



MESSAGING

Effective messaging is the foundation of successful economic development. It builds trust, inspires collaboration, and creates momentum for growth. When people understand the purpose behind economic initiatives and see their benefits, they become advocates rather than skeptics. By crafting a strong, unified message, Tuolumne County can showcase its strengths, attract investment, and foster a thriving future for businesses and residents alike.



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INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

As Tuolumne County does not have a clear and consistent messaging strategy, economic development projects struggle to gain community support, and businesses remain unaware or unconvinced of the benefits of establishing themselves here.

Theory of Change

By developing a clear, consistent messaging strategy that effectively communicates the benefits of economic development, engages the community, and enhances marketing efforts, we will build public trust, attract businesses, and create a stronger, more resilient local economy in Tuolumne County.

Overall Goal

Increase Community Understanding and Support for Economic Development – Clearly communicate the purpose, benefits, and impact of projects to build public trust, dispel misinformation, and encourage community buy-in.

Attract and Retain Businesses and Investment – Present Tuolumne County as a desirable location for businesses by crafting a compelling and professional marketing strategy that highlights economic opportunities, quality of life, and available resources.

Ensure Consistency and Accessibility in Communication – Develop a standardized approach to messaging that is clear, concise, and easily understood by diverse audiences, utilizing multiple communication channels for broad reach.

Strengthen Collaboration and Alignment – Foster coordination among government departments, regional organizations, and community partners to unify messaging efforts and maximize the effectiveness of outreach and marketing campaigns.



NARRATIVE

Problem Identified

Without a clear and consistent messaging strategy, Tuolumne County faces two major challenges: a lack of community support for economic development projects and an inability to effectively attract businesses.

A recurring theme in the economic development community meetings is a sense of disconnect, frustration, and uncertainty toward local government. This partly stems from messaging, which can be often too lengthy, filled with jargon, and inconsistently delivered, making it difficult for residents to understand or retain important information. This fragmented approach leaves the community to fill in the blanks. Additionally, communication can be siloed, with different departments or groups operating independently rather than coordinating their outreach. This fragmented approach leads to inconsistencies in messaging, where some information reaches the public while other crucial details are overlooked. Without a unified and strategic campaign, the county struggles to present a compelling, cohesive case for economic development.

There is a significant level of distrust toward government, with many residents unclear on its functions and skeptical of its actions. Misunderstandings about policies, such as zoning laws, contribute to this, as does the perception that government statements do not always align with actions. This is further fueled by social media, where misinformation spreads quickly, facts are often drowned out by frustration, and national narratives of government distrust reinforce local concerns.

“Both U.S. adults and communication practitioners recognize misinformation/disinformation and political polarization as significant challenges to public trust in government messaging. However, while U.S. adults cite dishonesty, communication practitioners in both government and the private sector also attribute the lack of trust to executional issues such as timeliness, audience segmentation and messaging clarity.” – Government Communications Study Reveals Critical Insights for Building Public Trust, GW College of Professional Studies, March 23, 2024

Many residents, particularly older generations, express concerns that economic development will lead to increased congestion, urbanization, and a loss of Tuolumne County’s rural character. Tourism, while widely acknowledged as a vital part of the economy, is often viewed as disruptive to local life. Fears of displacement, rising costs of living and resource scarcity further contribute to resistance against new development.



Compounding this issue, marketing efforts tend to be reactive rather than proactive. Instead of consistently promoting Tuolumne County as an attractive place to do business, outreach efforts often occur in response to economic downturns or when a business expresses interest in the area. This reactive approach means the county misses valuable opportunities to engage potential investors and establish itself as a desirable business destination. Without a well-planned, ongoing marketing strategy, Tuolumne County remains at a disadvantage in both building public trust and fostering economic growth.

“Without a proactive economic development strategy, rural communities’ risk being overlooked for investment, losing workforce talent, and struggling to compete with larger regions.” - Why Rural Economic Developers Need a Marketing Strategy—And What Happens Without One, Golden Shovel, February 17, 2025

Opportunity

“If you are not talking, other are talking for you” – Common Proverb

There are several opportunities to improve the messaging strategy in Tuolumne County by making communication more accessible, relevant, and consistent. A key consideration is understanding the audience’s perspective and demographics when discussing government initiatives or economic development projects. For messaging to be effective, the public must see how a project benefits them directly. Many residents may struggle to connect the dots between a project and its impact on the community, requiring clear explanations that highlight real-world benefits.

For example, with a large, retired population in the county, certain issues, such as childcare or workforce development, may not seem immediately relevant to them. Similarly, perspectives on affordability vary, as those who are financially stable may not recognize the challenges faced by lower-income residents. Considering audiences ensures broader engagement and understanding.

Many people do not regularly follow government activities or are unfamiliar with governmental terminology, creating a communication barrier. Simplifying language and making messages more direct can help prevent misinterpretation and make information more accessible to a wider audience.

Another key opportunity is ensuring consistency in messaging over time. As information evolves, messages often change, which can create confusion or erode trust. A more stable, clearly defined message builds long-term understanding and credibility. Diversifying communication methods, such as utilizing social media, signage, and in-person meetings, can help reach different segments of the population more effectively.



“Governments throughout the world can learn many critical lessons from examining instances of ineffective communication with the public during the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Ineffective government communication has resulted in a great deal of public confusion and misunderstanding, as well as serious errors in responding to this evolving health threat, leading to disastrous health and social outcomes for the public and prolonging the pandemic, especially within the United States.” – An Analysis of Government Communication in the United States During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Recommendations for Effective Government Health Risk Communication, D. K. David Kim and Gary L. Kreps, National Library of Medicine

Beyond improving local engagement, a more polished, strategically crafted marketing campaign can significantly enhance Tuolumne County’s ability to attract businesses. Companies considering multiple locations are often drawn to communities that present themselves as business-friendly, forward-thinking, and organized. A well-designed, visually appealing, and compelling campaign can position Tuolumne County as a competitive and desirable place to invest. By incorporating branding, professional visuals, and messaging that highlights the county’s strengths, such as its quality of life, available resources, and economic opportunities, Tuolumne can stand out among competing regions. A more sophisticated and cohesive campaign can create a lasting impression, making the county more attractive to businesses looking for the right place to establish and grow.

“One of the attributes of best-in-class organizations is that message development is strategic, consistent, and responsive to audience needs. In other words, there’s a Strategic Messaging Methodology in place as one of the standard operating practices of the internal communications function.” – 7 Benefits of Developing Messaging Strategically, LinkedIn Top Voice, David Grossman, January 21, 2021

Solution

To address the challenges in messaging and take advantage of opportunities for improvement, Tuolumne County must develop a clear, consistent, and strategic communication plan. This begins with creating a standardized messaging strategy that defines the county’s value proposition, ensuring all outreach efforts align with key economic development goals.



A dedicated committee or a Public Information Officer can help coordinate messaging, while tools such as public outreach worksheet can assist in the planning process for each project.

“There’s power in having a process that you use consistently to develop key messages and tell your story. It leads to greater efficiency and even better outcomes. Communications professionals have told us that a message platform saves between 20-30 hours a month in having to re-do materials. The bottom line is: Every organization should have a Strategic Messaging Methodology.” - 7 Benefits of Developing Messaging Strategically, LinkedIn Top Voice, David Grossman, January 21, 2021

Establishing common goals and collaborating with other organizations, such as leveraging state initiatives like California’s Master Plan, will help connect economic development efforts with valuable resources and data.

Public engagement is essential to building trust and support for local projects. Developing a website as a central hub for information, including project maps, holding public meetings to discuss upcoming initiatives, and maintaining a regularly updated list of projects will improve transparency and accessibility. Incorporating economic impact analyses can further demonstrate the tangible benefits of development efforts.

A strong marketing and branding strategy is also critical to attracting businesses and investors. Ensuring consistency across all communication channels, leveraging digital marketing to increase visibility, and enlisting help from businesses to create a professional marketing blueprint can significantly enhance outreach efforts. As noted in economic development research, sporadic social media posts and outdated websites are not enough. Tuolumne County needs a data-driven, professional marketing approach to remain competitive. By implementing these solutions, the county can improve public perception, increase business interest, and create a more effective framework for long-term economic growth.

“...We can do our best to communicate the message firmly but kindly—planting that seed of thought. And then do our best to nurture that seed, patiently waiting and hoping for growth. While there’s no guarantee of a seed we plant ever sprouting and growing, there’s absolutely no chance of a harvest if the seed is never planted!” – You Cannot Force Growth, Dan Nielson, January 24, 2019



Additional Benefits

Stronger Regional and Statewide Partnerships – A clear, unified message makes it easier to collaborate with regional, state, and federal agencies, as well as economic development organizations. When Tuolumne County presents itself consistently, it becomes a stronger partner in larger economic initiatives.

Increased Tourism Appeal – A well-crafted messaging strategy can highlight Tuolumne County’s unique assets. This could include outdoor recreation, historic charm, and quality of life, helping to attract visitors who contribute to the local economy.

Workforce Attraction and Retention – A compelling message about career opportunities, affordability, and lifestyle benefits can help attract skilled workers and retain young professionals who might otherwise seek opportunities elsewhere.

Crisis Communication Readiness – A defined messaging strategy allows for faster, more effective communication in times of crisis, whether it’s an economic downturn, natural disaster, or public safety concern. This helps reduce misinformation and reassures residents and businesses.

Increased Investor Confidence – A strong, well-branded message signals stability, organization, and forward-thinking leadership, making Tuolumne County more attractive to investors and developers looking for a location with a clear vision for growth.

Community Pride and Engagement – When messaging consistently reinforces local strengths and accomplishments, it fosters a sense of pride among residents, leading to greater participation in civic initiatives and stronger grassroots advocacy for economic development efforts.

More Effective Grant Applications – Many public and private grant opportunities require communities to articulate their economic development goals clearly. A strong messaging strategy makes it easier to craft compelling applications and secure funding for key initiatives.

Better Alignment Between Government Departments – By ensuring all departments share a consistent message, internal coordination improves, reducing confusion and making it easier to implement projects effectively.



STRATEGIES

To effectively address the challenges and capitalize on the opportunities, the following strategies should be implemented:

A

Develop and Maintain a Consistent Message for Economic Development

To develop a strong and effective messaging strategy, Tuolumne County should establish a committee of community members and communication experts to design an approach that considers audience perspectives and information consumption habits. This effort should include creating a standardized process for defining the value proposition of each project, ensuring messaging is clear, concise, and relevant to the public. A Public Outreach Worksheet can be utilized to outline key messaging details, such as target audiences, essential verbiage, and appropriate imagery to enhance communication effectiveness. Additionally, implementing a messaging strategy matrix will help ensure that information is disseminated in a structured and purposeful manner across different platforms and audiences. To coordinate these efforts and maintain consistency, the county should hire a Public Information Officer dedicated to overseeing outreach activities and ensuring a unified, strategic approach to public communication.





B

Build Partnerships and Leverage Existing Resources

To enhance economic development efforts, Tuolumne County should identify and collaborate with organizations that share common goals and budget resources for marketing. By working together, these partnerships can amplify outreach efforts and create a more cohesive approach to attracting businesses and investment. Additionally, aligning local initiatives with broader strategies, such as California's Master Plan, ensures that economic development efforts are positioned within a larger framework, increasing their effectiveness and impact. Strengthening relationships with state and regional agencies will also provide access to valuable resources, economic data, and funding opportunities, further supporting the county's ability to promote growth and sustainability.

C

Communicate Purpose and Benefits to the Public

To improve public communication and transparency, Tuolumne County should develop a centralized website to serve as an information hub and landing page for visitors and businesses. This platform would provide easy access to updates on economic development initiatives, available resources, and investment opportunities. Hosting public meetings, both in-person and online, will further enhance engagement by allowing residents to ask questions and stay informed about ongoing projects. Additionally, maintaining a regularly updated list of current and upcoming projects will promote transparency, with an interactive map providing locations and key details on approved developments, similar to the City of El Centro's online Development Map. Conducting Economic Impact Analyses will also be essential in demonstrating the tangible benefits of these initiatives, helping to build community trust and support for future growth efforts.



"If your current strategy consists of sporadic social media posts, a rarely updated website, and waiting for investors to find you, it's time to rethink your approach. A professional, data-driven website is the foundation of any economic development strategy." - Why Rural Economic Developers Need a Marketing Strategy—And What Happens Without One, February 17, 2025

D

Create a Strong Marketing and Branding Strategy

To effectively promote Tuolumne County's economic development efforts, messaging must remain consistent across all communication channels, including digital platforms, print materials, and in-person engagements. A strong digital marketing strategy should be leveraged, utilizing social media and online campaigns to expand visibility and reach a broader audience. Partnering with professional marketing firms can help develop a high-quality, data-driven marketing blueprint that ensures a polished and strategic approach. Shifting from a reactive marketing strategy to a proactive, long-term branding effort will position Tuolumne County as an attractive destination for business investment, fostering sustainable growth and economic resilience.



CURRENT AND RECENT PROJECTS

Numerous projects in Tuolumne County are either being implemented or have recently been completed, which align with this strategy.

Marketing Theme and Value Proposition

In February of 2025, the Economic Development Executive Team focused on the idea for messaging for Tuolumne County. Noting the strengths of the county, the group began to settle on the messaging theme of showcasing the possibilities of working and doing business in the region while maintaining a balanced, fulfilling lifestyle. With a target audience of teenager to young adult, this would highlight an environment where individuals can be professionally successful while enjoying recreation, family time, and a strong sense of community.

Visually, the concept evolved to depict people working in enjoyable, customer-friendly atmospheres and seamlessly transitioning into their personal lives. One approach involves showing individuals at work who, upon leaving, transform into another part of their life, whether at home, outdoors, or socializing. This would reinforce the message that **"In Tuolumne, It's Possible"** to have both career success and quality of life.

Example Wording – Tuolumne's Possibilities

It's possible to work where you play.
It's possible to spend time with your family.
It's possible to know your customers.
It's possible to make a living while living.
In Tuolumne, it's possible.



Public Outreach Worksheet

In late 2024, the Economic Development Executive Team developed a Public Outreach Worksheet. This provided a template to be used by a group developing a messaging strategy, to explore important factors. This would include:

- The objective of the messaging
- Identifying the target audience
- Developing the message itself
- Determining which mediums will be used
- Establishing the timelines and milestones
- Allocating resources such as budget and responsibilities

PUBLIC OUTREACH PLANNING WORKSHEET

Name of Outreach Efforts: _____

1. Define Objectives

- **Purpose:** What is the general purpose of the outreach?

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| ☐ To inform | ☐ To solicit feedback |
| ☐ To engage | ☐ To take action |
| ☐ To educate | |

- **Goal:** What is the main goal of the outreach?

Examples: "To better understand the needs of businesses in the Groveland area", "To inform the community of Columbia the purpose of the Welcome Sign project"

2. Identify the Target Audience

- **Stakeholders:** Identify key stakeholders

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ General Public | ☐ Tribal and other Government Entities |
| ☐ Business Owners | ☐ Residents (Area) _____ |
| ☐ Community Groups | ☐ Visitors |

- **Demographics and Disposition:** Identify the make-up of your target audience.

- ☐ Age or Generation: _____
- ☐ Income and Lifestyles: _____
- ☐ Education: _____
- ☐ Location: _____
- ☐ Interests: _____
- ☐ Values: _____
- ☐ Attitudes: _____

- **Community Partners:** Which persons or groups who can help amplify your message?

3. Message Development

- What is the clear and concise core message that aligns with your objectives?

- What image(s) could illustrate this?

4. Communication Mediums

- **Mediums:** What method will you use to communicate your message?

☐ Social Media

☐ Radio

☐ Websites

☐ Community Meetings

☐ Email

☐ Workshops

☐ Newsletter

☐ Flyers

☐ Survey

☐ Video

☐ Banner

5. Timeline and Milestones

- **Deadline:** What is the deadline for the outreach? _____

- **Timeline:** What are key milestones and deadlines?

6. Resource Allocation

- **Budget:** What is the budget for the outreach activities? Who will pay?

- **Responsibility:** Who will take on each role and responsibility?
