# CITY OF NORTH Ridgeville

EST 1810

## 2025 Communications Plan

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# Introduction ———————————————————————

This communication strategy represents a first for the City of North Ridgeville. Its purpose is to lay the foundation for success by better informing the public, serving the communication needs of staff, fostering positive engagement and creating meaningful connections. This plan sets a clear direction for the city's communications coordinator over the next five to ten years. It details goals and action items that will advance the city's mission and enhance community pride.

The document will align with the goals, recommendations and messaging consistent with the Ridgeville Ready Master Plan, where developing a communications plan is identified as a strategic priority to help achieve the city's communications objectives.

It will define opportunities and actions for the city to improve internal communication and collaboration and strengthen the way North Ridgeville shares information with the community. It is a multi-year plan that is intended to be monitored, evaluated and updated as needed.

## Vision Statement

North Ridgeville is a community with a strategic focus on the future… abundant amenities, economic vitality, sustainable infrastructure and access to opportunities for all.

## Guiding Principles

Be proactive, positive and professional.
Be transparent.
Be collaborative.
Communicate clearly and concisely.

## Develop a Communications Plan

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Implementing routine internal communications with employees can help improve understanding of current priorities and projects and create a greater sense of teamwork. The city should also identify ways to improve external communications with the public using a variety of methods (website, e-newsletters, social media, signage, etc.), ensuring there is opportunity for two-way communication with residents. When opportunities are available, the city should continue to provide mailed content (i.e., via utility bill inserts) to residents and businesses.

**NORTH RIDGEVILLE READY!**
Planning together for a better tomorrow

## Community Context

North Ridgeville became a city in 1960 when its population reached 5,000, but it remained a farming community for many more decades. Housing construction took off starting in the late 1990s. More housing was built in the 2000s than in the prior two decades combined. In 2017, North Ridgeville gained the recognition of being the fastest growing city in Northeast Ohio. Change, mostly in the form of rapid development, caused the city some growing pains during these years as it shifted from a largely rural community to the busy suburb of over 37,000 residents it is today.

To effectively communicate with the community, it is important to understand the city's population trends, demographics, housing and economic indicators. Much of this information was captured in the Ridgeville Ready Master Plan. Highlights are included here, in some cases adjusted for more recently available data.

- About 73% of the city's land is zoned for residential use.
- North Ridgeville's population grew 58% between 2000 and 2020.
- People age 65 and over represent the fastest growing age group since 2010.
- Children under 18 make up almost a quarter of the city's population.
- Housing units constructed since 2000 represent over 44% of the housing stock.
- About 90% of the city's housing units are owner-occupied.
- Median household income was $82,405 in 2020 and $94,234 in 2023.
- Healthcare and social assistance is the largest employer of residents.
- Manufacturing is the largest industry by employment in the city and the second largest employer of residents.
- Relatively few residents work in North Ridgeville. About 16,000 residents leave the city to work and 6,000 individuals living outside the city work in North Ridgeville.
- The workforce is aging. In 2019, about a quarter of the North Ridgeville workforce was over age 55, a significant increase from the previous decade.
- About 35% of North Ridgeville residents have a bachelor's degree or higher.

# Organizational Structure

The City of North Ridgeville employs over 200 staff members across seven departments. In 2023, the city undertook a reorganization and restructuring effort, consolidating departments into larger, more cohesive groups aimed at enhancing operational efficiency. This new structure emphasizes a team-based approach, which led to the recognition of a growing need for a dedicated communications office.
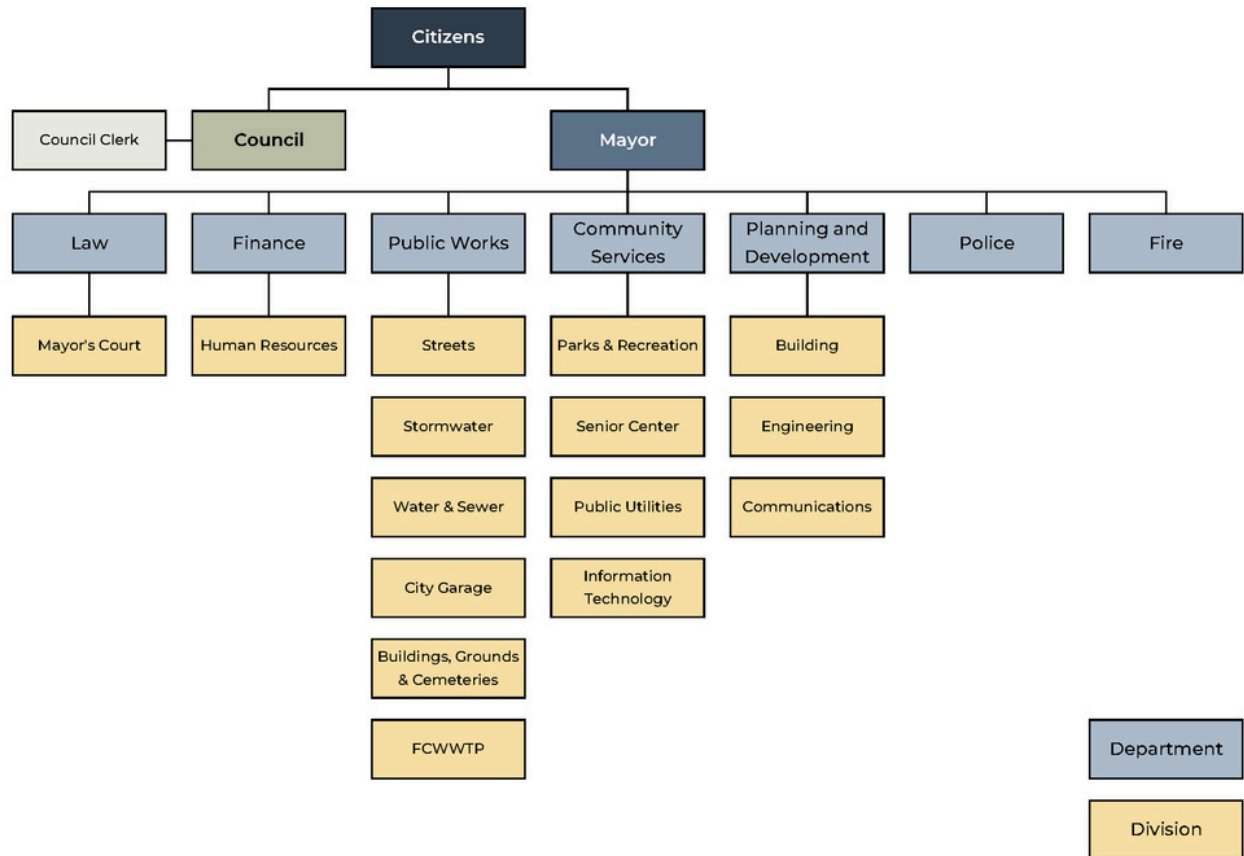
# Discovery and Analysis

## Branding Initiative

In 2021, the City of North Ridgeville began a process to create a brand in order to convey a consistent message and vision of the city and to align the visual elements used by various city departments. Led by Guide Studio, the process involved interviews with key stakeholders, a brand discovery workshop, an online survey and input by a steering committee. The result of the process was not just the new city logo and family of brand fonts and colors that have been deployed since 2022, but also a brand platform that can serve as a resource for the development of messaging and communication pieces.

The brand platform can be utilized in the following ways:

- To identify key audiences and pinpoint the strengths and features of North Ridgeville that resonate most with them.
- To recognize challenges and negative perceptions about the community and to develop communication materials to improve civic pride.
- To set the right tone and voice for communications compatible with the city's personality.
- To create messaging in support of North Ridgeville's distinct advantages.

## Positioning Statement

A positioning statement is a simple and concise internal statement that articulates who you are, what you offer, who it's for and the end benefit, while also identifying what makes you unique within the marketplace. It is used to set a direction for marketing and communications.

**North Ridgeville is proactive in sustaining a supportive community culture that makes the city feel like HOME. Residents enjoy the city's outstanding services, a robust locally-owned business community and abundant housing choices – all within a conveniently-located and picturesque landscape.**

## Communication Channels

Communication channels encompass the verbal and written methods used to deliver messages to others. These channels can be formal or informal, internal or external. Identifying the most effective channels for delivering messages is critical to achieving clear and successful communication. Since the importance and objectives of messages vary, along with the preferences and needs of the audience, it is essential to use a diverse range of channels to ensure information is effectively delivered and received. Current communication channels are listed below.

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| **Print** | North Ridgeville Magazine<br>Press Releases, Newspaper Articles<br>Parks & Recreation Tri-Annual Program Guide<br>Senior Center Bi-Monthly Newsletter<br>Direct Mail, Utility Bill Inserts, Brochures<br>Special Event Signage and Flyers |
| **Face-to-Face** | Public Meetings<br>Mayor's Monthly Coffee and Conversation<br>State of North Ridgeville<br>Other Public Events |
| **Digital** | City Website<br>Monthly City Newsletter<br>Parks & Recreation Tri-Annual Program Guide<br>Parks & Recreation Monthly Newsletter<br>Senior Center Bi-Monthly Newsletter<br>Employee Newsletter<br>Mayor's Weekly Video<br>Digital Sign<br>WENS Emergency Alerts |
| **Social Media** | City of North Ridgeville Facebook page<br>City of North Ridgeville, Ohio LinkedIn profile<br>North Ridgeville Parks & Recreation Facebook page<br>North Ridgeville Parks & Rec Instagram page<br>North Ridgeville Office for Older Adults Facebook page<br>North Ridgeville Fire Department Facebook page<br>North Ridgeville Police Department Facebook page<br>City of North Ridgeville YouTube channel |

## Staff Insights

After conducting internal interviews with each department and division to assess current communication practices and identify areas of need, several key themes emerged.

These findings helped to guide the development of targeted implementation strategies aimed at enhancing internal and external communication efforts across the organization.

Community Education

Employee Engagement

PR and Marketing

Communication and Brand Consistency

### Community Education

Community education is a vital tool for fostering a shared sense of purpose. By building knowledge and understanding, it enables the public and the city to collaborate effectively toward common goals. Additionally, community education reflects the city's commitment to transparency. Some key focus areas that were identified include:

- Supporting recruiting efforts
- Tracking implementation of the Master Plan
- Explanation of city finances in lay terms
- Improving communication about property maintenance expectations
- Creating awareness about permit submission requirements
- Highlighting Police Specialty Units
- Aid the Fire Department in efforts to increase public education on safety issues

### Employee Engagement

Engaged employees provide better customer service, have less absenteeism and have higher team collaboration and morale. Implementing engagement strategies is essential to drive organizational success and improve workplace culture. Areas where our staff feel improvement is a priority include:

- Increasing employee education opportunities
- Providing an updated employee handbook for guidance and reference
- Expanding onboarding opportunities to welcome new employees such as swearing in and introduction of newly hired personnel
- Recognizing employees for achievements, milestones and career transitions

## Communication and Brand Consistency

Brand consistency ensures recognizable and consistent communication across all channels. This builds trust, loyalty and familiarity with the brand. Consistent communication and branding also ensures that interactions reflect not only the brand image, but also brand values. Staff recommendations include:

- Updating documents and forms to meet branding guidelines
- Creating a more positive tone in regulatory communications, construction notices and other official correspondence
- Assisting with guides and newsletters to enhance consistent messaging
- Establishing monthly and annual report templates to encourage and enhance internal reporting

## Public Relations and Marketing

Public relations helps build relationships with the media, fosters a strong brand and secures positive media coverage thus shaping the public perception. Several departments requested assistance with writing press releases, publicizing events and creating social media content.

## SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis is a powerful evaluation tool that helps organizations make informed, strategic decisions to guide their planning efforts. By identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, this analysis offers a snapshot of the city's current position. This process of self-evaluation is essential for aligning strategies with the city's internal and external realities.

### Strengths

- A wide variety of communication channels currently exist and the city has recently increased its outreach capacity with the addition of the Office of Communications.
- The branding process that began in 2021 has enhanced community pride and resulted in stronger brand recognition within the community.
- The city maintains positive, collaborative relationships with local schools, businesses and community organizations, as well as other partners within Lorain County.

## Weaknesses

- It is challenging to reach all or even a majority of residents with city communications. In some cases, residents are simply not actively engaged. In other cases, the city's methods of communication may not line up with how residents consume information.

- City departments have historically operated in silos. Internal communication has been irregular and there is a lack of shared vision among employees. Becoming a more cohesive organization takes time and intention.

- The city has limited resources, so proposed expenditures for communications and public relations compete with other priorities such as public safety and city services. Prior to the creation of the communications office, there was no champion or person responsible for exploring new communication strategies and tools.

## Opportunities

- Communication tools can be used to improve community education on a wide variety of topics. Well-informed residents can help support and promote positive change.

- The city should make a greater effort to celebrate its accomplishments. This recognition of achievement extends to the city's volunteers and employees who contribute meaningfully to the success of the North Ridgeville community.

- New community events can help to build a positive image of the city and enhance civic pride. Friendly and positive interactions between residents and city employees can improve relatability and trust.

- Employees should understand the mission and core values of the city government. Providing regular communications and hosting employee appreciation events are examples of ways morale can be improved, expanding the role of employees from workforce to city ambassadors.

## Threats

- The city is not always in control of its own message. Antagonists can provide misinformation or promote negativity through social media, which is hard to combat. Engaging in two-way communications on social media has been limited due to the challenges of ensuring timely response and avoiding unproductive dialogue.

- While the city's branding initiative has generated positive feedback, the integrity of the brand relies upon the proper use by many city departments and employees. Lack of brand management can result in improper use of logos and other brand elements that may be costly to correct.

- To be most effective, the city needs to be able to control all of its communication channels, including social media accounts, Google profiles, etc. In some cases, previous employees have personal ownership of pages or accounts such that the city cannot access or make necessary changes to those profiles.

# Goals

## Capacity Building

Effective communication requires resources so staff can successfully collaborate, share information and engage with diverse audiences. North Ridgeville will create the internal infrastructure, develop procedures and obtain the tools needed to support its communication strategies.

## Internal Communications

Creating a positive reputation starts from the inside. North Ridgeville will improve internal communications and employee engagement to help build a culture where staff feel valued, informed and part of the team.

## External Communications

Communication is a key ingredient in building transparency and trust within the community. By providing timely and relevant content on city issues and initiatives, North Ridgeville will empower residents with the information they need to make informed decisions and feel confident in the city's commitment to accountability and responsiveness.

## Social Media

Using social media as a news source has become an increasingly more popular way for people of all age groups to obtain current and important information. North Ridgeville will strengthen its social media presence through consistently posting informative content, creating positive and engaging messaging and employing better social media management practices.

## Community Engagement and Partnerships

North Ridgeville's many service organizations, schools, business groups and churches are essential to the community fabric, creating a sense of belonging and support. North Ridgeville will build and maintain strong relationships with these partners to foster collaboration and strengthen the broader community.

# Implementation Strategies

## Capacity Building

▶ **Define internal roles and responsibilities.**

To build a culture of shared responsibility in the city for effective communication, identify point people within each department to serve as key communicators.

▶ **Actively engage in brand management and monitor brand usage.**

Review the importance of proper brand usage with department heads. Engage a designated brand manager when brand use requires review to ensure consistent application. Ensure new employees that will interact with brand elements are provided training as part of their onboarding process.

▶ **Create an annual editorial calendar.**

Effective communication requires the participation of all departments. The communications coordinator should convene key communicators to plan out social media, newsletter, news media and website content. This will ensure coordination and help the city be strategic about communicating important projects, overarching stories and timely topics. Meetings should be held at least quarterly.

▶ **Develop internal procedures to support communication strategies.**

Establishing procedures, deadlines and other expectations helps all staff members understand their role in communications. Participating in team meetings helps communications staff identify opportunities, provides the needed background knowledge on departmental activities and reinforces the importance of information sharing.

▶ **Build a digital resource library.**

Continue to add resources – brand elements, high quality photography and video – to a digital library that can be used in a variety of applications including social media, the city website, print publications and even streetscape banners.

**Continue to implement North Ridgeville's brand identity in the physical and digital realms.**

The city should continue to build its brand through physical improvements, a website refresh and other digital tools, as well as continuing to develop the communications side of the brand.

Indicates strategy was identified in the Ridgeville Ready Master Plan

▶ **Design and create North Ridgeville branded merchandise.**

City "swag" can be used for community engagement and to promote civic pride. Apparel and other branded items can be available for purchase by employees as well as the public.

▶ **Develop a crisis communications strategy.**

Create a framework for communications when an emergency situation arises. Identifying the necessary tasks and steps used to convey critical information can save valuable time in an emergency.

▶ **Collect and review metrics and adjust communications strategies as needed.**

Consistent evaluation and measurement help to assess what is working and identify areas for improvement. Tools include, but are not limited to, data analytics from newsletters and social media, website clicks, community polls and surveys and staff feedback.

## Internal Communications

▶ **Welcome new employees.**

Identify ways to enhance the employee onboarding process such as welcome messages to new hires, lunch with the mayor or gifting a North Ridgeville branded item.

▶ **Develop and implement routine bi-weekly employee newsletters.**

Regular, consistent communication helps improve understanding of current city priorities and projects and creates a greater sense of teamwork. The newsletter is a tool that can be utilized to support the city's other internal communications objectives.

▶ **Celebrate employee accomplishments.**

Share significant milestones, awards, positive media coverage, successful projects and achievements of city employees in both internal and external communications.

▶ **Create an official employee recognition program.**

Develop a peer-nominated recognition program that rewards employees for providing excellent service to the city and North Ridgeville residents.

▶ **Plan volunteer appreciation activities.**

The city benefits from the time and talents of many volunteer board and commission members. Volunteer efforts should be recognized on an annual basis. Opportunities include but are not limited to social events, recognition in the city newsletter and thank you letters from the mayor's office.

▶ **Plan and promote employee events.**

Employee events (BBQs, holiday celebrations, retirements) provide an opportunity for staff to interact who may not frequently come into contact with each other.

## External Communications

▶ **Refresh the new resident packet.**

Develop a more appealing and user-friendly format to convey city information to new residents. Leverage the in-person opportunity to welcome new residents at the time utility accounts are established.

▶ **Improve the city website.**

Update the website to conform to the city's brand standards. Explore ways to better utilize the website as a strategic communications tool. Curate content and collaborate with department heads to keep the site fresh and relevant.

▶ **Create a contact list of print and digital media outlets that cover North Ridgeville.**

Identify primary contacts for each outlet. Ensure the list is updated as reporters' assignments change. Keep open lines of communication with reporters to understand their areas of interest.

▶ **Increase news coverage of North Ridgeville by proactively engaging with the media.**

Packaging content in a helpful way (press releases with attached photos or graphics, for example) can result in better news coverage of the North Ridgeville community. Sharing story ideas and being responsive to media inquiries helps strengthen relationships and creates new opportunities for positive press.

▶ **Continue to identify ways to improve communications with the general public using a variety of methods.**

A citywide communication strategy should involve a combination of tactics including the city website, e-newsletters, social media, signage, mailed content, etc. By better understanding audiences and how they obtain their information, the city can more easily meet residents where they are at with timely and relevant information.

▶ **Create more dynamic and engaging messaging.**

Photos and videos are powerful communication tools. Capture photos and video of local events, city initiatives, staff at work, etc., to accompany messaging. Graphics should grab attention and provide a snapshot of the message. Use tools such as Canva and Adobe products to create quality graphics.

▶ **Level up in-person outreach activities such as the Mayor's Coffee and Conversation and State of North Ridgeville.**

Create a more welcoming environment for the public to engage with their city officials. Create branding for regular town hall meetings or annual events that can be expressed through graphics, signage and other design elements.

▶ **Promote public education through topic-specific and targeted campaigns.**

Projects or initiatives that span a significant time period, involve multiple departments, require community input or have other unique communication needs require special attention. A topic-specific strategy should allow for a deep dive into the small details and nuances of the subject with the aim of improving public understanding.

## Social Media

▶ **Identify all existing social media accounts affiliated with the city, their administrators and other content creators.**

All social media accounts tied to the city should be secured and administered via a city profile. Eliminate any former pages that are not currently affiliated with the city to prevent public confusion.

▶ **Revisit the social media use policy.**

Review and revise, as needed, the city's social media policies. Any city employee with access to a city social media account should be provided with regular training and review of the policy.

▶ **Explore new social media tools.**

Stay abreast of new and emerging apps and technologies that could be used to expand the city's communication platforms. Review and revisit existing opportunities for social media engagement that may be unused or underutilized.

▶ **Develop a content calendar.**

Proactively identify content, such as seasonally-relevant information, that can be pre-scheduled to improve the frequency of city communications.

▶ **Improve photography and expand the use of video in social media posts.**

Capture higher quality photos and video of city activities and local events. Use of photos and video should become a regular part of communicating on social media.

▶ **Integrate polls and surveys into social media to encourage engagement and check the pulse of the community.**

Simple polls and surveys can be included to periodically check in with the community and encourage engagement outside of formal opportunities.

▶ **Create brand specific graphics.**

Utilize Canva or other design tools to create brand-consistent graphics rather than generic templates.

▶ **Work towards utilizing social media for two-way communications.**

Currently, the ability for the public to comment on certain city accounts is disabled. Explore best practices of communities for managing public comments on posts. Establish guidelines for responding to comments.

▶ **Explore the value of a social media management platform.**

A social media management platform would provide the ability to schedule posts in advance, promote staff collaboration and offer detailed analytics. Investigate the costs, benefits and likely usage of such a tool.

## Community Engagement and Partnerships

▶ **Establish network of key communicators across the North Ridgeville community.**

Key communicators should represent various groups and organizations, as well as different geographies and population groups. Key communicators may be affiliated with schools, churches, business groups, service organizations, neighborhood homeowners' associations, etc. Key communicators should be tasked with sharing city information with their groups and contacts.

▶ **Build relationships that will enhance collaboration between the city and community organizations.**

Key staff should acquire membership in appropriate community groups and attend meetings and events to broaden awareness and maintain positive relationships. In some cases, this may require the city's investment in membership dues and/or event fees.

▶ **Continue to seek ways to involve residents and community organizations in events and other city programming.**

Community organizations can provide valuable support for city events and programs, whether providing sponsorship, supplying volunteers or assisting with activities.

❗ **Create new, local events aimed at bringing the community together and strengthening civic engagement.**

The city should create new events designed specifically for North Ridgeville residents to increase civic pride and engagement and allow for people from various parts of the community and walks of life to get to know one another.

This Communications Plan provides a roadmap for achieving North Ridgeville's outreach goals by providing specific and measurable action items to improve both internal and external communications. It is a guide for city officials as they engage with the community, recognizing that transparency builds trust and strengthens collaboration between local government and the people it serves.

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