic Development Corporation
- Patrick Parsley, Community Development Director, City of Hiawatha



Initial Media Themelines and Spokespeople (cont.)

For a media relations campaign to be successful, it is essential to showcase the unique assets and events that set Greater Cedar Rapids apart from similar-midsized communities. Come up with a pitch plan, incorporating the dates of key events and national holidays/news hooks with key themelines. DCI recommends prioritizing the following themelines and considering the following spokespeople during year one of your media relations program:

The Next Generation of Leaders Are Thriving in Small Communities

The days of hustle culture are over and the next generation is looking for something different in their work lives. Young professionals and business owners are finding rewarding careers and building a name for themselves in small and midsized communities – sitting on boards, starting their own businesses, winning elections and rising through the ranks. In Greater Cedar Rapids, these young movers and shakers exemplify how moving to a smaller community can speed up your career trajectory as you become a “big fish in a small pond.” If appropriate, consider submitting select candidates to Forbes’ 30 Under 30.

Suggested Spokespeople:

- Sydney Rieckhoff, CEO, Almost Famous Popcorn
- Gage Miskimen, City Council, Marion
- Alicia Terry, Co-founder, Saturday Social
- Caleb Woods, Entrepreneur; Board Member, Horizons
- Renjena Burnett, Senior Engineering Manager, Collins Aerospace

“Most Wanted” Media Outlets

Target media outlets and journalists should be established from the outset of the media relations campaign and updated regularly as new stories emerge. Following is an initial list, taking into account internal outlets as well as regional publications in target markets and national publications covering lifestyle, cities and the job market. Media outlets and journalists should be customized to the topic of the pitch.

Internal

- The Gazette
- Iowa City Press-Citizen
- The Des Moines Register

External

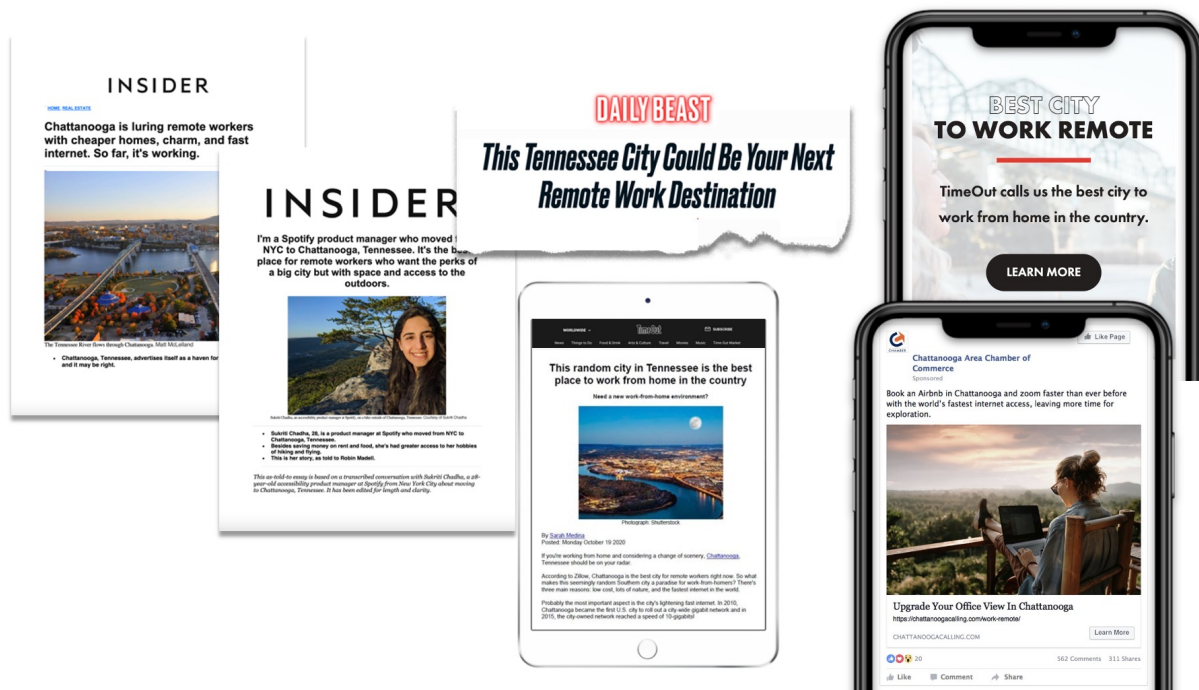
- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| • AFAR | • MarketWatch |
| • Insider | • New York Times |
| • Café Mocha TV | • The Daily Beast |
| • CNBC Make It | • Thrillist |
| • Essence | • USA Today |
| • Fast Company | • Chicago Tribune |
| • Forbes | • StarTribune |
| • Food & Wine | • Denver Post |
| • Livability | • Los Angeles Times |
| • Lonely Planet | • Kansas City Star |
| • Matador Network | |

“So what makes this seemingly random Southern city a paradise for work-from-homers? There's three main reasons: low cost, lots of nature, and the fastest internet in the world.”

—TimeOut

Case Study

As the rise of remote work swept the nation, Chattanooga launched a national media relations campaign to brand itself as the best place to work remotely in the country. Paired with digital advertising, the campaign was successful in garnering placements in top media outlets touting Chattanooga's unique combination of super-fast internet, low costs and lifestyle assets, and ultimately in attracting remote workers to “workcation” in the region.



Social Media

Nearly 40% of your external audience uses social media to learn more about jobs and careers. With that in mind, having an active and reliable presence on social media is an efficient and effective way to reach your target audiences.

Platform Recommendations

DCI recommends prioritizing the following social media channels for talent attraction efforts:

- **LinkedIn:** Nearly 65 million people use LinkedIn to search for jobs each week and 40% of users organically engage with a page each week. In fact, LinkedIn was the No. 2 top social media platform utilized among your external audience throughout their job search, making it a strategic platform to utilize in your marketing strategy. Consider utilizing LinkedIn to highlight open jobs, major employers and ambassador testimonials of those living and working in Greater Cedar Rapids.
- **Instagram:** Strong imagery and video plays an important role in talent attraction marketing and helps prospective talent visualize what their life could be like in Greater Cedar Rapids. Instagram allows talent to 'visit' Greater Cedar Rapids from the comfort of their own home. The highly visual platform allows for creating dynamic and approachable videos, interactive polling and more. DCI recommends utilizing this platform to promote the region's livability assets while sprinkling in job-related content - from weekend live music or upskilling workshops in Cedar Rapids, Food Truck Fridays in Hiawatha to job fairs, and moonlit movies in the park in Marion.

Adding more social channels requires more time and resources. With that in mind, we recommend prioritizing the two above for the first three years. At this juncture, DCI does not recommend pursuing a TikTok presence. While TikTok is rising in popularity, it has yet to break through as a top platform for talent and often requires the most custom content to stay active. Given that the primary focus of this campaign is to attract external talent, we do not recommend Facebook at this time as it is more valuable for internal audiences.

Recommended Content Pillars

Content creation for both platforms should follow a series of content pillars, which are a strategic way to guide content creation and maintenance for social media. They ensure that you have a strong repository of content to develop and that you stay consistent in your messaging. The following aligns closely with your recommended sitemap:

- **Live Here:** This pillar should consist of content focused on your cost of living, housing availability/types, communities, safety and education options. DCI also recommends featuring any livability rankings through this content pillar.
- **Work Here:** This pillar should focus on your available jobs, major employers, events like those hosted by ImpactCR, ambassador features and other networking opportunities available across the region.
- **Engage Here:** This pillar should focus on how residents can connect to their community once they move to Greater Cedar Rapids. This can include content on youth sports, cultural groups, music venues, farmers markets and your food and dining scene.

“ 40% of your external audience uses social media to learn more about jobs and careers.
—External Survey

Engagement

To maintain an active presence on social media, DCI recommends posting at a minimum of two times a week and increasing the cadence to three times a week as the platforms begin to build a following. Avoid posting too many times in one day, as it will be called user fatigue. DCI outlines platform-specific metrics to track in the Key Performance Indicator section of this strategy.

Utilizing User-Generated Content

Once these platforms are live, consider leveraging user-generated content to showcase authentic social media content. User-generated content is created by followers, local partners or visitors and reshared on your platforms. User-generated content can be sourced in a few different ways:

- Utilize platforms like TINT and Crowdriff to source content and gain usage rights
- Reference geo-tags and hashtags for content
- Partner with influencers or content creators

When pursuing user-generated content, it is crucial to get explicit written permission to use each photo or video, even if you know the creator personally. This helps to prevent potential legal issues. Platforms like TINT and Crowdriff streamline this process for brands.

“

69%

of respondents are likely to trust a friend, family member or influencer recommendation over information coming directly from a brand.”

- Matter Communications, 2023

Influencer Partnerships

Take user-generated content to the next level by partnering with influencers on social media to increase awareness of life in Greater Cedar Rapids. When considering influencer partnerships, it is important that the influencers you pursue are authentic and align closely with your brand goals - to increase awareness of the region in target markets. Influencer partnerships could consist of a mix of local/regional content creators, who can authentically speak to their experience in the region, and external content creators with national followings, who would consider a sponsored trip to Greater Cedar Rapids to create content. The larger their audience, the more expensive the partnership fees, so get creative about working with “micro influencers” who have a more niche audience that fits your goals. As a starting point, DCI identified three potential influencers for your campaign:

- [Lizanne Dooner](#)

- Midwest Travel & Lifestyle Influencer | National Influencer

- 62.3k Instagram followers

- [Ariana | Space Communicator](#)

- Aerospace Engineer | Career Influencer

- 47.2k Instagram followers

- [Laura Vandenberg](#)

- Host, Iowa Hawkeyes | Local Influencer

- 24.6K Instagram followers

Case Study

[WonderFL](#), the state of Florida's talent attraction campaign, utilizes Instagram to promote their quality of life, industries, jobs and the diversity of lifestyles available to talent across the state.



Digital Advertising

Once your talent website is up and running, one of the most strategic ways to get targeted, high-quality conversions is through a robust digital advertising campaign. With a focus on increasing brand awareness in target markets and driving engagement with key tools and information on the website, DCI recommends prioritizing the following channels:

- **Google Search Ads:** Google Search is the highest-converting digital advertising channel because it allows brands to capture intent-driven users. In other words, Greater Cedar Rapids can get in front of people who are already searching for terms like “best cities to live in the Midwest,” “jobs in Iowa,” or “best places to raise a family,” and drive them to relevant pages on the website.
- **Google Display Retargeting:** When people engage with the talent campaign, but don’t perform a conversion action, Greater Cedar Rapids can retarget this audience when they are browsing across any website in the Google Display Network with a display ad. If they engage with jobs content on the website, serve them content about the lifestyle, and vice versa, to make sure the Greater Cedar Rapids stays top-of-mind.
- **Meta Ads (Facebook and Instagram):** Meta leads all channels in terms of engagement and offers a strategic platform for awareness-building. When talent in target markets are browsing on social media, Greater Cedar Rapids can serve them an ad about the region’s assets as a place to live. For talent in higher-cost markets, specifically target them with cost-of-living comparisons to get them thinking about just how much they would save.

- **LinkedIn Sponsored Content:** A top platform for job searching and career building and networking, LinkedIn allows for highly sophisticated targeting of individuals based on their industry of employment, level of seniority, educational history and, of course, location. Leverage LinkedIn to target talent in target markets with industry-specific ads showcasing the employment opportunities in Greater Cedar Rapids within their industry. To capture the “boomerang” audience or those with a tie to the region and state, target alumni of University of Iowa living outside of the state and working in target industries with information about the jobs and lifestyle assets in the region.

Analytics & Reporting

The success of a digital advertising campaign is contingent upon the ability to track key metrics and report on conversion actions. Work with an analytics team to set up an ethical data collection framework, including a consent management system that meets global compliance. Ensure that Google Analytics 4 is set up and Google Tag Manager is installed on the new website with tracking in place to capture when users complete an action on the website which indicates a high level of interest in the region. Based on our website content recommendations, we recommend considering the following as conversions:

- Job Clicks (via Jobs Board or to Employer Websites)
- Cost of Living Calculations
- Interactive Map Interactions
- Community Quiz Completions
- Outbound Links to Employer Websites

To allow for real-time reporting and data visualizations that will resonate with stakeholders, we recommend building a custom Looker Studio (Google’s reporting product) dashboard with overall campaign performance as well as channel-by-channel performance reports. Channel-specific metrics are included in Appendix C.

“

Digital ads can increase brand awareness by

80%”

–WebFX

Publisher & Out-of-Home Advertising

Digital advertising allows for the highest level of tracking and thus the ability to track ROI, while other channels, such as out-of-home, can be difficult to evaluate in performance. With that in mind, we recommend focusing most heavily on digital advertising and carefully vetting any other ad opportunities with the target audience and tracking capabilities in mind. Consider volume of traffic or readership as well as audience and content attributes. Are you getting in front of target talent with your message or reaching a much broader audience that will be less effective? Will you be able to prove that someone saw your ad and took action as a result? These are questions to ask when evaluating ad opportunities.

Keep in mind that channels like Google Display Network and Demand-Side Platform advertising can allow you to place ads on virtually any website, so advertising with a publisher directly may not be necessary to achieve desired results. When it comes to out-of-home ads, you can expect broad awareness building, but not necessarily action or conversion. Still, always incorporate a custom QR code in order to track any direct web traffic. Here are a few ideas to consider once the foundational digital advertising program is in place, as resources allow, in years two and three:

- **Ad takeover of Eastern Iowa Airport** to get in front of leisure and business travelers to invite them to consider Greater Cedar Rapids as more than just a visitor destination;
- Branded tailgate party and *geotargeted ads* surrounding a major Hawkeyes game;
- **Branded content** package with a key media outlet such as Thrillist, allowing Greater Cedar Rapids editorial control of the article(s).

Photography

High-quality, engaging imagery is a vital tool in talent attraction marketing and serves multiple purposes across your website, social media, digital ads, in-person activations and collateral.

DCI recommends working with a local photographer to build out a robust talent marketing photography library, including lifestyle and work-related imagery. While building this photography library, consider intentional representation of the various cultures and identities that are present in Greater Cedar Rapids, without being inauthentic.

Initial Shot List Recommendations

Considering the following categories of imagery, keep in mind what you will need for the website, social media, digital advertising, etc. Some imagery may be available via partner organizations.

- **Live Here**
 - **Communities:** Create or source imagery of people walking around and engaging around key assets and events in Cedar Rapids, Hiawatha and Marion.
 - **Housing:** This should include a variety of housing options from Cedar Rapids, Marion and Hiawatha - from urban apartments to townhomes and single-family homes with acreage.
 - **K-12 Education:** Greater Cedar Rapids is fortunate to have an excellent K-12 system. Work with Cedar Rapids Community School District to secure existing imagery or create new imagery that shows children of various ages learning, interacting with teachers, etc.
 - **Healthcare:** Work with regional healthcare providers to source or create imagery that showcases the strength of Greater Cedar Rapids' healthcare systems and the variety of care that is possible in the region.

Initial Shot List Recommendations (cont.)

- **Work Here**

- **Major Industries:** This imagery should include a wide variety of people working, speaking with colleagues, performing job-related tasks, etc. in each of the following industries:
 - Manufacturing
 - Food sciences and processing
 - Logistics and distribution
 - Tech and finance
 - Insurance
- **Major Employers:** This imagery should include photos of major employer office space, production floors and headquarters. While focused on the employers and their amenities, these images should be people-centric and show employees actively interacting with each space as well as the products/services they're providing, if appropriate. Carefully source locations to ensure that they represent attractive, modern workplaces.
- **Remote/Hybrid Work & Entrepreneurship:** Consider securing imagery of people working in coworking spaces, such as Cowork 1107 in Marion and The Vault in Cedar Rapids or on laptops in regional coffee shops. Source or capture shots of entrepreneurs in action through NewBoCo or at their places of work.

- **Engage Here**

- **Professional Development Groups:** Have a photographer take photos of people engaging with one another at ImpactCR, Leadership for Five Seasons, EntreFEST and other regional networking events.

- **Arts, Culture & Outdoor Recreation:**

Partner with regional businesses and your tourism counterparts to secure images of performing arts centers, museums, live music, hiking and biking trails and your food scene.

- **Events & Festivals:** There is no shortage of engaging events to participate in across the region. Send a photographer to major events and festivals to secure imagery of people enjoying the food, music and connecting with one another.

- **Meet Your New Neighbors:** Hold a dedicated photoshoot to capture images of Greater Cedar Rapids ambassadors working and doing what they love in the region. Authentic action shots are encouraged over stuffy headshot-style photos.



Video

Video is one of the most engaging types of content for both organic and paid media, with [66% of consumers](#) considering short-form video the most engaging type of social media content. Video can be a highly influential tool in your attraction and retention strategy. DCI recommends developing a strong video library and has provided a series of content themes to consider:

- **Greater Cedar Rapids Brand Anthem:** Consider this your movie trailer for living and working in Greater Cedar Rapids. This video should be a fast-paced visual overview of the variety of careers and lifestyle options available in the region, showcasing the new brand campaign. Utilize big and bold imagery that shows the scale of innovation and collaboration possible.
- **Company/Workspace Tours:** Greater Cedar Rapids is home to innovative companies and dynamic workspaces, but lacks a general internal and external awareness of these assets. Have energetic hosts show potential talent around these innovative workspaces, providing an inside scoop into the variety of open jobs, amenities and live-work assets in the region.
- **Day in the Life:** Follow talent living and working in Greater Cedar Rapids through a day in their life. From where they get their morning coffee to where they take their kids for after-school activities, these videos help talent visualize exactly what their life might look like in Greater Cedar Rapids.
- **MythBusters Video:** Our research uncovered that even internal talent is not fully aware of the breadth and depth of career and lifestyle amenities available to them in the region. Create MythBusters-style videos to challenge internal perceptions, all while channeling a playful, welcoming spirit.
- **Homeownership Within Reach:** With quality of life closely tied to the ability to own a home, showcase the variety of housing available across the region. This video can feature strong cost of living stats juxtaposed against stunning apartments, houses and estates.

Best Practices in Video Creation

- **Keep Videos Short & Sweet:** It's often said that a video has three seconds to capture the audience's attention before they scroll and move on to the next piece of media. DCI recommends keeping videos limited to 60-90 second snippets to capture your audience's attention quickly. Create 15-30 second snippets and format to platform specifications for optimal viewing across social media platforms.
- **Utilize Consistent Editing Style:** Using your new talent brand and messaging as a guide, channel a consistent filming and editing technique to show brand consistency. The new brand and messaging should be shared with videographers or producers prior to filming to make sure they are aligned on the overall tone and style. DCI also recommends including the talent brand logo as a watermark in the bottom corner of your videos, and incorporating closed captions for accessibility.
- **Make the Most of Your Content:** These videos should be created with the idea that they can serve multiple purposes – from getting prospects excited about the region during your prospect weekends to driving engagement on social media. Make sure to publish on LinkedIn and Instagram, incorporate into the new website and share widely with partners.

Research

A key goal of this strategy is to improve the awareness and perception of Greater Cedar Rapids among both internal and external audiences. We recommend replicating the internal and external talent perception surveys in three years to understand how marketing efforts have moved the needle.

Big Ideas

As budget allows, we recommend considering the following “big ideas” once the foundational brand and marketing campaign is in place.

- **Prospect Weekends:** Roll out the red carpet for talent seriously considering a relocation to Greater Cedar Rapids by hosting prospect weekends. Work with regional employers to recruit individuals who have a job offer or other strong candidates for local positions to participate and curate a weekend that is both informational and fun. Organize community tours and meetings with school and real estate executives and employers. Host a happy hour with recent transplants where they can ask burning questions about what it's really like to relocate to the region, or consider a panel or fireside chat-style format.
- **Hawkeye Target Market Event:** Consider hosting events at Hawkeye bars in target markets should the Hawkeyes make it to the championships. The event could include the opportunity to "Get a drink on your hometown" or other fun giveaways to keep Greater Cedar Rapids top of mind for boomerangs. These vouchers and branded event materials should include a QR code directing talent to your talent website and directly to the cost of living calculator to show them how much they could save. Potential bars include (A full list can be found [here](#)):
 - [Theory](#) - Chicago
 - [Barney's Beanery](#) - Los Angeles
 - [The Sportsbook Bar & Grill](#) - Denver
 - [The Loop](#) - Minneapolis
 - [McGinns Sports Bar](#) - Milwaukee
- **RAGBRAI Takeover:** RAGBRAI and biking are major staples across Greater Cedar Rapids and Iowa. Celebrate this race and your biking culture by serving as a sponsor of RAGBRAI and offer a Greater Cedar Rapids passport to those along the route, which could include coupons for Greater Cedar Rapids businesses and information on cost of living, school rankings and major companies across the region. In tandem with this sponsorship, consider reviving the Tour de Trashmore, a free bicycle pub crawl with stops at area pubs, around the same time as RAGBRAI (late July) to celebrate the event and build local buzz. Understanding that RAGBRAI's 2024 route does not pass through Greater Cedar Rapids, we recommend holding this activation until 2025-2026 or when the route closer aligns with the Greater Cedar Rapids location.
- **Establish A Talent CRM:** To make the most of the interested talent who come to your website via your marketing channels, consider integrating a tailored Customer Relationship Management platform. Platforms like HubSpot can be customized to collect information from interested talent and remarket to them with tailored information based on their interests. This platform can also be used to provide employers with direct access to this new talent pool. As the goal of this campaign is to generate awareness and engagement, this step is optional and should only be taken on if resources allow to manage this part of the program.



Implementation Guidelines

This Marketing Blueprint was designed to be implemented immediately, as resources allow. With that in mind, DCI developed the following high-level, three-year timeline, budget and key performance indicators.

Timeline

The below timeline provides Greater Cedar Rapids with a high-level overview for how to pace recommended marketing tactics over a three-year timeline.

Year 1

Internal Tactics

- **Organizational Structure:** Select regional organization to serve as campaign lead and final decision maker; Hire senior staff person to lead talent attraction efforts; Facilitate funding conversations with private sector employers and public sector entities; Secure public and private sector funding.
- **Regional & Statewide Alignment:** Establish regional talent collaborative; Host quarterly collaborative meetings; Share updated messaging and assets with statewide campaign.
- **Regional Promotion:** Develop media kit and press release; Identify spokespeople; Execute regional PR strategy; Host talent workshop with regional employers and solicit feedback; Unveil campaign to regional talent pool; Select regional ambassadors.
- **Regional Brand Launch:** Host launch party and fireside chat.

External Tactics

- **Branding:** Establish a brand taskforce; Continue consistent communication with taskforce; Create regional talent brand; Update existing and create new talent attraction materials; Launch brand in conjunction with website launch. Keep in mind that a typical brand project takes 4-6 months, but this timing can likely be condensed given the head start you have with the brand messaging.
- **Website:** Following brand development, build talent attraction website with key tools; Secure ambassadors and develop featured content; Launch website. A typical website design and development process takes 6-8 months, but can be combined with the brand process for maximum efficiency.
- **Media Relations:** Begin planning for launch of national PR campaign in Year 2.
- **Social Media:** Secure social media handles; Brand accounts with new talent brand; Develop content strategy; Launch social presence across Instagram and LinkedIn in conjunction with website launch.
- **Digital Advertising:** Create media plan/strategy; Implement strategic paid recommendations; Launch in conjunction with website launch; Perform ongoing optimization and reporting.

Timeline (cont.)

Year 1 (cont.)

External Tactics

- **Photography:** Identify photographer; Establish shot list; Photographer conducts photoshoot and delivers content. Photography should be delivered prior to website launch (ideally before the site goes into development) and used throughout the website, marketing collateral, social media, etc.
- **Video:** Start creative storyboarding process; produce, edit and publish brand anthem video in time for brand launch party; Begin producing other videos and leverage across social media and digital advertising.
- **Big Ideas:** Begin planning for prospect weekend and target market event in Year 2, if resources allow.

Year 2

Internal Tactics

- **Organizational Structure:** Evaluate operating structure and consider building capacity.
- **Regional & Statewide Alignment:** Continue to host quarterly regional talent collaborative meetings; Continue close collaboration with area employers, holding additional workshop(s) as needed; Continue to resource-share with statewide campaign.
- **Regional Promotion:** Cohost career fair with Kirkwood Community College; Continue to identify regional ambassadors; consider sponsoring or hosting young professional event(s).

External Tactics

- **Branding:** Update branded collateral with new stats/figures, as needed.
- **Website:** Continue to update and optimize website; Conduct SEO audit (allowing at least three months post-launch) and make updates/optimizations.
- **Media Relations:** Develop strategic media relations plan; Conduct proactive pitching, host inbound media visits.
- **Social Media:** Ongoing social media content creation, scheduling and quarterly reporting; Identify influencers for use in influencer program; launch influencer program, recruiting 2-4 influencers in Year 2.
- **Digital Advertising:** Ongoing optimization, monthly reporting and quarterly insights; refresh content flights to avoid ad fatigue.
- **Photography:** N/A
- **Video:** Continue to edit and upload videos. Consider repurposing existing footage to create new videos.
- **Big Ideas:** Plan and host prospect weekend; Plan and host target market event; Begin planning for RAGBRAI Takeover.

Timeline (cont.)

Year 3

Internal Tactics

- **Organizational Structure:** Assess program performance and operating structure, making adjustments if needed.
- **Regional & Statewide Alignment:** Continue to host quarterly regional talent collaborative meetings; Continue to resource-share with statewide campaign.
- **Regional Promotion:** Continue to collaborate on events with Kirkwood Community College; Continue to identify regional ambassadors; Host happy hours/networking events with young professionals.

External Tactics

- **Branding:** Continue to update stats on branded collateral, as needed.
- **Website:** Continue to update and optimize website; Conduct SEO audit and make updates/optimizations.
- **Media Relations:** Continue proactive pitching, inbound media visits.
- **Social Media:** Ongoing social media content creation, scheduling and quarterly reporting.
- **Digital Advertising:** Ongoing optimization, monthly reporting and quarterly insights.
- **Video:** Continue to edit and upload videos. Consider repurposing existing footage to create new videos; create additional footage as needed.
- **Research:** Replicate perception survey and report on findings, potentially paired with a broader workshop/event for employers and stakeholders.
- **Big Ideas:** Host prospect event; Host target market event; Host RAGBRAI takeover.

Budget

The following budget represents our best estimate of what it will take to execute the recommended marketing tactics in the first three years. We have included “adequate” and “optimal” levels for each tactic. The budget is intended to provide direction in terms of priorities and resources needed and is subject to change based on specific vendor and platform pricing. In many cases, individual line-items can be scaled up or down.

Please note that the cost of internal staff time/resources is not included in this budget.

Marketing Recommendation	Year 1 Adequate	Year 1 Ample		Year 2 Adequate	Year 2 Ample		Year 3 Adequate	Year 3 Ample
Internal Marketing & Partner Engagement								
Regional Public Relations	\$30,000	\$60,000		\$25,000	\$50,000		\$25,000	\$50,000
Regional Brand Launch	\$20,000	\$35,000		N/A	N/A		N/A	N/A
Branding								
Regional Talent Brand Development	\$80,000	\$100,000		N/A	N/A		N/A	N/A
Campaign Testing Adequate = internal testing only; Ample = internal and external, including panel expenses)	\$3,500	\$15,000		N/A	N/A		N/A	N/A
Campaign Collateral (Regional overview booklet, rebranding existing talent materials and merch)	\$20,000	\$35,000		N/A	N/A		N/A	N/A

Budget (cont.)

Marketing Recommendation	Year 1 Adequate	Year 1 Ample		Year 2 Adequate	Year 2 Ample		Year 3 Adequate	Year 3 Ample
Website								
Website Development (Adequate = Microsite, Ample = Full Website)	\$80,000	\$150,000		N/A	N/A		N/A	N/A
SEO Management & Maintenance (Adequate Year 1 is Strategy only; Ample includes implementation)	N/A	N/A		\$8,000	\$35,000		\$42,000	\$54,000
Hosting, Maintenance & Licensing (Hosting at \$1440, Maintenance 4 or 5 hours per month at \$185/hour, Licensing for two tools or all tools recommended)	\$18,800	\$26,700		\$18,800	\$26,700		\$18,800	\$26,700
Media Relations								
Agency Fees for Proactive Pitching, Inbound Reporter Visits	N/A	N/A		\$144,000	\$180,000		\$144,000	\$180,000
Expenses (hosting journalists, in-bound FAM tours)	N/A	N/A		\$15,000	\$30,000		\$15,000	\$30,000
Social Media								
Agency Fees for Strategy & Ongoing Content Creation	\$48,000	\$60,000		\$60,000	\$84,000		\$60,000	\$84,000
Community Management	In-House	In-House		In-House	In-House		In-House	In-House

Budget (cont.)

Marketing Recommendation	Year 1 Adequate	Year 1 Ample		Year 2 Adequate	Year 2 Ample		Year 3 Adequate	Year 3 Ample
Digital Advertising								
Paid Media Management/ Agency Fees	\$50,000	\$60,000		\$70,000	\$85,000		\$70,000	\$85,000
Paid Media Ad Spend	\$125,000	\$175,000		\$200,000	\$300,000		\$200,000	\$300,000
Imagery & Video								
Talent Image Database (building out campaign imagery and live/work assets)	\$10,000	\$15,000		N/A	N/A		N/A	N/A
Video	\$20,000	\$60,000		N/A	N/A		N/A	N/A
Research								
Replicate perception research study in three years	N/A	N/A		N/A	N/A		\$38,000	\$50,500
TOTAL	\$505,300	\$791,700		\$540,800	\$790,700		\$612,800	\$860,200

Big Ideas								
Prospect Weekends	N/A	N/A		\$50,000	\$150,000		\$150,000	\$300,000
Hawkeye Target Market Event	N/A	N/A		\$45,000	\$70,000		\$45,000	\$70,000
RAGBRAI Takeover	N/A	N/A		\$30,000	\$50,000		\$30,000	\$50,000
Talent CRM	\$25,000	\$35,000		\$25,000	\$35,000		\$25,000	\$35,000
TOTAL BIG IDEAS BUDGET	\$25,000	\$35,000		\$150,000	\$305,000		\$250,000	\$455,000

TOTAL INCLUDING BIG IDEAS BUDGET	\$530,300	\$826,700		\$690,800	\$1,095,700		\$862,800	\$1,315,200
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Key Performance Indicators

Selling a relocation to a new region is not as simple or quick as selling a pair of shoes, so the measures of success are necessarily more nuanced and longer-term. At the end of the day, it is up to your employers to decide who they hire and recruit – and most people will not relocate without a job offer. What Greater Cedar Rapids can do is get the region on the radar of talent in external markets and spur engagement that ultimately increases the talent pipeline for regional employers and improves perceptions of the region. Ultimately, the goal is to keep growing the region's working-age population, but short-, mid- and long-term metrics are needed to give an accurate picture of the success of a talent initiative.

The following key performance indicators will help to benchmark and track the success of the the talent attraction campaign recommended in this document.

- 1. Generate Interest in Greater Cedar Rapids as a Place to Live and Work:** An overarching goal of this campaign is to generate interest in Greater Cedar Rapids among its target talent audiences. This will be measured through key marketing engagement metrics. For each tactic and channel recommended, DCI has provided benchmarks and recommended KPIs to track the success of the marketing campaign. A full list is provided in Appendix C.
- 2. Connect Talent with Greater Cedar Rapids Employers:** Expand the employer pipeline by funneling talent to jobs in region within target sectors. The more qualified candidates your employers have to choose from, the stronger the regional talent pool, and the more potential relocations. Track the short- and mid-term impacts of the campaign through the following:
 1. Report on Job Views on the website quarterly via digital marketing analytics.
 2. Establish an annual employer survey or BRE survey question subset for the talent initiative to determine the extent to which employers feel that their candidate pipeline has expanded as a result of this initiative, and whether they feel better equipped to sell the region, in addition to their company, by leveraging the marketing tools recommended in this strategy.
- 3. Improve Perceptions of Greater Cedar Rapids:** Aim to increase the percentage of talent in target markets interested in relocating to Greater Cedar Rapids by 10-12% over three years. Measure this by replicating the survey in Year 3. Understanding that perception shifts are both mid- and long-term, we recommend continually replicating the survey to observe how the needle has moved across key livability and career factors as they relate to Greater Cedar Rapids, and tweak the strategy accordingly.
- 4. Maintain Working-Age Population Growth:** Greater Cedar Rapids is already outpacing the national average when it comes to growth in working-age population. With that in mind, a realistic goal is to target a consistent working-age population (ages 20-64) growth of 5% in Linn County over the next five years. As this data has the greatest potential to lag, ensure that key leadership and stakeholders understand the value in measuring the above metrics as a way to track and benchmark incremental gains.



Thank You

Development Counsellors International (DCI) would like to thank the Collaborative Growth Team for the opportunity to develop a data-driven Marketing Blueprint for Greater Cedar Rapids. We are confident that with your leadership and the collaboration of your stakeholders, you will be successful in leveraging this report to elevate the region's image as a great place to live and work, and ultimately attracting and retaining talent to meet the needs of area businesses.

Special thank you to City of Cedar Rapids, Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance, City of Marion, Marion Economic Development Corporation, City of Hiawatha and Hiawatha Economic Development Corporation.