

SMART MOVE FARGO MOORHEAD: COMMUNICATIONS PLAN FOR THE GREATER
FARGO MOORHEAD EDC

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ABSTRACT

An economic development corporation is, in many respects, the marketing arm of a community or metro area. The Organization needs to effectively sell the region to prospective companies and residents. The Organization also needs to tell its own story assuring its stakeholders that the Organization is effective. To do that, the Organization needs a communications plan.

This paper uses stakeholder theory to evaluate the investors' roles to drive the communication plan. The paper also reviews economic development theories on marketing effectiveness. Finally, a survey of the Organization's electronic newsletter recipients was conducted evaluating current communications efforts. A majority of participants represent investor companies, and the remaining participants represent partner institutions and primary-sector companies.

Together the research and survey results provide feedback to evaluate the 2008 communication plan and provide guidelines to create a current communication plan.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Greater Fargo Moorhead Economic Development Corporation attempts to grow the economy and improve the quality of life for the region's citizens. The Organization works to attract new businesses and support existing companies' expansions therefore creating jobs. Examples of local company support are workforce development assistance or air service attraction efforts. Changing technology and the potential for frequent leadership change within the Organization create a need for an updated communication plan. The communication plan can align the Organizations marketing efforts and direct investor communication despite Organizational changes. Literature review including the marketing practices of successful economic development organizations and stakeholder theory provide background for an updated communication plan. A survey to current electronic newsletter recipients supplements the literature review.

The literature review showed that the website is the central marketing piece for successful economic development organizations. Using the website along with other communication efforts drives their target market, mainly prospective new businesses, to the website. Further, literature supports the importance of stakeholder analysis. Stakeholders are those organizations that benefit if the Organization is successful or conversely have something to lose if the Organization fails in its mission. Communicating with and providing information to those stakeholders supports the Organization's overall mission. Communication also keeps stakeholders engaged both short and long term solidifying stakeholder support. Survey participants revealed a desire for more communication from the Organization and identified a preference for email communication.

As the public relations and communications manager, the author has extensive knowledge of the Organization and its investors and can speak to the marketing and communication strategies.

CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION

Developing the Economy

With more than 210,000 residents, the Fargo, N.D.-Moorhead, Minn., metropolitan statistical area (Fargo MSA) lays claim to steady growth, a highly trained and educated workforce, and a business-friendly environment (Greater Fargo Moorhead Economic Development Corporation [GFMEDC], 2012a). These characteristics offer an excellent opportunity to prospective businesses. The Greater Fargo Moorhead Economic Development Corporation's (referred to as the Organization in the remainder of the document) mission is to grow the economy through the attraction, retention, and expansion of primary-sector companies (GFMEDC, 2012b). The Organization is a 501c3 non-profit organization tasked with growing the Fargo MSA's economy which includes all of Cass County, N.D., and Clay County, Minn. The Organization helps grow the economy through its efforts to attract, retain, and expand primary-sector companies.

A "primary-sector company" (GFMEDC, 2011) is one that exports a majority of its goods and services outside the trade area therefore bringing new wealth into the region. A primary-sector company can be located anywhere in the world. Examples of primary-sector companies include Microsoft, Case New Holland, and John Deere Electronic Solutions (formerly Phoenix International). Growing the region's base of primary-sector companies creates new money that circulates and supports regional growth. For example, the region will have more grocery stores, more banks, more hair salons, etc. If the Organization is successful growing the primary sector, it will create additional employment opportunities, population, and tax base to better compete in a global economy. Ultimately the Organization aims to improve the quality of life in the Fargo MSA.

Economic development organizations may be part of a city, a chamber of commerce, or a stand-alone organization. The Organization is neither part of a city government nor a chamber of commerce but is a separate entity supported by businesses and public dollars. Economic

development organizations complement chambers of commerce but are unique in their focus on job creation through the retention, expansion, and attraction of primary-sector companies. The International Economic Development Council (IEDC; 2012) defines economic development as “a program, group of policies or activity that seeks to improve the economic well-being and quality of life for a community, by creating and/or retaining jobs that facilitate growth and provide a stable tax base”(n. p.).

Rationale

The Organization is in a unique position in its ability and arguably its responsibility to be the marketing arm of the region. Its mission is to grow and diversify the economy in the Fargo MSA to create jobs and improve the quality of life for the people who call the metro home. To succeed in that mission, the Organization must market to various target audiences. The first target audience is potential businesses, either start-ups or businesses expanding their footprint into the area. The Organization is also challenged to recruit and retain residents, convincing them the metro is a smart place to work and live. To accomplish this mission, the support of investors is imperative. Last but not least, the Organization must promote to current primary-sector companies the benefits of staying and possibly expanding in the area.

In 2008, the Organization developed a 17-page communication plan that was meant to be a starting point for a communication strategy. Now almost four years later, the document needs to evolve. To succeed at marketing to and communicating with key target audiences, the Organization needs a plan that addresses three areas. First, technology has significantly changed the way businesses and the world communicate. There are more communication channels such as electronic newsletters, blogging, and social media (e.g., Twitter and Facebook). These avenues of communication are an opportunity and a responsibility relative to joining and monitoring conversations. Second, changing leadership has created an opportunity and a challenge in the organization’s continuity and direction that can be addressed in a

communication plan. Third, the Organizations marketing efforts are fragmented. Those efforts, if evaluated, can be focused to address various stakeholders' needs and aligning marketing strategies to create efficiencies in processes and avoiding overlap.

Communication Channels

The website is an important marketing tool for any economic development-focused organization. According to a study done by GIS Planning, when marketing to site selection consultants researching potential business locations, the website "is typically the first point of contact with an economic development organization" (Ubalde & Simundza, 2008, p. 6).

The Organization has two websites, the main Organization site, www.gfmedc.com, and CareerFM, www.careerfm.com. To date, CareerFM has been kept somewhat isolated from the Organization. This separation has been done to allow CareerFM and the activities of the workforce council (which is directed by Organization staff) to be less conservative than the activities of the Organization. However, the funding has been provided by the Organization, and the activities of CareerFM have been directed by the Organization, its staff, and its board of directors along with the workforce council. CareerFM is focused on marketing job opportunities to those outside the region. It also highlights quality of life and quality of place. The CareerFM website along with the organization's workforce development efforts provide a large benefit to employers; however, they appear to go largely unnoticed under the current structure. The Organization's main website is a resource for information about the regional economy including available resources to companies and start-ups as well as information on the region's current economic climate. The site has the potential to become a very effective marketing tool if designed to be more content driven, containing resources that benefit potential businesses. As is, the site is not user-friendly, intuitive, dynamic, nor content driven.

One area the current website is lacking relates to business development and marketing the region to new businesses or businesses expanding into the region. Although available

through many economic development organizations around the country, the current website does not offer a central location to search available commercial real estate. This lack of resource puts the region at a disadvantage relative to other regions and represents a missed opportunity to be placed on a prospective company's short list when a company or site selector determines a geographic region in which to locate a new or expanded business.

In addition, the website currently does not provide or link to information about the many things happening in the Fargo area. This information could provide current residents more information about what is happening in the metro thus driving an internal marketing strategy and allowing current residents to become more effective ambassadors. Those ambassadors are our biggest and most effective marketing and sales team with the ability to help spread positive and accurate information about the metro.

Overall, the communication plan does not address current technology and social media which present opportunities for expanded marketing opportunities. According to Templin (2012), "the most obvious opportunity is in external facing applications where the corporation not only messages but interacts with partners and customers" (p. 28). Beyond the two websites, the Organization and CareerFM have a very minimal presence in social media. CareerFM has a Facebook page which is slowly but steadily gaining a fan base with more than 120 users in April 2012. Successful economic development corporations have created jobs and helped local businesses, in part, through social media. According to McFarland, "leveraging the Internet and social media to achieve economic development goals and to build connections to international companies" (2011, n. p.).

In March, 2011, the Organization began to send monthly electronic newsletters. These newsletters have received a positive response with an average open rate (percentage of recipients who open the email) of 25-30%. The current newsletter goes to approximately 300 investors, the same list that previously received the economic indicators. The economic indicators were expanded to contain related economic development and Organization news.

The Organization's regional and national media strategy has gradually increased from just reporting on events to including an attempt to become more of a thought leader in economic development. For example, in the past, the Organization sent out press releases to announce a company expansion made possible by the Organization's involvement to trigger a low-interest loan from the Bank of North Dakota and an additional participating bank. The program is called Partnering for Assistance in Community Expansion (PACE) loan. Print media has often published news of the business expansion but is less likely to include information about the Organization's role.

Leadership Change

The leadership of the Organization, namely the president and its board chair, has historically been the face of the organization. The president represents the organization reflecting on local economic conditions both in media interviews and in presentations to various organizations and groups. Change in leadership has allowed for more communication and increased opportunities for partnerships and has brought forth new ideas for collaborations. Previous changes in leadership philosophy have also allowed staff to take on a more significant role in representing the organization. Staff members have participated in media interviews and have joined advisory committees. For example, the Organization's workforce development director was on the cover of *Prairie Business Magazine* in November, 2011. Staff members have also represented the Organization on boards such as the Economic Development North Dakota (EDND) Organization. The GFMEDC staff has also begun to nurture local, regional, and state-wide partnerships to build and maintain that continuity. According to Gilmore (2003), new leaders "must look both to the past and to the future. They affirm some aspects of the history of the organization...they also carry into the organization new values" (p. 11).

However, the transition between leaders also creates uncertainty. Gilmore (2003) states, "leadership transitions are important because they involve periods of destabilization" (p.12).

Frequent leadership change creates potential for a loss in continuity that can be addressed through long-term planning documents such as a communication plan. A communication plan could direct staff activities and marketing efforts aligning those efforts with the overall strategy set by the Organization's board of directors and the Organization's partners.

The Organization's Role as a Leader

The Organization has accomplished or has facilitated groups and processes to achieve many great things. For example, the Organization helped write and testified in order to provide information leading to the North Dakota legislature's decision to pass the Automation Tax Credit in 2011. However, historically the organization has not done an effective job telling its story. One challenge has been that the actual accomplishments are hard to measure and difficult to explain to citizens unfamiliar with economic development. For example, a citizen first has to understand the definition of primary sector and why the GFMEDC focuses on primary sector.

Many times the Organization simply connects two groups with the long-term goal of job creation. The Organization does not actually create jobs but facilitates job creation. Further, the Organization, at times, faces local politics; while one group may praise an action of the Organization, another group may criticize the same action. Potential criticism has made the Organization reluctant to publicize much of the efforts of its board and staff. While the Organization has been able to reduce criticism, the lack of communication has prevented opportunities for understanding and awareness of the Organization's work and its successes.

Realigning Functions, Reducing Fragmentation

The Organization has several functions that focus on business development, workforce development, and investor relations (GFMEDC, 2012d). Those functions have unique target audiences and have been separated by job functions. Business development and workforce

development have done separate marketing strategies, and while the two departments may communicate, the two have never converged. While those strategies are admittedly very different, proper alignment has the potential to create a more streamlined and effective overall marketing strategy. Externally, the Organization has the opportunity to become the marketing entity for Fargo Moorhead MSA. In early 2011, the Organization began developing a branding strategy called Smart Move Fargo Moorhead to better align all marketing efforts.

The three areas, communication channels, leadership, and fragmentation described above provide opportunities for the Organization to enhance and expand its current communication plan to better position the Organization and the region in the global economy. An effective plan will put the region in the best position to compete for workforce, new businesses, and entrepreneurs looking for a place to call home. Through a structured communication plan, the Organization can help market the region as a “smart move.”

The following chapter reviews the Organization’s internal structure and relevant literature focusing on the challenges of identifying stakeholders and creating appropriate marketing plans based on the target audiences.

CHAPTER TWO. LITERATURE REVIEW

Executive Summary of the GFMEDC

The Organization is supported by both public money and private investors¹ who have a stake in the Organization's ability to grow the economy and create jobs. Both Cass County in North Dakota and Clay County in Minnesota fund the Organization making up approximately half the funding. The private sector provides the remainder of the funds. The Organization maintains roughly 160 private-sector investors. Banks and utility companies are typical investors. An investor contributes thousands of dollars every year because a stable and growing economy translates into continued success for their business and the region.

The Organization is directed by a 33-member board of directors. The board is made up of investors and regional stakeholders including university presidents, mayors, city and county representatives, and school superintendents (GFMEDC, 2012c).

The Organization Staff

Organization staff works to stimulate economic growth through targeted strategies to attract new primary-sector businesses while simultaneously responding to the needs of current primary-sector companies to retain those companies and help them expand locally (GFMEDC, 2012b). Four main roles outside the president focus on efforts to assist in economic growth. The vice president of retention and expansion meets with local primary-sector companies to understand their challenges and to discuss incentives for expansions. Business retention visits focus on ways to help the companies succeed. Help from the Organization may include efforts to attract and retain air service providing the company better national and global connections or by providing connections to city government for tax incentives to grow or expand the company locally versus another location. The Organization manages the Growth Initiative Fund (GIF), a

¹ An investor is defined as a company or organization that contributes a minimum of \$500 per year in support of the Organization's economic development efforts. The investor anticipates the benefits of long term job creation. The investor organization does not receive a return in the form of stocks or dividends.

501c3 that provides low interest loans that trigger grants or low interest loans from the Bank of North Dakota. The program is called the PACE program. This provides an additional low-cost option for primary-sector companies looking to expand. The vice president of business development strategizes ways to attract new companies or to help entrepreneurs start a business in the Fargo MSA. The vice president might put together a proposal for a site selection consultant or potential business contacts including a specialized site visit. The vice president has also been involved in work with local colleges and universities to align curriculum or to foster stronger relationships between researchers and industry.

The director of workforce development drives initiatives focused on attracting workforce as well as growing a pipeline of talent for future positions. The director maintains committees focused on attracting and retaining people. The director also works directly with companies doing community tours which give potential recruits a better idea of what the metro has to offer. Finally, the communication director manages investor communication and works with local and national media to help tell the stories of the region and the businesses within it. The communication director also manages the brand of the organization. The president directs all the activities of the organization and is a liaison to the partner organizations in and around the region. The president also speaks to organizations around the area and is seen as an economic development expert.

To do the work of economic development, the staff follows a plan of work that is reviewed and updated yearly and is approved by the board of directors. The plan of work contains roughly ten objectives with several strategies and tactics. Objectives focus on supporting the retention and expansion of existing major employers; attracting new businesses and focusing on entrepreneurs; recruiting and retaining residents; building regional capacity, and implementing the Cass Clay Economic Plan; and communicating with all constituencies and influencing state economic development policy. One strategy, for example, is to work with the Fargo Airport Authority to expand air service. Better connectivity and more reasonable fares not

only improve the quality of life for residents and businesses, but better air service helps recruit and retain businesses.

Organization Support

The Organization's main supporters, as stated above, are the investors. Cass County is the largest investor providing one mil levy every year toward economic development. Clay County provides \$85,000. Of the roughly 160 private-sector investors, investments vary greatly. While some provide the minimum level investment of \$500 per year, several investors provide support of \$5,000 or more. The largest private-sector investor gave \$50,000 in 2011.

The Organization could not grow the economy without the help of many partners in both the private and public sectors. The university systems play a large role in helping to drive the economy. The Organization partners on many projects with the Tri-College University, consisting of Minnesota State University, Moorhead, Concordia College, and North Dakota State University. One example is an alignment of curriculum which allowed for a vaccinology² minor, the first of its kind in the nation. The new minor aligns with the job growth anticipated through the Cass Clay Economic Plan. The vaccinology minor supports a component of the plan focused on creating a cluster of businesses and talent in the biopharmaceutical sector.

The Organization also partners with private-sector companies, and, in particular, those in charge of hiring. The manufacturing workforce council formed in 2011 highlights this partnership. The council, started by the Organization, is a group of individuals representing the manufacturing industry, technical schools, K-12 education, workforce development at the state level, and other organizations like Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) and ND Job Service. The group's mission is two-fold. First, attract more people into the manufacturing field to fill an immediate need for skilled jobs such as welding and machining. The second mission is

² Vaccinology minor –A collaborative program within the Tri-College system of NDSU, MSUM, and Concordia, the minor allows undergraduate students the opportunity to conduct research, interact with industry experts, and secure experience through an internship experience.

to encourage more students to consider the skilled trades therefore growing the pipeline of workers into those high demand fields. This second focus also stresses the need for higher skill levels out of high school including mathematics and technology.

Organization Focus

The Organization is, in many ways, an intermediary. The Organization's strength is bringing other organizations and groups together to strengthen the region's overall efforts to expand and grow the economy. When businesses say they face challenges attracting or retaining workforce, the Organization pulls together the appropriate group to find ways to answer that challenge. When companies identify a potential barrier to growth as the lack of global connectivity and the cost and time relative to national and international travel, the Organization relies on its partnerships with the Fargo Airport Authority and the airport's air service consultant, Sixel Consulting, to try to recruit and retain air service to increase connectivity and reduce fares. The region's success rests on its strong base of companies in diverse sectors including agriculture, manufacturing, distribution, and back office operations. These sectors have allowed the region to experience growth and stability in population, employment, gross metro product, and individual incomes. However, the increasingly global economy presents not only challenges but opportunities that need to be addressed to ensure long-term growth and economic strength. The Cass Clay Economic Plan attempts to answer that challenge, giving our region the tools to compete in the global economy.

The Organization's efforts are driven in a large part by the Cass Clay Economic Plan. The plan was developed in 2006 through the input of several economic development partners. Groups of industry leaders joined experts in the areas of information technology and life sciences to help the organization identify specialized areas in their fields that are growth sectors or have large growth potential. Growth sectors are those that are growing and leading employment gains in the United States typically paying higher-than-average wages. The plan's

objective was to determine ways to continue the economic and population growth the region had experienced to date. The resulting document focuses on areas or sectors that show strong potential for growth allowing the Organization to continue to diversify and compete in a globally-competitive economy. The plan focuses on five areas to transition the region's economy: core knowledge infrastructure, entrepreneurial infrastructure, telecommunications infrastructure, air service, and K-12 science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education.

The Organization currently sends out a monthly activity report to board members and city and county leaders. The document follows the plan of work with the recent month's activities inserted into the correlating section. The report includes new business prospect activity coded to keep the company's anonymity. The report also contains workforce attraction activities, local business visits, and investor meetings. The activity is sent to the Organization's board of directors as well as city, county, and regional representatives. The activity reports have been well received and have seemingly opened up communication repairing or maintaining trust among certain stakeholders or partners and the Organization.

Stakeholder Theory – Power and Legitimacy

The Organization relies on stakeholder relationships to grow and strengthen the economy. When determining what activities to do and what areas to focus on, the Organization attempts to determine who its stakeholders are and why. According to Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997), stakeholder theory helps managers determine where to focus their attention. Freeman (1984) provides a broad definition of a stakeholder: "a stakeholder in an organization is by definition any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objective" (p. 46). Based on Freeman's description, the list of economic development stakeholders is long. Universities affect economic development through research that can be turned into a business which creates jobs. Universities, colleges, and technical schools provide graduates with talents and educational backgrounds that align with business

needs. Cities and counties benefit from the increased tax base from business expansions and new businesses resulting in job creation. Banks, utility companies, and healthcare organizations benefit from additional businesses which translate into more jobs and a larger population with buying power. Citizens benefit from more opportunities and better quality of life.

In a more narrow definition, Clarkson views stakeholders as voluntary or involuntary risk-bearers:

Voluntary stakeholders bear some form of risk as a result of having invested some form of capital, human or financial, something of value, in a firm. Involuntary stakeholders are placed at risk as a result of a firm's activities. Without the element of risk there is no stake. (as cited by Mitchell, et al., 1997, p. 856)

In Clarkson's definition, a stakeholder is someone or some entity that has something to lose. While overall, the definition is considered narrower by theorists, in economic development, it is still a fairly broad definition. An economic development organization's ability or inability to fulfill its mission to grow the economy and create jobs potentially affects everyone.

According to Mitchell et al. (1997), limited time and resources is the fundamental reason an organization attempts to narrow and focus its list of stakeholders. Determining the primary concerns of the most important stakeholder translates into an effective strategy that allows an organization to accomplish its mission. The Organization, for example, receives a lot of sales requests for advertising. While the Organization may place an advertisement congratulating the NDSU Research & Technology Park, the Organization would not be as likely to place an advertisement recognizing the United Way of Cass Clay. Both are worthy organizations, but NDSU's Research & Technology Park aligns with the Organization's mission; however, the United Way of Cass Clay does not.

Another factor Mitchell et al. (1997) addresses is power and dependence. Whether it is the organization's dependence on the stakeholder or vice versa, dependence plays a role in

setting the organization's agenda. The organization/stakeholder relationship focuses on "minimizing harm, upholding its rights, or achieving its interests" (p. 862). The Organization's dependence on the stakeholder will directly correlate with the stakeholder's potential to influence the Organization's agendas.

The Organization makes some calculated risks, tightly weaving itself with stakeholders in an effort to advance and strengthen the local economy creating jobs and furthering the stakeholder's opportunity for success and stability. For example, providing a \$2 million match to support NDSU's Center for Biopharmaceutical Research & Production is a risky venture. The venture has the potential to be a monetary loss or to spin out biopharmaceutical companies helping to create a cluster of biopharmaceutical companies (GFMEDC, 2008). Clarkson (1995) argues that

the survival and continuing profitability of the corporation depends on its ability to fulfill its economic and social purpose which is to create and distribute wealth or value sufficient to ensure that each primary stakeholder group continues as part of the corporation's stakeholder system. (p. 107)

The Organization builds synergistic relationships with various organizations or stakeholders across the metro to strengthen and grow the economy. For example, the Organization understands that the long-term success and viability of companies depends on a pipeline of talent. Organizations will continue to recruit people to the area, but relying on that one strategy is not feasible. Industry and education also need to partner to grow the pipeline so the region can align students' education with the available opportunities. In 2011, the Organization partnered with an area school and NDSU to create a teacher internship. The internship places a K-12 teacher in industry for four weeks. The teacher is expected to take what he or she learned back into the classroom to provide higher level teaching in terms of 21st century skills or those skills students need to be college and career ready.

As the Organization works to grow and strengthen the economy while competing with other metros doing the same, synergistic stakeholder relationships will become increasingly important. Creating relationships and aligning strategies with the appropriate stakeholders is a critical component of a successful economic development strategy.

Identifying Economic Development Stakeholders

The Organization needs to identify appropriate stakeholders to create an effective marketing and communication strategy. As previously noted everyone has a stake in economic development and job creation. According to Mitchell, et al., “persons, groups, neighborhoods, organizations, institutions, societies, and even the natural environment are generally thought to qualify as actual or potential stakeholders (1997 p. 855). However, some organizations and people play a more central role. Strong partnerships with certain stakeholder organizations allow the Organization to answer needs and produce something greater than could be created by each individual organization. Mitchell et al. (1997) uses three attributes to classify stakeholders “the stakeholder's power to influence the firm, the legitimacy of the stakeholder's relationship with the firm, and the urgency of the stakeholder's claim on the firm” (p.854). An investor has the power to directly influence an economic development corporation with its ability to threaten to withdraw its investment. Their four-year pledge also legitimizes the investor's stake in the organization. A university may not be an investor but certainly has a legitimate relationship with the organization. Finally, the airport may lay claim to urgency when they present an immediate opportunity to attract an additional airline or air service route. Adding and retaining air service affects not only the Organization's investors but its primary-sector businesses. Urgency “adds a catalytic component to a theory of stakeholder identification, for urgency demands attention,” (Mitchell, et al., 1997, p. 864). Putting all three attributes together creates what Mitchell et al. refers to as a “highly salient stakeholder” (p. 873). Let's say, for example, that the Organization was approached by one of its larger investors, John Deere

Electronic Solutions (JDES). Company representatives tell the Organization that it will have to turn away a major project unless human resources can attract and hire additional workforce. The Organization would likely put significant resources toward assisting JDES. This example puts JDES into all three categories (power, legitimacy and urgency) making the company highly salient.

Understanding its stakeholders allows the Organization to determine stakeholders' salience. According to Mitchell et al.,(1997) "to achieve certain ends, or because of perceptual factors, managers do pay certain kinds of attention to certain kinds of stakeholders" (p. 855). The Organization's stakeholders have many different roles and purposes and fulfilling long-term goals depends on positive and effective interactions with relevant stakeholders. Investors provide direct support of economic development because they stand to benefit from the new jobs created by the Organization. To sustain investor relationships, the Organization needs to use multiple avenues to effectively communicate its success in job creation and economic development. Partnerships with organizations like Chambers of Commerce and Convention and Visitor's Bureaus on various initiatives create mutual benefits. The Tri-College University partners for mutual benefit in such projects as brochures to attract students to the area or to align curriculum to address industry needs or workforce needs. Continued communication keeps partnerships strong, and collaborations help each entity meet goals more efficiently and effectively.

One of the challenges facing many economic development corporations is determining how much time to focus on communicating with entities or stakeholders that are not in a direct relationship with the organization. While there are scholars who stand on both sides of the debate, Mitchell et al. (1997) argue that latent stakeholders have a place: "A theory of stakeholder identification and salience must somehow account for *latent* stakeholders if it is to be both comprehensive and useful, because such identification can, at a minimum, help organizations avoid problems and perhaps even enhance effectiveness" (p. 859). A latent

stakeholder may have power but no legitimacy nor urgency therefore commanding no attention. For example, a smaller investor that is not closely involved with the Organization through board or committee involvement and has no urgent need for action from the Organization might be overlooked. Conversely, the Organization may lose its power and legitimacy in the eyes of the investor. That loss may happen because over time, the investor may disconnect from the Organization and decide to either reduce or discontinue its investment. Proper communication to all stakeholders, including latent stakeholders, may allow for closer connections and effectively turn perceived latent stakeholders into ones with power and legitimacy.

Determining stakeholders and their position relative to the Organization is one step in creating a communication plan. The next step is determining effective ways to deliver stakeholders messages.

Marketing to Develop an Economy

If the Fargo MSA wants to be successful marketing the region, its leaders and citizens need to think as a region. According to Mark Vaux, Director of Economic Development, City of West Fargo, the region has more to offer as a region versus individual cities. Moreover, if a company locates in Moorhead, the City of West Fargo will benefit as additional people move to town living in Moorhead and West Fargo. (Vaux, personal communication, April 4, 2012). Working as a region benefits the citizens and businesses and allows each city to be more effective when competing against other regions for the same businesses and workforce. As Levine (2008) points out, it is not easy to differentiate one MSA; “in the United States alone, there are 50 states, 268 metropolitan statistical areas and nearly 20,000 cities or incorporated areas. But defining what makes your community different – really different – is the first step to success in place branding” (p.6). As the region positions itself to compete with other regions and MSA’s, it will differentiate itself by the resources spread throughout the region. Moreover, recruitment of a primary-sector company in one city means success for the entire region.

Regardless of the resources, when marketing a region, a potential resident's or businesses' decision may initially come down to perception. When business leaders are considering a location, it is safe to assume they want a place that technologically savvy. According to Ubalde and Simundza (2008) economic development marketing needs to have a strong online presence as well as involve direct contact with consultants. In other words marketing to site selection consultants should be "high tech and high touch" (n.p.).

When marketing to site selection consultants, the goal is to get on the prospective company's short list. A short list is a preferred subset, selected by the site selection consultant, of possible locations to expand or locate a business. After that, the goal is to be the final location. According to the survey "A View from Corporate America, Winning Strategies in Economic Development Marketing" by Development Counselor's International (DCI, 2001)," site selection professionals typically use economic development professionals only after narrowing their selection list to a few finalist locations (p.15). While it is unlikely the site selection consultant will contact the economic development consultant in the initial phase of the selection process, the consultant will most likely use the economic development organization's website. In fact, the likelihood of a site selection consultant using an economic development's website is high and the top three website features selected were: "comparisons to competitor locations (e.g., cost comparisons); database of available buildings and sites; and demographic information (e.g., population size, average income, age distribution)" (DCI, 2011, p. 18).

The Website's Role in Economic Development

The website allows site selection consultants to collect useful information such as available sites and demographic information to compare locations in a relatively easy and short process. According to Levine (2002), "the website is becoming the marketing instrument of choice by serious site-seeking executives and their advisors with the speed that makes the word

'revolutionary' something of an understatement (p.7). Site selection consultants want to gather the information quickly and easily and not having the available information on your site in an easy to find format, might keep an organization from ever being considered. According to Wright & James (2008) the internet is many times the first and most complete source of information, but many websites do not put the communities' "best foot" forward. "Practitioners struggle to develop a web presence that puts their community and organization in a comparative context" (p. 3).

According to Levine (2002), Kansas City Area Economic Development Organization's website www.thinkKC.com is an award winning site that is an effective tool in marketing to site selection professionals. The website, updated daily, markets the site through a number of tactics:

Regular e-mails updating prospects on the latest developments that link back to the site for more detail; post cards, newsletters, other direct mail pieces that prominently feature the site address; many interactive elements within the site itself including a real estate search engine, a quiz on Kansas City facts and downloadable stories for journalists. (p. 8).

As the former example indicates, a website is a main component of economic development marketing. An effective strategy also includes communication channels that funnel news of the economic development corporation's accomplishments and sell the region to potential investors including direct investors, potential businesses, and current and potential residents.

Communication channels would include social media and blogging and, like the ThinkKC example, would redirect the reader back to the website. The website becomes a major part of an overall marketing and branding campaign.

Levine (2008) stresses that a branding campaign needs to be more than a logo or theme and lists several points to create an effective branding strategy. The community needs to determine its brand message or value statement, then identify the target audience, develop

creative ways to deliver the message and finally, implement the strategy. Effective strategy implementation depends upon proper participation among supporters of either the organization or the cause. For example, an investor may be a supporter of the organization while a new resident may know nothing of economic development but may support the Organization's cause to create a positive image of the region. Levine (2008) states "in today's world of the blogs, podcasts, and the 'Internet', there is an opportunity for especially innovative communities to build a similar group of "electronic ambassadors" (p.8). An authentic voice can create positive impressions of a region and ambassadors can help push the message out to receptive audiences. New resident and writer of the Area Voices blog *Becoming Midwestern* (www.becomingmidwestern.com) is an example of an authentic voice giving a unique perspective of the Fargo region.

As the Organization focuses on facilitating economic growth, stakeholder identification will continue to be a critical component of success. Many stakeholders contribute and benefit from a stable and growing economy. Utilizing stakeholder strengths drives successful economic development strategies. A closer look at the Organization's stakeholders and why they matter allows the creation of a more effective marketing campaign. Taken all together, strategies and tactics provide positive images of the Fargo MSA and may create enough impact in the ocean of media impressions to begin to turn the tide of perceptions. In the next chapter, the methodology of the communication survey will be discussed along with the author's SWOT analysis and communication plan.

CHAPTER THREE. METHODOLOGY

The strategies of the Organization help stimulate regional economic growth. Initiatives focused on business attraction as well as expansion and retention create more jobs. In addition, a focus on targeted sectors, like smart technology and biotechnology, promises high-wage jobs. An increase in high-wage jobs translates into a strong economy and an improved quality of life for the region's citizens.

Every communication strategy has strengths and weaknesses, and periodically assessing the Organization's communication plan is an important part of maintaining a solid foundation. In this case, the last revision to the communication plan was in 2008; therefore, a review and update to the plan is timely. The goal of this project is to conduct research to inform the development of a communication plan. The intent of the survey is to gain a better perspective of investors' impressions of the Organization's communication efforts and perceptions of the Organization's communication effectiveness. The remainder of this chapter will explain how data will be collected and analyzed.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited using the Organization's *InSights* electronic newsletter. Approximately 310 individuals receive the monthly newsletter and represent active organization contacts. The individuals represent leaders in business, education, and of cities and counties in the Fargo MSA. A majority of the newsletter recipients are investors. Recipients were recruited August 17, 2012, via email. Survey participants were informed that the survey was voluntary. The participants were also informed that the data would be used in aggregate form. Participants received no compensation for their participation. Participant recruitment solely from the *InSights* electronic newsletter was based on three reasons. First, a majority of the roughly 310 participants are investors who receive a majority of the communication out of the Organization. This group provides a broad base of recipients including investors and primary-sector company

representatives. The group has had adequate exposure to the Organization's activities and has at least a basic understanding of the Organization's role and goals. Second, the survey recipients have a stake in the Organization's effectiveness. Third, they reflect a segment of the Organization's target audience. That is, they represent the types of businesses or workforce the Organization is trying to recruit.

Participants

Fifty participants, who are newsletter recipients, took the survey; 47 participants completed the survey over the course of seven days. Almost forty-six percent of participants consider themselves investors of the Organization while the remaining participants either do not consider themselves investors or do not know. A majority of participants, 84%, were 41 or older at the time of the survey. Ninety-three percent of participants claim to have a four-year degree or higher, and a majority, 89.4%, supervise the activity of at least one employee. Almost 68% of participants were male. Sixty-eight percent of participants selected management or business and financial operations as their current occupation. Participants also selected architecture and engineering, government, education, training and library, sales and related, and arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media occupations.

Instruments and Procedures

Rather than use a simple random sample, a purposive sample was used. This method was based on the need to gather meaningful data from investors and supporters. According to Fink (1995), nonprobability samples do not guarantee that all eligible people have an equal chance of being in the survey; however, they are convenient, economical, and appropriate for the Organization whose supporters are the most familiar with the Organization and economic development. The primary disadvantage is that nonprobability samples are vulnerable to selection bias. The participants in the survey already receive communication from the

Organization. With investors in mind, the questions focused on the current monthly electronic newsletter, the website, and overall communications.

An electronic survey was sent out through SurveyMonkey, an online survey program. During the course of one week, August 17 2012, the survey was distributed via email to all *InSight* e-newsletter recipients. The survey was available for ten days with a reminder email sent to non-respondents on day five. The survey questionnaire (Appendix A) asked 27 questions. Questions were adapted from previous communications surveys from The Chamber Fargo Moorhead West Fargo and Cass County Electric Cooperative. The first 20 questions focused on communication efforts of the Organization. Of the first 20 questions, 13 were multiple choice; of those, eight had an option to add comments. Six questions were open-ended questions only asking for comment. The questions focused on quality and frequency of overall communication from the Organization and about how survey respondents prefer to receive communication. Survey questions also focused on both the newsletter and the Organization's website. Finally, the survey contained seven demographic questions. The survey questions were given final approval through the NDSU Institutional Review Board.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data was completed in SurveyMonkey. All information was entered by the participants, and SurveyMonkey automatically calculated the answers into numbers and percentages. The author checked SurveyMonkey's calculations for accuracy. Comments were color coded and put into categories. The categories were: statistics/economic data, communication frequency, economic news stories, additional communication requests, and other. This data was combined with the survey answers to develop a thorough understanding of participants' perceptions of the Organization's communication.

In total, 50 participants completed a 27 item survey via SurveyMonkey. The participants represented investor companies such as banks, utility companies, and manufacturing

companies. Participants also represented city and county governments. The surveys were analyzed by the researcher to develop an understanding of the Organization's communication strengths and weaknesses. The results of the survey are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR. RESULTS

Survey results show that the monthly electronic newsletter is respondents' primary form of communication from the Organization. While comments provided generally positive feedback on the Organization's communication, mainly the newsletter, respondents indicated a desire for more communication and news alerts from the Organization. Respondents indicated a strong preference for email as a communication tool. A majority of respondents visit the website a few times per year. The vast majority of respondents who do not visit the website cited either not enough time or a lack of awareness.

The survey consisted of 20 questions designed to evaluate the Organization's communication efforts (see Table 1 for a complete list of questions). The questions focused on overall communication, electronic newsletter content, and the website. In addition, participants could provide comments to ten questions. The survey findings are reported by the questions posed and can be found in Appendix B. See Table 1 below for descriptive statistics of data.

Summary of Survey Findings

The survey asked investors, local company representatives, and partner organizations to share their perceptions of the Organization's communication efforts. Respondents preferred communication in the form of email, and the least preferred medium was Twitter. A majority of respondents regularly read the monthly electronic newsletter and look for economic indicators. Several comments indicated respondents skim the news items for stories that interest them. The majority of respondents visit the website at least a few times per year while a small percentage (28%) never visits the website. A majority of those who did not use the website indicated lack of time or awareness of the website. Overall, findings indicate that while the communication coming from the Organization is useful to respondents, they indicate a desire for more communication.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Survey Results

Question	Response	(%)	Mode
In general rate how well your GFMEDC communicates with its members/public.	Excellent Good Fair Poor	13 66 19 2	Good
How often do you receive communication from the GFMEDC?	Daily Weekly Monthly Rarely Never	2 24 70 2 2	Monthly
What is your favorite way(s) to receive communication (select all that apply).	Email Twitter Direct Mail Media GFMEDC Website	96 7 9 7 13	Email
What is your least favorite way to receive communication (select all that apply).	Email Twitter Direct Mail GFMEDC Website	2 60 50 15	Twitter
How often do you read the monthly electronic newsletter, InSights?	Every month 2-4 times/year 5-7 times/year 8-10 times/year	61 11 17 11	Every Month
How much of the InSights newsletter do you typically read?	All of it Part of it Only Econ. Ind.	38 57 4	Part of it
On a scale of 1 to 5 (with one being not at all and five being tremendous value) how would you rate the overall value of the newsletter?	2 3 4 5	9 49 38 4	3
Do you forward the newsletter to others within your organization?	Yes No	34 66	No
Do you forward the newsletter to others outside your organization?	Yes No	15 85	No
How often do you visit the gfmcdc.com website?	Monthly A few /year Never	13 59 28	A few/per year
What information do you look for on the GFMEDC website (select all that apply).	News Dem. Info Econ. Ind. Living/Q.of Life Tax.Incentive Other	64 47 67 22 25 6	Economic Indicators
Over the past year, have you increased or decreased your visits to the gfmcdc.com website?	Increase Decreased	43 57	Decreased
If you do not visit the gfmcdc.com website, why not?	Don't have time Didn't know Other	58 25 17	Don't have time

Respondents commented that they skim the newsletter for interesting items; therefore, creating descriptive headlines is a chance to communicate more effectively. Survey respondents' desire for more communication provides an opportunity to increase engagement through various communication channels such as emails and blogs. Using those channels to drive stakeholders back to the website can increase website traffic and build stronger connections with stakeholders. Survey results also indicated a desire for more "dots connected" between what the Organization does and the regional impact. The desire for better understanding of the Organization is an opportunity and a responsibility as the Organization continues to build on its communication efforts. Overall, the organization can continue to strengthen its reputation within the region by communicating its successes and providing relevant economic data and information.

The final chapter will provide a detailed look at possible communication strategies including an evaluation of current strategies followed by goals and objectives that will build the communication plan.

CHAPTER FIVE. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Research and survey results affirm that the Organization can more effectively implement its strategies to recruit businesses, attract workforce, and inform investors, in part, through increased communication and a stronger, more complete communications strategy. The survey results indicate two main areas that the Organization should embrace as part of its communication plan. First, increase communication to investors and partners, and second, use communication to educate and inform people of the Organization's value to economic development. The survey indicated that the Organization provides valuable information to investors and partner organizations.

To address the information provided by survey participants, I developed a SWOT analysis and seven objectives and 24 tactics. The following paragraphs outline the communication plan. The plan seeks to address identified strengths and possible opportunities. In addition, the plan takes into consideration identified threats and weaknesses. Finally, the plan uses the information found in the survey and my employment experience to develop actionable objective and tactics.

Every communication strategy has strengths and weaknesses, and periodically assessing the organization's communication plans is an important part of maintaining a solid foundation. In this case, the last revision to the communication plan was in 2008; therefore, a review and update to the plan is timely.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

Strengths of the situation include: The Organization has many investors representing various sectors and a strong board of directors. Email is a preferred communication tool. The communication coming from the Organization is good and desired by partners and investors including the newsletter. A majority of respondents to the survey rated communication efforts

good to excellent (78%). The Fargo MSA is a great product to sell based on an excellent quality of life; the residents have a well-known, excellent work ethic.

Weaknesses

Weaknesses of the situation include: The current website is not a useful marketing tool; based on user feedback, it is difficult to navigate and not content driven. There is potential for high leadership turnover within the Organization. Economic development is complicated and can be difficult to explain to the average resident. As many organizations increasingly use Twitter as a method of communication, the Organization's stakeholders indicated a lack of preference for Twitter especially. This may limit how social media can be used.

Opportunities

Opportunities include: Survey respondents indicated a desire for more communication from the Organization and an opportunity to provide more detail and more data-related information. A portion of participants indicated they forward the newsletter within their organization. The region contains ample partnerships to market the F-M area, available communication channels and social media outlets to spread the message about the great things FM has to offer as well as easily accessible media partners locally.

Threats

While no threats were identified in the survey, previous research has indicated threats including a negative perception of the region – cold weather, a perception that the region is both geographically and socially isolated, alternatively a lack of perception or knowledge in terms of what is available in Fargo, i.e., attractive downtown, strong companies, excellent arts community which makes it hard to market to potential businesses. A lack of knowledge and understanding of what the Organization does and how its activities impact the region. Research indicates there are many other MSA's marketing to and competing for the same businesses.

Using the SWOT analysis, the development of goals and objectives grounds the communications plan providing a roadmap to enhance and support the Organization's

strategies. The following goals and objectives were developed by combining the survey data collected in this study and the knowledge gained through literature review with my professional understanding of the Organization.

Goals and Objectives

GOAL 1 Increase awareness of the economic development activities and the GFMEDC both regionally and nationally across diverse stakeholder groups.

Objective 1 Increase local and regional media coverage.

Tactic: Increase press releases and position the GFMEDC as an economic development thought leader.

Tactic: Increase the number of relationships with local media; improve and strengthen relationships that already exist by meeting with those organizations periodically.

Tactic: Meet with area editorial boards such as the Forum Editorial board twice per year.

Tactic: Communicate with partner organizations and other investors to create a list of contacts appropriate for various economic development and related subjects.

Tactic: Work with partner organizations to share news, support efforts to market Fargo MSA.

Objective 2 Increase impressions in national media coverage.

Tactic: Prioritize publications and reporters based on our marketing and communication strategies and build relationships.

Tactic: Send out press releases on broad topics related to economic development.

Tactic: Work with investor organizations to assist in distributing their news and capitalizing on their expertise and vice versa.

Tactic: Meet with partner organizations to determine their expertise in order to adequately assist media inquiries.

Objective 3 Develop marketing campaign to recruit business and workforce

Tactic: Attend trade shows and market region as a place to do business.

Tactic: Investigate and implement a GIS tool to help market local properties to site selectors.

Tactic: Investigate the use of social media tools like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to distribute content and drive readers back to the website.

Tactic: Update website creating a more user-friendly and content driven tool.

GOAL 2 Increase and enhance investor communication and awareness of the GFMEDC.

Objective 1 Gain greater awareness and support of partner organizations i.e. the Chamber, city governments Convention & Visitors Bureau, Downtown Community Partnership and F-M Area Home Builders Association.

Tactic: Meet regularly with leaders of the organizations; hold separate meetings with communication managers.

Tactic: Encourage partner organizations to submit articles to the Organization's electronic newsletter.

Objective 2 Increase communication to city and county governments and economic development organizations that partner or contribute to the region's economic development efforts.

Tactic: Evaluate current plan and modify communication strategy to address needs

Tactic: Continue to send activity report; evaluate and modify as needed.

- Objective 3 Utilize and enhance tools in order to improve investor communication
- Tactic: Continue to enhance monthly electronic newsletter and increase recipients.
- Tactic: Offer several investor breakfasts or lunches to update investors.
- Tactic: Develop and maintain a blog through AreaVoices; the blog will be featured on InForum occasionally connecting GFMEDC with business leaders, the general public, etc.
- Tactic: Use the website to manage and drive content to all communication outlets.
- Objective 4 Generate more content to increase and improve stakeholder communication
- Tactic: Generate and distribute more data-related content
- Tactic: Highlight investor companies and relevant organizations; distribute that information through email and the website.
- Tactic: Investigate and generate local economic development news

Conclusion

Study results signal to the Organization that an opportunity exists to expand its communication efforts relative to frequency, content expansion, and number of participants. Research and survey feedback have resulted in three key findings for the Organization focused on a desire for increased communication, the need for a new website, and a potential opportunity to target pass-along readership.

One, survey participants indicated a desire for increased communication. One survey respondent's comment indicated a desire to see the "dots connected." The respondent stated they would like the Organization to do a better job explaining how its activities affect the community. That comment and relatively strong feedback in support of additional

communication supports the Organization's plan to increase communications and become more of a thought leader within the community. Survey findings also support an opportunity to provide more data-driven communication and analysis. This is an opportunity to provide more value to investors and stakeholders. Stakeholder theory supports increasing communication to investors. Taking advantage of investor's willingness to receive more communication is an opportunity to strengthen relationships and continue to be relevant to stakeholders. Positive interactions with investors can strengthen the Organization's ability to accomplish its goals.

Two, the website is a critical tool in the marketing toolbox, and the current site is in need of updates. The Organization's website is difficult to navigate and is not content driven. Research shows that when marketing a region to site selectors or potential businesses, a website is an important marketing piece. An updated website with the appropriate data in more user-friendly format could allow the Organization to more effectively market the region. Creating a website that is easy to use and technological savvy is an important component to a successful business development strategy. The website is also a tool that can be used to increase and enhance communication with investors. Communication channels like the electronic newsletter and the blog can drive readers back to the website where they are able to find additional information.

The third key finding relates to pass-along readership. Survey results indicate that a portion of recipients have been passing the newsletter along to others within their organization. This unknown connection could provide tremendous benefit to the Organization. Those additional readers may represent latent stakeholders. Increasing the distribution of news to those and other investors or potential investors allows the Organization to enhance its effectiveness. Reaching latent stakeholders through the newsletter and other channels could be an effective way to provide evidence of the Organization's worth. Survey results also indicate that the majority of recipients do not forward the newsletter outside their organization. That may be because they believe the newsletter is intended only for investor companies. Making the

newsletter easily accessible and encouraging recipients to forward to additional readers outside their organization creates opportunities for the Organization to continue to build connections.

Communication with stakeholders is important to support the Organization's mission and expand its efforts. An effective communications plan builds stronger relationships with investors and partners allowing the Organization to be more successful.

The Organization's stakeholders represent a diverse cross-section of businesses, government entities, education, and organizations. The communication plan addresses the need to increase communication to stakeholders providing them a better picture of the Organization's work and success. Increasing news alerts and continuing the electronic newsletter, improving its content and increasing distribution will be important components to the communications strategy.

The results of this study served as the basis for the communication plan presented in this chapter. Further, this study will be used by the Organization to enhance its communication strategy. Taken together, a strong marketing and communication plan to both external audiences (potential businesses and residents) and internal audiences (investor and partner organizations) allows the Organization to compete more successfully in a global economy.

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APPENDIX A. SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. North Dakota State University
Department of Communication
Dept. 2310, PO Box 6050
Fargo, ND 581086050
7012317705

Please read the entire consent. At the end of the form, you will be asked for your consent. Consent is required to access the survey. Thank you.

Title of Research Study: Communication Plan for the Greater Fargo Moorhead Development Corporation.

This study is being conducted by Dr. Amy O'Connor, Associate Professor of Communication.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You are being asked to participate in this research study because of your relationship with the Greater Fargo Moorhead Economic Development Corporation. Participation is completely voluntary and there are no restrictions that would exclude you from participating. There are approximately 310 individuals who may participate in this study.

What is the reason for doing the study?

Your participation will help the GFMEDC develop effective communication methods to meet your needs. By completing the following survey, you will help provide the GFMEDC with information that will be used to improve its communication.

How long will the study take?

The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary and your responses are anonymous. The survey link will be available for ten days beginning Friday, August 17, 2012 and ending August 27, 2012.

What are the risks and discomforts?

There are no known risks or discomforts that may result from participating in this research. However, it is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures.

What are the benefits to me and other people?

As a stakeholder in the GFMEDC, the results of this study may provide improved communication from the GFMEDC. Improved communication may enhance the GFMEDC's impact to the community and business environment.

Do I have to take part in the study?

No. Participation is completely voluntary.

What are the alternatives to being in this research study?

There are no alternatives.

Who will see the information I give?

Your survey responses are confidential. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study, we will write about the combined information we have gathered.

What if I have questions?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the research study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have any questions about the study, you can contact the researcher, Dr. Amy O'Connor at 7012317705.

What are my rights as a research participant?

You have rights as a participant in research. If you have questions about your rights, or complaints about this research [may add, "or to report a research related injury" if applicable], you may talk to the researcher or contact the NDSU Human Research Protection Program by:

- Telephone: 701.231.8908
- Email: ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu
- Mail: NDSU HRPP Office, NDSU Dept. 4000, PO Box 6050, Fargo, ND 581086050.

The role of the Human Research Protection Program is to see that your rights are protected in this research; more information about your rights can be found at:

www.ndsu.edu/research/irb.

Documentation of Informed Consent:

You are freely making a decision whether to be in this research study. By marking this box, I acknowledge that: 1. you have read and understood this consent form; 2. you have had your questions answered, and 3. you have decided to be in the study.

Please take a few minutes to fill out the following brief survey regarding communications efforts of the Greater Fargo Moorhead EDC. This survey will help GFMEDC staff evaluate current efforts in order to craft an effective communications strategy. Your feedback and input is a critical part of this process, and we appreciate your time.

Thank you for your continued support of the GFMEDC and economic development.

2. In general, rate how well your GFMEDC communicates with its members/public.

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

3. How often do you receive communication from the GFMEDC?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Rarely
- Never
- Comments

4. What is your most favorite way(s) to receive communication (select all that apply);

Most favorite way to
Receive communication: Email Twitter Direct Mail Media GFMEDC Website

5. What is your least favorite way(s) to receive communication (select all that apply).

Least favorite way to
Receive communication: Email Twitter Direct Mail Media GFMEDC Website

6. Please add any additional comments about the GFMEDC's overall communication efforts.

7. How often do you read the monthly electronic newsletter, InSights?

Every month

2-4 times per year

5-7 times per year

8-10 times per year

never

If never, please explain.

8. How much of the Insights newsletter do you typically read?

All of it

Part of it

None of it

Only the economic indicators

If you read "part of it", please identify which part.

9. On a scale of 1 to 5 (with one being not at all and five being tremendous value), how would you rate the overall value of the InSights newsletter?

1 (not valuable)

2

3

4

5 (tremendous value)

10. What do you find most valuable in the newsletter?

11. What additional topics would you like to see covered in the InSights newsletter?

12. Do you forward the e-newsletter to others within your organization?

Yes

No

13. Do you forward the e-newsletter to others outside your organization?

Yes

No

14. Please add additional comments about the newsletter.

15. How often do you visit the gfmedc.com website?

Daily

Weekly

Monthly

A few times per year

Never

16. What information do you look for on the GFMEDC website (select all that apply)?

News
Demographic Information
Economic Indicators
Living/Quality of Life Information
Tax/Incentive Information
Other (please explain)
Comments

17. Over the past year, have you increased or decreased your visits to the gfmedc.com website?

Increased
Decreased

18. If you do not visit the gfmedc.com website, why not?

Content is not valuable
Don't have the time
Didn't know it was available
Other (please explain)
Comment

19. Is there anything that is not currently on the website that you would like to see there?

20. Please add any additional comments about the website.

21. Are you an investor of the GFMEDC?

Yes
No
I don't know

22. Are you a primary-sector company representative?

Yes
No
I don't know

23. Which best describes your age?

20 or younger
21-30
31-40
41-50
51-60
61 or older

24. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Graduated from high school
Attended some college
Graduated from a two-year institution
Graduated from a four-year institution
Some graduate school
Completed graduate school

25. Do you supervise the activity of at least one full-time employee?

Yes
No

26. Are you male or female?

Male
Female

27. Which of the following best describes your current occupation?

Management occupations
Business and financial operations occupation
Computer and Mathematical Occupations
Architecture and Engineering Occupations
Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations
Legal Occupations
Education, Training, and Library Occupations
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations
Sales and Related Occupations
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations
Construction and Extraction Occupations
Production Occupations
Transportation and Materials Moving Occupations
Government
Other
.

APPENDIX B. TABULATED SURVEY RESULTS

Communication Quality

Question two asked participants “in general rate how well the GFMEDC communicates with its members/public.” Participants were asked this question with four options. Of the 50 participants, 47 participants responded to this question. The majority of participants (66%, n=31) indicated “good”. Second, participants indicated “fair” (19%, n=9). The third highest response by participants was “excellent” (13%, n=6). Finally, “poor” was the fourth choice by participants (2%, n=1). The mode was Good. There were four comments. “I am on the board so I kept up with most of them.” “I like the email updates – statistics on growth, etc. but would like more updates on what the GFMEDC is in the process of doing for business development.” “I find the emails informative, but I see little other information. Maybe it’s because I’m not a member so this is justified.” “I really appreciate the economic indicators and notification of “best of” lists FM makes.” “Would love to see more stats/info about workforce, students in the pipeline, grads in certain programs annually.”

Communication Frequency

Questions 3 asked participants, “how often do you receive communication from the GFMEDC?” Participants were asked this question with five options. Of the 50 participants, 46 responded to this question. The majority of participants indicated “monthly” (70%, n=32). Participants also indicated “weekly” (24%, n=11), participants responses were tied among the three final options with participants indicating “daily”, “rarely”, “never” (2%, n=1). The mode was “monthly”. There were five comments. “Not sure.” “Other than email subscription dealing with economic indicators.” “I receive the emails about once/week.” “My email subscription to monthly data.” “I receive an e-newsletter, also appreciate the annual report.”

Communication Channel Preferences

Question four asked participants “what is your favorite way(s) to receive communication (select all that apply).” Of the 50 participants, 46 answered this question. The majority of participants indicated “email” (96%, n=44). Second, participants indicated the “GFMEDC website” (13%, n=6), followed by participants indicating “direct mail” (9%, n=4). The remainder of participants responses were tied with participants indicating both “media” (7%, n=3) and “Twitter” (7%, n=3). The mode was “email”. Participants also had the option to list another choice in a comments section, but no comments were made. Question 5 asked participants “what is your least favorite way to receive communication (select all that apply).” Forty-six participants answered this question. The majority of participants indicated “Twitter” (59%, n=27). Next participants indicated “direct mail” (50%, n=23), the third choice indicated by participants was “media” (17%, n=8) followed by participants indicating “GFMEDC website” (15.2%, n=7). The last choice indicated by participants was “email” (2%, n=1). The mode was “Twitter.” Participants also had the option to list another choice in a comments section. One participant commented “totally non-productive.”

Participant Generated Comments

Question 6 asked participants to “please add any additional comments about the GFMEDC’s communication efforts.” Eight participants answered the open-ended question. “Concise, like it?” “I would like to see a better explanation of how the EDC’s work impacts the community. Connecting the dots between the work they do and community benefits.” “I think it is worth the time we are spending to enhance our communication effort” “I like the new(ish) constant contact newsletter” “My communication currently is once a month in an economic update from the previous month’s information. More news alerts would be appreciated” “Not even certain who is there anymore or what their roles are. I know there have been changes. Not

sure what their mission is any longer either.” “Very polished.” “I don’t spend much time reading it.”

Newsletter Reader, Frequency and Content

Question 7 asked participants “how often they read the monthly electronic newsletter, InSights.” Forty-six participants responded to this question. The majority of participants indicated “every month” (61%, n=28), the second choice, participants indicated “5-7 times per year” (17%, n=8) the next highest choice, the remainder of participants tied indicating “2-4 times per year” and “8-10 times per year” (11%, n=5) no participant indicated “never.” The mode was “every month.” One participant commented “depends on content/table of contents and how busy at work.”

Question 8 asked participants “how much of the InSights newsletter they typically read.” Forty-seven participants answered this question. The majority of participants indicated “part of it” (57%, n=27), second, participants indicated “all of it” (38%, n=18), third, participants indicated “only the economic indicators” (4%, n=2) no participant chose the option “none of it.” The mode was “part of it.” Participants were asked the open-ended question “if you only read part of it, which part?” Five people responded to this open-ended question. “Economic indicators, then scan articles titles for ones of interest.” “I skim the headlines and read the articles I find interesting.” “Depends on time and what issues are being discussed” “The part that pertains to my immediate interest.” “Whatever catches my eye at the time.”

Newsletter Content and Readership

Question 9 asked participants “on a scale of 1 to 5 (with one being not at all and five being tremendous value) how would you rate the overall value of the newsletter?” Forty-seven participants answered this question. The majority of participants indicated “3” (49%, n=23), second participants indicated “4” (38%, n=18), third, participants indicated “2” (9%, n=4). Next

participants indicated “5” (4%, n=2). No participants chose “1”. The mode was “3.” There was no opportunity to comment.

Question 10 asked participants “what they find most valuable in the newsletter.” Twenty-one participants answered this open-ended question. “The employment numbers and number of units being built.” “Economic indicators” “economic indicators” “business news”, “keeping up to date on trends/events”, “news-type items and reports on EDC activities and initiatives”, “incentives news”, “anything related to helping grow housing starts”, “current events, what’s happening,” “economic development reports,” “statistics,” “current projects and economic indicators,” “economic information community economic news,” “up-to-date local developments,” “the information about the economic climate in Fargo Moorhead,” “I always look for economic indicators. Article subjects vary and are valuable.” “Economic indicators – taxable sales pacing, unemployment, and housing permits,” “Demographic and economic statistics,” “What kind of activity is being done/proposed,” “See above,” “Economic indicators.”

Question 11 asked participants “what additional topics they would like to see covered in the newsletter?” Ten participants answered this open-ended question. “Local area tax base size, trends, and contributions to state ratings/rank and quantifications of major area economic engines.” “A better idea of what the organization’s employees do every day.” “Commentary from the president on economic environment and trends,” “Not sure,” “Information other than Fargo,” “Special articles on major companies.” “Economic outlook, workforce development.” “Breakdown of taxable sales to retail, manufacturing, AG related etc...” “Not sure.” “See above.” “Economic indicators.”

Newsletter Pass-Along Readership

Question 12 asked participants “if they forward the newsletter to others within their organization?” Forty-seven participants answered this question. The question gave participants two options, yes or no, with no opportunity to comment. The majority of participants indicated

“yes” (66%, n=31), the remainder of participants indicated “no” (34%, n=16). The mode was “yes.” There was no opportunity to comment.

Question 13 asked participants “do you forward the newsletter to others outside your organization?” Forty-six participants answered this question. Participants were given two options, yes or no, with no opportunity to comment. The majority of participants indicated “no” (85%, n=39), the remainder of participants indicated “yes” (15%, n=7). The mode was “no.” There was no opportunity to comment.

Question 14 asked participants to “please add any additional comments about the e-newsletter”. One participant answered this open-ended question. “Sometimes I forward the newsletter.”

Question 15 asked participants “how often do you visit the gfmedc.com website?” Forty-six participants answered this question. Participants were given five choices. The majority of participants indicated “a few times per year” (59%, n=27), second, participants indicated “never” (28%, n=13), third, participants indicated “monthly” (13%, n=6). No participant selected “daily” or “weekly.” The mode was “a few times per year”. There was no option to comment.

Question 16 asked participants “what information do you look for on the GFMEDC website (select all that apply).” Thirty-six participants answered this question. Participants were given six options with other being one available option. The majority of participants indicated “economic indicators” (67%, n=24), second participants indicated “news” (64%, n=23), third, participants indicated “demographic information” (47%, n=17), next participants indicated “tax/incentive information” (25%, n=9), fifth participants indicated “quality of life” (22%, n=8), finally participants indicated “other” (5.6%, n=2). The mode was “economic indicators.”

Participants provided two comments “usually for some random information” “workforce stats.”

Question 17 asked participants “over the past year, have you increased or decreased your visits to the gfmedc.com website?” Thirty-seven participants answered this question. The majority of participants indicated “decreased” (57%, n=21). The remainder of participants

indicated “increased” (43%, n=16). The mode was “decreased.” There was no opportunity to comment.

Question 18 asked participants “if you do not visit the gfmcdc.com website, why not?” Twenty-four participants responded to this question. The majority of participants indicated “don’t have the time” (58%, n=14), second, participants indicated “didn’t know it was available” (25%, n=6), third, participants indicated “other” (17%, n=4). The mode was “don’t have the time.” Participants provided four comments. “no need to” “not top of mind, prefer the e-newsletter for information” “I would rather be notified of updates via email versus having to go to the website to find out news.” “n/a” No participant selected “content is not valuable.”

Question 19 asked participants “is there anything that is not currently on the website that you would like to see there?” Three participants answered this open-ended question. Participant comments were “just more news” “nope, it’s pretty comprehensive” “fairly unfamiliar to offer opinions.”

Question 20 asked participants “please add any additional comments about the website.” One participant answered this question. “Needs a new look, a personality.”