

# COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY FRAMEWORK FOR THE GREATER LIMA REGION

Prepared for



This report was prepared under contract with Allen County Commissioners, with financial support from the Office of Economic Adjustment, Department of Defense. The content reflects the views of kglobal, and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Office of Economic Adjustment or the Department of Defense.

**June 2017**

**Allen County Board of Commissioners**

144 S Main St #200

Lima, OH 45801

**kglobal**  
public affairs + public relations



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

BACKGROUND

3

PHASE I (LOCAL)  
DEVELOP “REAL AMERICAN”  
BRAND + CAMPAIGN

6

PHASE II (LOCAL AND REGIONAL)  
LAUNCH THE “REAL AMERICAN” CAMPAIGN +  
INTRODUCE THE GREATER LIMA REGION

10

PHASE III (LOCAL + REGIONAL + NATIONAL)  
WIDE ROLLOUT

15

In 2015, community stakeholders in Allen County, Ohio, launched a two-part planning process to position the Greater Lima Region for future economic and workforce development. The Greater Lima Region comprises Allen County and seven neighboring counties: Hancock, Auglaize, Mercer, Putnam, Paulding, Van Wert, and Hardin.

Part I examined **existing regional assets and regional economic trends** through a combination of research and community stakeholder meetings. The results of these efforts were presented in three reports: Regional Asset Inventory & Readiness Report; Scenarios of the Future Report; and Strategic Action Plan Report. Together, these reports not only defined the innovation and workforce needs of key industries, but they also included recommendations for stakeholders to collaboratively and proactively implement creative solutions to build a vibrant regional economy.

Part II focused on fostering and improving collaboration to meet **three unified economic and community development goals:**

- + Grow employment by 22,000 jobs and provide the qualified regional workforce to fill those jobs;
- + Be recognized and viewed as an ideal location for new businesses to locate and existing businesses to expand; and
- + Be recognized nationally as one of the most livable communities in the Midwest.

Meeting these goals necessitated two sets of processes:

- + strategic alignment of stakeholders (government agencies, businesses, occupational skills clusters, and community groups) to synchronize economic development activities; and
- + coordinated communication of positive attributes and economic opportunities locally, regionally, and nationally.

## BACKGROUND

To address the strategic alignment challenge, the Allen County Board of Commissioners under the direction of the Allen County Office of Economic Adjustment, retained Future iQ Partners, a Minneapolis-based consultancy, to assess and define the model for future collaboration in the region. Future iQ delivered its recommendations in a series of comprehensive reports, including: Regional Gap Analysis (including a Regional Workforce Analysis, a Regional Supply Chain Analysis, and a Regional Innovation Analysis), a Regional Network Mapping Analysis, resulting in a Greater Lima Region Collaborative Growth Plan.

To address the coordinated communication challenge, kglobal, a DC-based consultancy, was retained to develop a comprehensive communications strategy. The strategy includes three primary deliverables: Findings Report; Communications Strategy Framework, Communications Plan; and Implementation Plan.

Based on independent research and stakeholder interviews, kglobal arrived at two major findings:

- + the region suffered from a perception problem – the “good news” story was being lost in cynicism, negative publicity, and outdated stereotypes; and
- + the same coordination and alignment issues constraining economic development were also undermining the community’s communications, resulting in mixed messages and duplication of effort.

## TO ADDRESS THESE FINDINGS, KGLOBAL DEVELOPED A COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY IN THREE PHASES.

### PHASE I (LOCAL): DEVELOP THE “REAL AMERICAN” BRAND AND CAMPAIGN

In concert with key stakeholders, kglobal developed the “Real American” brand to represent the next evolution of the community’s Real American Strength campaign. While “Real American Strength” spoke primarily to employers (particularly in the manufacturing sector), “Real American” is intended to appeal to a broader set of audiences – each of which is vital to the region’s economic future. The “Real American” brand presents a “rallying point” around which the Greater Lima Region can position itself with unified messages that focus on both identity and experience. The brand (visuals) sets the direction for one look, one voice, and common themes, images, and words to be used by public, private, and nonprofit partners. The objective of the campaign (tactics) is to communicate all the region’s assets, thereby strengthening initiatives aimed at positioning the Greater Lima Region as an optimal place for business, talent, and economic growth. It is designed to address lingering (mis)perceptions and recast the region as a great place to live, work, build, explore, and invest.

### PHASE II (LOCAL AND REGIONAL): LAUNCH THE “REAL AMERICAN” CAMPAIGN AND INTRODUCE THE GREATER LIMA REGION

As the campaign moves from local (Allen County) to regional (eight county region), it is vital that an entity be established to support a broader set of stakeholders. In Phase II sees the formal launch of the Real American campaign and the introduction of the Greater Lima Region as marker for economic development

activity in the region. Building on common themes established by the “Real American” campaign, the Lima/Allen County Chamber of Commerce and the Allen Economic Development Group (AEDG), which together make up the Greater Lima Region, Inc. will coordinate and promote common messages and expand the brand identity within the eight-county region.

### PHASE III (LOCAL, REGIONAL, AND NATIONAL) – WIDE ROLLOUT

Phase III is the culmination of the work established in the two previous phases. The “Real American” campaign will continue to underpin all communications produced on behalf of the region, and the Greater Lima Region, Inc. will leverage those messages to align with the three unified economic and community development goals to promote the region both within Ohio and on the national stage.

This Communications Strategy will support the following objectives for the Greater Lima Region:

Compete more effectively for investment from the public and private sectors;

- + Recruit talent and job-creating organizations to the area;
- + Attract customers, visitors, and residents;
- + Encourage innovative and sustainable development that supports the Region’s long-term vision; and
- + Establish Lima-proper as the center point of a dynamic region for living, working, learning, and exploring.



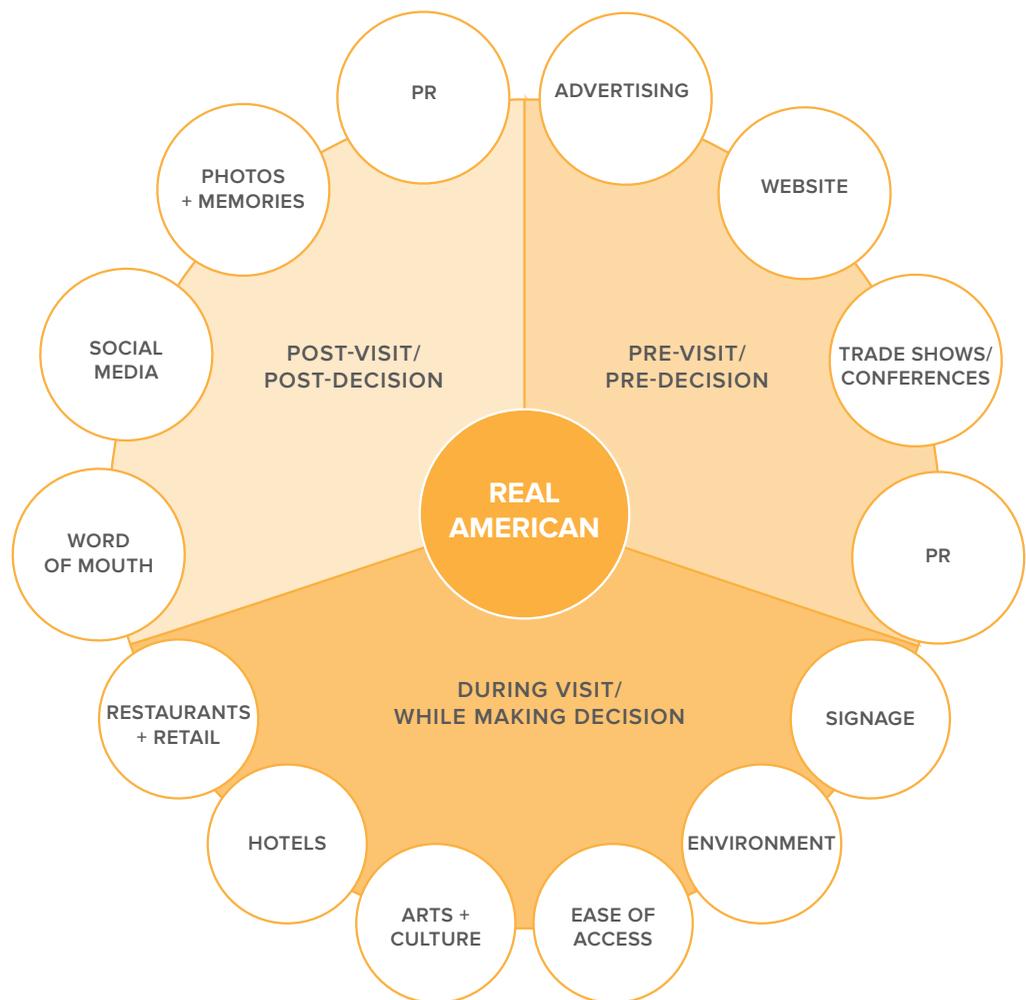
PHASE I (LOCAL):  
DEVELOP “REAL AMERICAN”  
BRAND + CAMPAIGN

# PHASE I Local

## DEVELOP “REAL AMERICAN” BRAND + CAMPAIGN

The “Real American” brand presents a “rallying point” around which the Greater Lima Region can position itself with unified messages that focus on both identity and experience. The brand itself sets the direction for one look, one voice, and common themes, images, and words to be used by public, private, and nonprofit partners. Maximizing impact requires a campaign that includes constant outreach, education, oversight, and coaching for key organizations and individuals to understand the brand rationale and how to effectively use consistent brand messages.

### 360° “REAL AMERICAN” EXPERIENCE



---

### ACTIVITIES + TIMELINE (JANUARY 2017 – JULY 2017)

*\*activities should be performed in the order listed*

#### 1. DEVELOP CAMPAIGN NAME

#### 2. DEVELOP COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

It will define:

- + what the campaign is designed to accomplish (objectives);
- + ways in which those objectives will be accomplished (themes, messages, roles and responsibilities);
- + to whom communications will be addressed (audiences); and
- + how to measure the results (evaluation).

#### 3. DEVELOP IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

This is a roadmap for communicating “Real American” messages to key audiences. It will:

- + address how to accomplish campaign objectives (tools and timetable); and
- + organize tasks in an editorial calendar that outlines roughly what projects, events, and initiatives will be accomplished and when (monthly, weekly, etc.).

#### 4. ESTABLISH COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

The Committee will:

- + provide a focus for communications activities conducted by key stakeholders;
- + help all stakeholders set mutual priorities;
- + provide a sense of order and control over campaign activities;
- + establish ambassadors for the campaign and staff to support it;
- + protect the campaign from duplication of effort and promotion of mixed messages; and
- + ensure mutual accountability.

---

(Cont.)

## 5. Design Brand Collateral

The collateral will comprise the visual materials to support the execution of the “Real American” campaign.

**Dependency:** Contingent upon budget approval for supplemental scope of work.

**Dependency:** Establish budget for current or original photography.

## 6. Create an online hub for the “Real American” brand management

The ability of the Communications Committee to effectively share and leverage brand resources depends on the creation of a shared repository for all brand collateral, written and multimedia content, and shared calendar. Many mass market options for collaboration are available, such as Basecamp for task management and Dropbox for file storage.

**Dependency:** Contingent upon budget approval for software subscriptions.

## 7. Conduct “Real American” brand workshop

The workshop will train the Communications Committee on how to appropriately leverage branded materials and familiarize it with the Implementation Plan activities.

---

## RESPONSIBILITY

kglobal, working in coordination with AEDG, the Lima/Allen County Chamber of Commerce, and the Communications Committee.



PHASE II  
(LOCAL AND REGIONAL):  
LAUNCH THE “REAL AMERICAN”  
CAMPAIGN + INTRODUCE THE  
GREATER LIMA REGION

---

## **INTRODUCE THE GREATER LIMA REGION**

The **Greater Lima Region, Inc.** is a private-public partnership and the organizing entity for economic and community development activity in Allen County. The newly formed 501(c)(3) will expand its purview to include seven additional counties in Northwest Ohio, which together will comprise the “Greater Lima Region.” With a renewed focus on collaborative growth, the Greater Lima Region Inc. launches in 2017 as the funding driver for new business attraction, workforce growth, and economic prosperity. As the organizing entity, the Greater Lima Region, Inc., will focus its communications to build membership, expand its brand identity within the eight-county region, and compete effectively with other regional economic development consortiums. As such, the launch of the Greater Lima Region Inc., will coincide with the launch of the “**Real American**” campaign. The themes will be used to not only the Greater Lima Region as a place (so-called “pin on the map”) but also serve as an image-boosting campaign to better recruit business, jobs, and talent to the area.

Leveraging the “Real American” themes, Phase II of the Communications Strategy features the launch of a communications program and the introduction of the Greater Lima Region to generate opportunity and foster economic growth in Northwest Ohio.

---

**ACTIVITIES + TIMELINE (SEPTEMBER 2017 – JANUARY 2018)**

*\*activities should be performed in the order listed*

**1. Write a Charter and define the purpose and intention of the Greater Lima Region**

Codify its:

- + purpose;
- + mandate;
- + goals;
- + partners;
- + constituents;
- + structure; and
- + membership.

**Dependency:** Establish a budget to write Charter and outreach plan to support partner/member attraction development.

**2. Appoint/Hire Communications Lead/Outreach Coordinator for the Greater Lima Region, Inc.**

The Communications Lead will assume communications responsibilities for both the Greater Lima Region, Inc., (as an organization) and the Real American brand (as a campaign). This person should be hired as early as possible in Phase II to ensure a seamless launch of the campaign and the region. The Greater Lima Region, Inc., will need to establish requirements (and a budget) for this position; draft a hiring requisition; and recruit for this role.

**Dependency:** Determine whether this is a hire position or retainer contract with an outside vendor.

**3. Develop a Greater Lima Region Website**

The website will serve as a digital home for the Greater Lima Region leveraging “Real American” campaign themes. The website will focus on economic and community development and explain the organization’s rationale, governance structure, regional partners, and membership parameters (See Columbus 2020). The website will be managed by the Communications Lead/Outreach Coordinator.

**Dependency:** Establishment of a budget for website design and development.

**Dependency:** Hiring of a Communications Lead.

---

**(Cont.)**

#### **4. Build the “Real American” Website**

The website will serve as the digital home for the “Real American” campaign. It will be modeled after Omaha’s successful “We Don’t Coast” website. This website should replace wearelimaallencounty.com and move to a new web domain. The Greater Lima Region Inc., will need to establish a budget for website design and development.

**Dependency:** Approval from the Lima/Allen County Chamber of Commerce to update and replace the wearelimaallencounty.com website.

**Dependency:** Identification and purchase of a new web domain.

#### **5. Create Marketing Materials**

Effective outreach relies on the development of effective marketing materials targeted for internal audiences (regional partners) and external audiences (businesses, other economic development bodies, and government agencies). The look, messaging, and feel should leverage “Real American” themes, including Skill (work), Strength (build), and Possibility (invest). For an example of how Greater Lima Region messages can be fused with “Real American” themes, see attachment:

<http://columbusregion.com/columbus/media/columbus/pdfs/brochures/columbus-region-overview-brochure.pdf?ext=.pdf>

Production of a video highlighting the region is also a vital component of the marketing materials. It can live on the website, online, and distributed across web and social platforms.

**Dependency:** Establishing a budget to produce the video and hiring a producer to film and edit.

**Dependency:** Establishing a budget and hiring a graphic designer.

#### **6. Build “Real American” social media presence**

“Real American” will have accounts on social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat.

**Dependency:** Hiring a dedicated Communications Lead/Outreach Coordinator to oversee the daily maintenance of the platforms or assigning this task to the Lima/Allen County Chamber of Commerce.

---

**(Cont.)**

**7. Develop an Outreach Plan**

The Outreach Plan is designed to increase buy-in from regional partners and introduce the benefits of the region to other counties within it. The plan will identify target audiences, assign outreach responsibilities, and define platforms (social media, advertising, and traditional media). It will also determine parameters for how new partners can participate in the “Real American” campaign, and how communications leads from partner organizations promote the region, and whether they will participate in the Communications Committee. The Communications Plan will be managed by the Communications Lead/Outreach Coordinator.

***Dependency:*** Hiring of a Communications Lead.

---

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- + Retain an outside consultant to develop the website and marketing materials
- + Create new domain name for wearelimaallencounty.com in support of the campaign

***Dependency:*** Getting buy-in from the Lima/Allen County Chamber of Commerce to re-work the website and establishing a budget to make the necessary changes.

- + Establish dedicated “Real American” social media pages, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat

***Dependency:*** Hiring a dedicated Communications Lead to oversee the daily maintenance of the platforms.

---

**CONSIDERATIONS**

- + How will the Greater Lima Region website work with “wearelimaallencounty.com”? We believe these platforms have two different audiences – Greater Lima Region (business, talent, job seekers) and wearelimaallencounty.com (tourists, job seekers, employers, employees, community members etc). As the two main web platforms, they should “play well” together.

A close-up photograph of a person's face, slightly out of focus, holding a lit sparkler. The sparkler is the central focus, emitting a bright, golden-yellow light with numerous sparks radiating outwards. The background is dark, with some blurred lights, suggesting an outdoor night setting. The overall mood is celebratory and festive.

PHASE III  
(LOCAL + REGIONAL + NATIONAL):  
WIDE ROLLOUT

---

## **WIDE ROLLOUT**

Before launching Phase III, each of the eight Greater Lima Region counties must be represented – by membership of either its economic development agency or Chamber of Commerce. Without this regional buy-in, expanding communications statewide and nationally risks a false start from which it may be very difficult to recover. Both the organizing structure (Greater Lima Region, Inc.) and the messages (Real American) must be fully aligned to make a “splash” to statewide and national audiences.

### **ACTIVITIES + TIMELINE (JANUARY 1 – JUNE 30, 2019)**

*\*activities should be performed in the order listed*

#### **1. Expand Outreach Plan to include B2B, G2B, and B2G**

#### **2. Launch targeted earned media campaign to trade publications using “Real American” themes and messages**

Earned media is essentially the coverage you can’t buy. The Greater Lima Region has a great story to tell but to disseminate news related to business, workforce, and investment, it must develop a robust plan to attract the interest of the gatekeepers – influencers, media, and online publications (bloggers etc.) – who hold the key to accessing their audiences and talking about the Greater Lima Region content. For example, earned media would seek not only feature news placements but also quote area experts in an article on relevant topics. Earned media is essential to generating third-party credibility – someone who isn’t paid by the Greater Lima Region but believes enough in its promise and attributes to mention, quote, or promote brand content.

#### **3. Launch advertising campaign regionally and nationally**

With paid media, the Greater Lima Region can buy access in the form of social ads, print ads, outdoor, etc. to promote specific content. For example, you may elect to initiate a digital pay-per-click campaign for keywords around trending topics related to “workforce” or “manufacturing” to gain additional visitors to your website.

With paid media, the Greater Lima Region is in control of the content BUT it involves the use of the organizations brand dollars.

---

## **RESPONSIBILITY**

Greater Lima Region Inc. Communications Lead and Communications Committee

---

## **RECOMMENDATION**

- + Retain an outside consultant or public relations firm to establish an advertising budget, pitch media, and design ads for placement.



2001 L Street NW  
6th Floor  
Washington, DC 20036

Lauren Martens, Vice President  
lauren.martens@kglobal.com  
202.306.3295

Randy DeCleene, Partner  
randy.decleene@kglobal.com  
202.295.7931

[kglobal.com](http://kglobal.com)