



Talent Attraction Marketing Strategy for  
— **THE NORTHERN** —  
**SHENANDOAH VALLEY**



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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

# Executive Summary

From August 2019-December 2019, Development Counsellors International (DCI) partnered with the Shenandoah Valley Talent Solution Coalition (the "Coalition") on a research and marketing strategy project to identify the region's talent challenges and create powerful marketing solutions. The project consisted of:

## Deep Research

- An immersion tour in the region with 10 focus groups arranged by the Coalition representing dozens of local leaders, employers and talent
- 8 in-depth phone interviews with local leaders (Mercury Paper, Monoflo International, The Shockey Companies, Holtzman Corp., Navy Federal Credit Union, Lord Fairfax Community College, Winchester Convention and Visitors Bureau, Alamo Drafthouse Cinema)
- An internal perception survey distributed by the Coalition, capturing 1,620 respondents, including representation of a wide range of ages and occupations
- Identification of four target talent markets for the region and an external perception survey capturing 1,200 respondents in those markets

## Key Messages

- Top talking points to describe the reasons why the region is a strategic location to live and work

## Marketing Strategy

- Based on research and best practices, DCI presented 8+ major marketing tactics for the region to start promoting its career and lifestyle opportunities to internal and external talent. The suggested marketing tactics were created with the following in mind:
  - The mission to arm employers, increase awareness and inspire career change.
  - Marketing builds awareness, but also needs to be combined with on-the-ground programs and resources to drive talent down the decision funnel from consideration to actual attraction.
  - Tactics can range from practical solutions to ambitious operations, but all have **the goal of solving employer and talent challenges.**
- The Marketing Strategy also includes direction on measurement and a timeline to track the execution of tactics. A detailed budget was provided to the Coalition in a separate excel sheet.

On behalf of the entire DCI team, we would like to thank the entire Northern Shenandoah Valley region and its stakeholders for collaborating with us on this important project. The project results would not have been possible without the direction and support from the Coalition, representing the economic development entities of Clarke County, Frederick County, Page County, Shenandoah County, Warren County and the City of Winchester. Thank you!

## DCI'S RESEARCH TAKEAWAYS

# Research Takeaways

DCI believes great marketing is rooted in research. Before developing the Marketing Strategy, DCI worked with the Coalition to gather talent insights from both external and internal audiences.

In order for the Northern Shenandoah Valley region to win talent, DCI sought to understand who the region's competition is. DCI identified four target markets that will be the region's "best bet" locations to draw talent from, taking into account multiple factors, such as in and out migration patterns, target industry data, employment concentrations, quality of life factors, cost of living, commute times, and alumni concentrations.

Based on the above, DCI conducted an external perception survey with 1,200 responses from the four identified target markets:

- Washington-Arlington-Alexandria DC-VA-MD-WV
- Baltimore-Columbia-Towson MD
- Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia NC-SC
- Hagerstown-Martinsburg MD-WV

DCI also conducted an internal perception survey with 1,620 responses (ranging from Gen Z to HR executives - distributed by the Coalition).

The full research respondent profile and findings were captured in a separate PDF and recorded presentation provided to the Coalition. Here are some of the top takeaways that informed the Marketing Strategy:

- The less time respondents have lived in the region, the less favorably they rank the region as a place to visit, live and work.
- 46% of respondents currently enrolled in a secondary or post-secondary institution would like to stay in the region. However, 38% are not confident they will find a job in the region that meets their skill and/or salary requirements.
- When target markets were asked what three words/phrases come to mind when you think of the region, the top response was "Unknown."

While the research pointed to the region's challenges—such as the need to build local pride with newcomers, connect existing young talent to careers, as well as build awareness with external talent—the findings also indicated huge opportunities:

- 89% of employers would hire or would consider hiring employees that require additional training. Of those, 90% would be willing to pay for the additional training required by job candidates.
- 64% of external talent said "yes" they would relocate to the region if offered a job that provided free/reduced cost training which allowed them to change their career path/and or upgrade their skills.
- For external talent, there was a strong correlation between visitation and willingness to relocate. Of those who said "Yes, I would be willing to relocate to the region," a majority either frequently visited/lived in the area or at least visited the area once or twice. Add to that, 77% said the best relocation tool is the chance to visit.

## KEY MESSAGES





# The Northern Shenandoah Valley Talent Key Messages

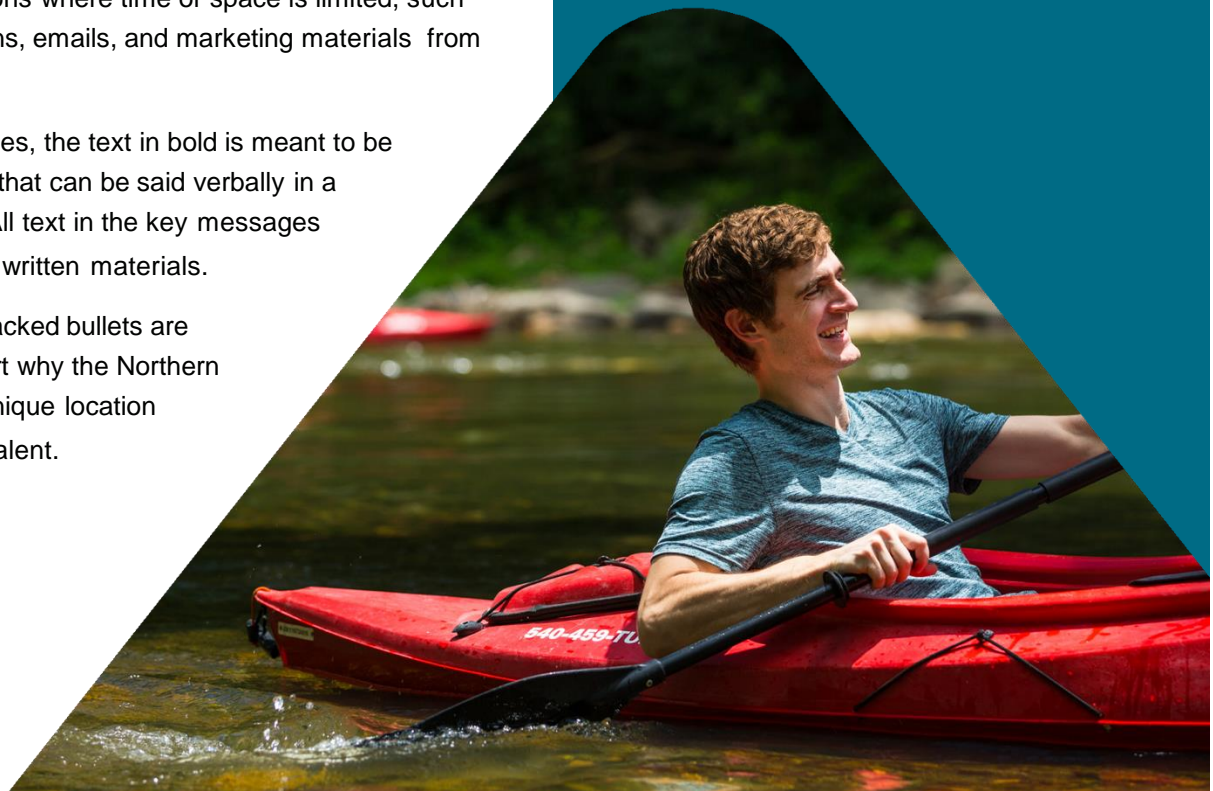
## Purpose of Key Messages

Key messages are your elevator speeches—they serve as the “top reasons” why the Northern Shenandoah Valley region is a great place to live, work, and thrive. Instead of communicating all points, it is important that your region communicates its most important points well.

The key messages are meant to quickly capture the attention of talent audiences in situations where time or space is limited, such as interviews, presentations, emails, and marketing materials from brochures to websites.

In each set of key messages, the text in **bold** is meant to be the overarching message that can be said verbally in a meeting or presentation. All text in the key messages can be used verbally or in written materials.

Each of the information-packed bullets are designed to further support why the Northern Shenandoah Valley is a unique location and **strategic** choice for talent.



# The Northern Shenandoah Valley Talent Key Messages

## Welcome to The Northern Shenandoah Valley.

Located at the northwest peak of Virginia and an hour and a half west of Washington, D.C., the five-county Northern Shenandoah Valley region is the northern gateway to the world-famous Shenandoah National Park and home to one of the fastest-growing communities in the D.C. area—the City of Winchester.

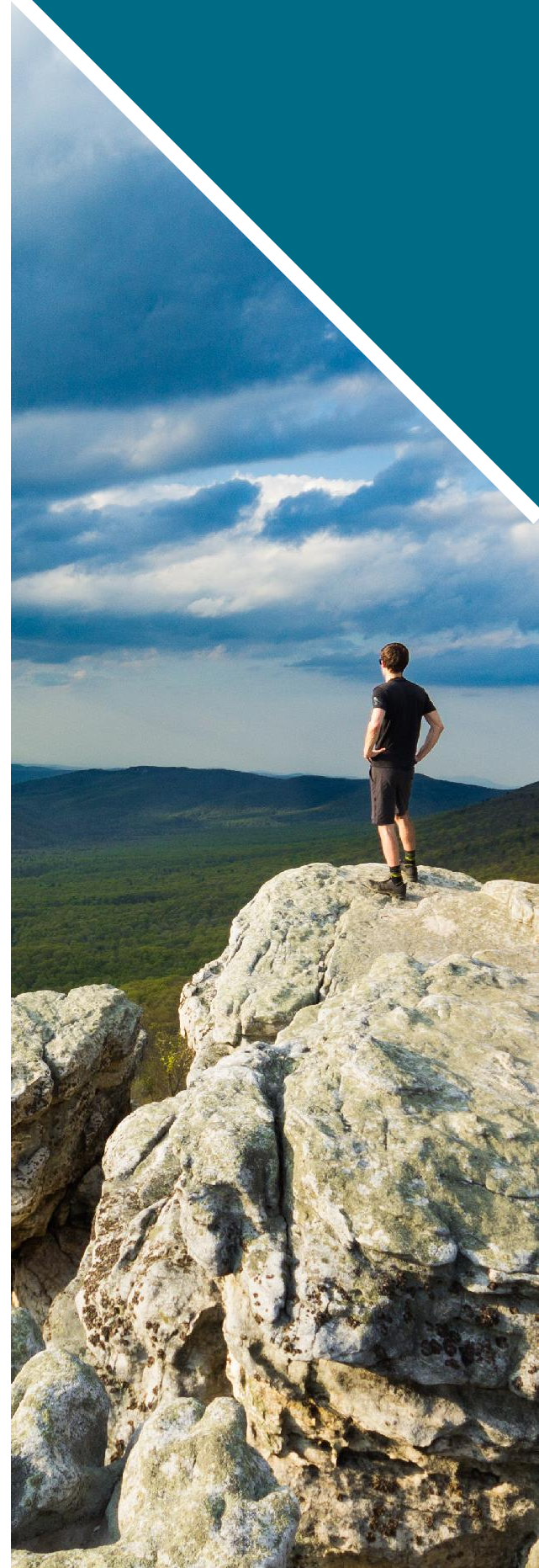
## Gain Back Your Time and Peace of Mind.

Ready to ditch the concrete jungle? Instead of being stuck in a costly commute with time-consuming traffic, you could be working where you live. Instead of renting in one of the nation's most expensive markets, you could be buying a home with a real backyard (housing costs are nearly **60% lower than D.C.** and one-bedroom apartments range from \$600-\$1,500/month). With all the region's major towns ranking well below the national average crime rate, you can rest assured you'll live in a safe neighborhood. Plus, the Northern Shenandoah Valley offers top-ranked public and private school options. Whether it's more space, more time, or more peace of mind, you can "trade-in" for a better life in the Northern Shenandoah Valley.

## Here's what people have to say after moving to the Northern Shenandoah Valley:

**"My mortgage is less than what I was paying for a two-bedroom apartment in D.C."**

**"The truth is I do more here than when I lived in a larger city – there is more to do and you can access it without fighting traffic."**







## **Live Where Others Love to Visit. Create a Life You Don't Need a Break From.**

More than 1.5 million people from around the world visit the Northern Shenandoah Valley region each year to enjoy Shenandoah National Park, outdoor festivals and concerts, historic towns and more. Moving to the Northern Shenandoah Valley region means the breathtaking Blue Ridge Mountains and its rivers are in your backyard. The same qualities that make the region a great escape for city dwellers make it an even greater place to call home. With five counties, there's always more to explore—whether it's foodie and music festivals or sporting events—from triathlons to cycling tours.

### **When you live in an outdoor oasis, other people's great adventures become your weekly routine...**

...hiking the Appalachian Trail, kayaking the Shenandoah River, or soaking in the views at one of the region's 17 vineyards or hopping around the 13 breweries (some even have play areas for the kiddos). More of an indoors person? Experience the region's 27 museums or watch a great film with local beer and food at one of the nation's first Alamo Drafthouses. Hungry? Because of the region's roots in agriculture, locals can grocery shop for fresh food at farmer's markets and dine at farm-to-table restaurants. The Northern Shenandoah Valley is also a hub for arts and cultural events — from operas to plays. In fact, through Shenandoah University alone, 300+ events are made possible — and that doesn't even count the hundreds more in surrounding communities.

**And because  
you won't be  
fighting traffic,  
you'll actually  
have time to  
experience it all.**

## Employers in the Northern Shenandoah Valley Want to Invest in You. Enjoy Major Benefits and Career Upgrades.

The Northern Shenandoah Valley is home to one of Forbes' Top 10 Best Small Places for Business and Careers in the nation—the City of Winchester, which is also No. 1 in Virginia. The region's economy is growing fast in diverse industries, including professional services, technology, manufacturing, logistics and distribution, food processing/agribusiness, tourism/hospitality and more.

Feeling worn out by your work? **Make work, work for you.** The region's employers are passionate about giving your life and career a much-needed makeover.

Thanks to local companies that put people first and great training institutions, like Lord Fairfax Community College, you can upgrade or completely change your career here. **In fact, 88% of the Northern Shenandoah Valley region's employers will pay for training.** Northern Shenandoah Valley companies offer life-changing benefits, like tuition reimbursement to take your skills and education to the next level, on-site medical and fitness centers, adoption assistance, and even discounts on everything from childcare to concerts.

Come work for one of the Fortune 500 companies in the region like Navy Federal Credit Union, Continental, Kraft Heinz Company, Amazon, Rubbermaid, HP Hood, or work for locally-based companies making a national impact.



- **Berryville Graphics (BVG):** One of the nation's largest book manufacturers
- **C2 Management (C2):** The Mid-Atlantic's largest provider of surplus asset recovery services and electronics recycling
- **Cives Steel Company:** Employee-owned and one of the nation's largest and most successful structural steel and plate fabricators
- **Greenway Engineering:** One of the largest multi-disciplined consulting engineering firms in Northern Virginia
- **Holtzman Oil Corp:** The region's largest oil company
- **Monoflo International:** The nation's premier manufacturer of superior quality injection molded plastic products
- **Shockey:** One of the Mid-Atlantic's most-respected construction firms

Have that big idea you've been wanting to make a reality?  
The Northern Shenandoah Valley region is ideal for entrepreneurs.  
With a low cost of doing business, you can focus on your concept, not on costs.



## One Region, Multiple Cities and Towns—Each with Their Own Unique Character.

The Northern Shenandoah Valley region is made up of six localities — each with unique economies, geographies, and personalities: Clarke, Frederick, Page, Shenandoah, Warren and the City of Winchester. The region has earned awards and accolades as a top city for business and careers, as well as a top location for outdoor play, foodies and more. While each county has its own character, you'll find we have the following in common: welcoming residents known for hospitality, scenic views, and historic downtowns with walkable main streets. No, you won't find urban landscapes here, but you won't find sprawling suburbia either. Our housing options are as diverse as our communities—spanning loft apartments, townhomes, historic homes, lake and riverfront living, new construction in private communities with amenities and properties with acreage to spare and mountain views.



## Proximity—Perfected. Next to Nature But Not too Far from Major Metros.

The Northern Shenandoah Valley is a rare gem of a place that offers so much natural beauty, so close to major metros. The Northern Shenandoah Valley is just an hour and a half from Washington D.C. and two hours from Baltimore. Plus, Virginia Beach, Ocean City, Maryland and even Philadelphia and New York City are all easy day trips located within a four to five-hour drive. The region is also close to three major airports — Dulles International Airport (IAD), Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA), Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport (BWI) — all within a two-hour drive or less. You can also get to flying in a matter of minutes through the convenient Shenandoah Valley Regional Airport (SHD), which has free parking close to the gate, short TSA lines, and direct flights to Chicago O'Hare and Washington-Dulles, where one of United's 70+ nonstop flights is just a layover away.

## THE MARKETING STRATEGY

## THE MARKETING STRATEGY

The purpose of this marketing strategy is to provide the Northern Shenandoah Valley with a blueprint on how to start marketing the jobs and lifestyle opportunities in the region. Based on DCI's research and what we heard from regional partners, we recommend the Northern Shenandoah Valley focus on the following priorities with its marketing efforts:

### THE MISSION

- 1. Arm employers**—DCI heard that when employers are recruiting candidates to relocate (professional service positions), candidates are hesitant about the location. To “sell” the location to the candidate, employers are investing in individual efforts for each candidate. Additionally, employers have a challenge retaining talent because of the location—mainly, the perception that there is a lack of activities. **The Northern Shenandoah Valley can fill this gap by creating marketing tools and programs that help employers sell location to candidates and existing employees.**
- 2. Increase awareness**—DCI's research showed that 34% of target market talent reported they were “somewhat familiar” or “very familiar” with the region. One of the top responses when asked what three words and/or phrases come to mind when you think of the Northern Shenandoah Valley? **“Unknown.”** Many local employers have their own methods of proactively finding and recruiting talent, which can be difficult and time intensive. In order for employers to have a steady stream of talent to choose from, the region needs to be known by talent as an ideal place to search for job opportunities and a better lifestyle.
- 3. Inspire career change**—DCI heard from employers that there is a large need for talent in positions that do not typically relocate—i.e. manufacturing or logistics. These positions also require training. There are already great employers and institutions with existing programs that connect talent to training programs. **The Northern Shenandoah Valley should use marketing to drive interest locally towards these programs.**

**The Northern Shenandoah Valley region needs to be on the radar of talent in target markets. Ultimately, marketing should interrupt talent's job and location searches, and turn their attention to the Northern Shenandoah Valley region.**



## 1. TALENT WEBSITE

Create one regional website for information on living and working in the Northern Shenandoah Valley region. The website will be a resource for employers to share with candidates, as well as for those looking to relocate and newcomers.

**The region has the great benefit of local tourism websites with an abundance of assets that showcase the location—make sure to fully capitalize on tourism’s existing content and functions when developing the new talent site.**

The talent website reduces the need to rely solely on relocation brochures—which can be costly to print and need constant updating.

## 2. DEVELOP DIGITAL “THINGS TO DO” RESOURCES

From focus groups with young professionals, DCI found there was a perception that there was a lack of activities, entertainment, amenities and generally “nothing to do” in the Northern Shenandoah Valley region, especially when compared to nearby regions. From employers, DCI heard that employees, especially young professionals, are hard to retain because of the same perceptions.

While the Northern Shenandoah Valley cannot solve this issue overnight, what the region can do is create a digital regional resource that showcases “things to do.” This resource will be housed on the new talent website and include the following regional information:

### Feedback from employers on most helpful tools for attracting talent:

“

*You can’t easily find the resources – you can’t just Google online and find anything”*

“

*It would be wonderful to have some materials or a site that actually spoke to a person coming from the outside who does not know the area – understand the features and the advantages of living and working in this area”*

“

*Help them to navigate it”*



## CASE STUDIES

### Maps

Upstate South Carolina's talent website includes a map that showcases the proximity to major metros, Charlotte and Atlanta. The website also has an interactive map that allows talent to explore the unique attributes of each community in the 10-county region.

[www.moveupstatesc.com/](http://www.moveupstatesc.com/)



KNOWN FOR:



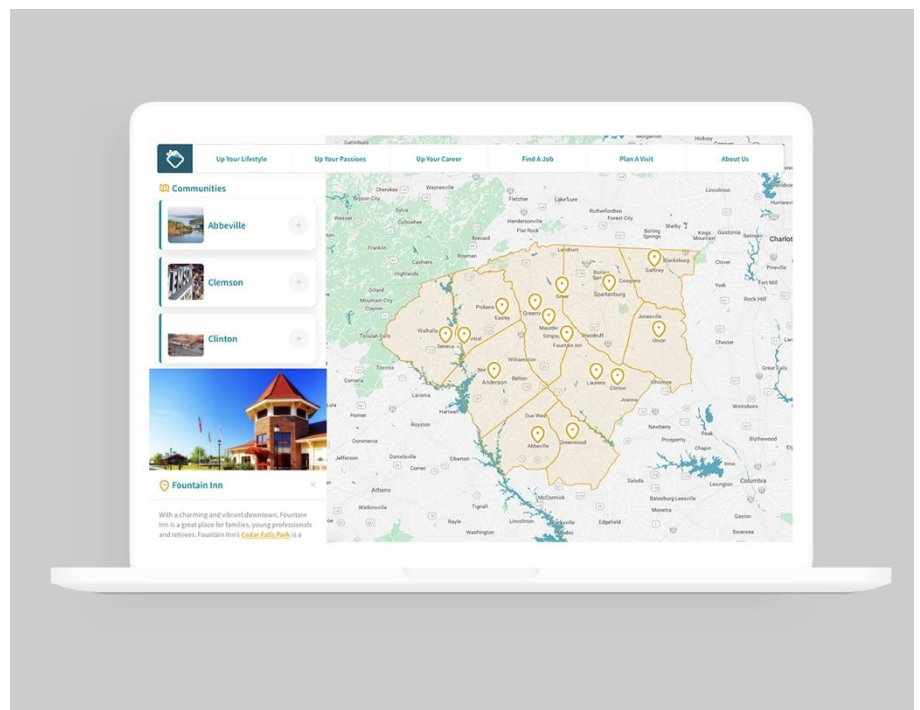
Lake Scene



Historic  
Downtown



Hiking



### 3. CREATE A CAREER TRAINING NETWORK + DIGITAL HUB

According to DCI's research, 88% of the region's employers will pay for training. The region also has great resources to connect talent to training that should be championed—including Lord Fairfax Community College, Triplett Tech, “Worlds of Work,” and other initiatives that expose K-12 to local careers. We heard it is a challenge to let those out of the school system (graduated) know about these training paths.

The Northern Shenandoah Valley can focus on making sure those 19+ (out of the school system) are aware of the great training and career opportunities by creating a career training network and digital hub.

#### **Career Training Network**

Enlist all local employers that are committed to career change/offer free or reimbursed training to join a regional network. By working regionally, these companies can create a stronger and louder message to talent. Employers in the network can create a candidate referral system that encourages local employees to share training/career opportunities with friends and family, and even their social media networks. If employers find a candidate that is interested in training, but not a current fit for the company, they can pass along their resume/credentials through the network.

#### **Career Training Digital Hub**

To supplement the network, make it as easy as possible for talent to plan for career training and find companies that support it, as well as help employers find candidates that are open to career change: create a digital hub within the new talent website dedicated to career training.

**Program idea: Amplify existing efforts to host career fairs for those who have not graduated high school to show them training opportunities and local employers (efforts are already being done by Winchester and Frederick County Schools).**

## WHAT IT COULD LOOK LIKE IN ACTION

Sample page of the Career Training Digital Hub on the new talent website.

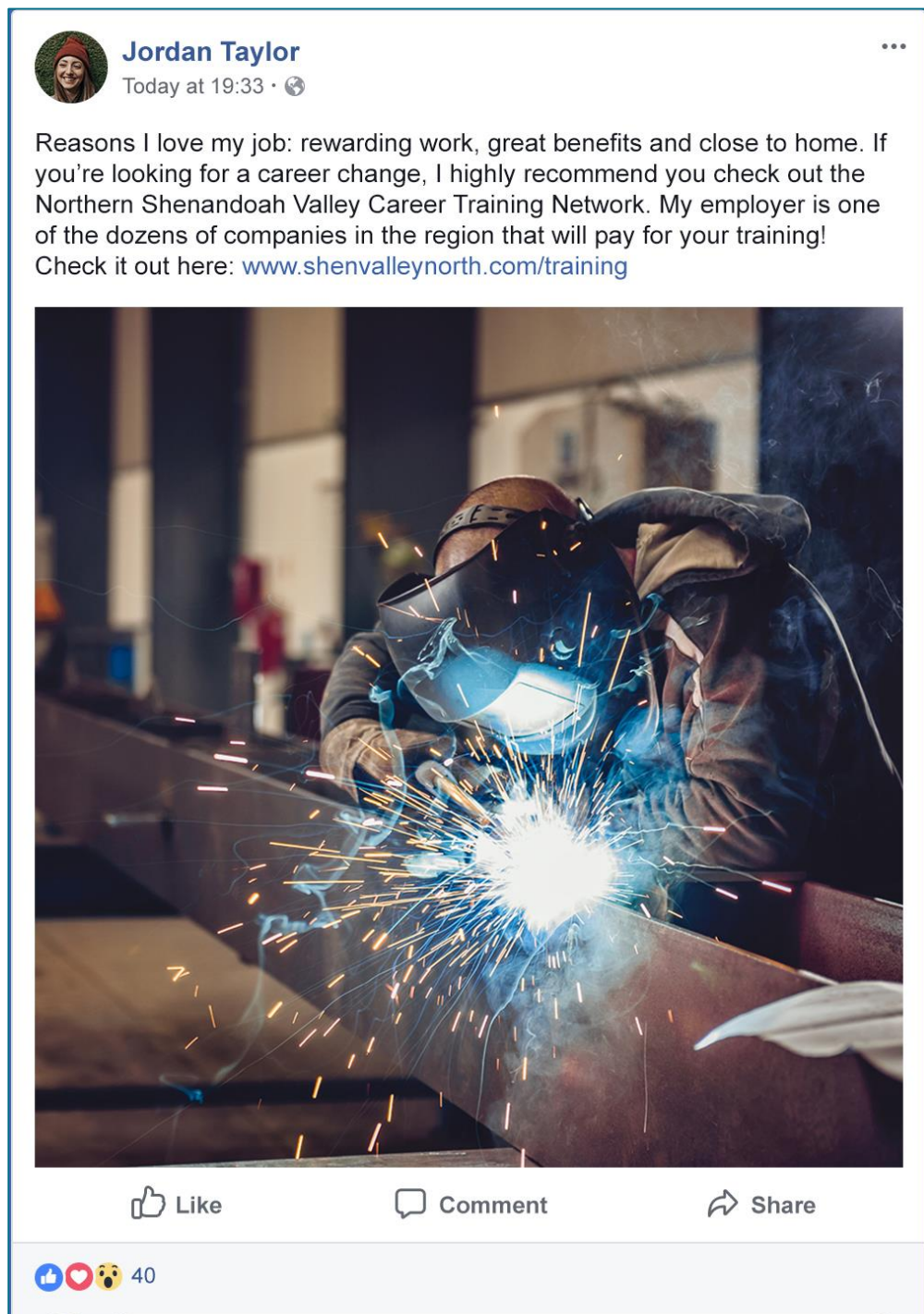
The image shows a sample page from the Career Training Digital Hub. The page features a navigation bar with the following links: BUSINESS, CAREER, LIFESTYLE, PASSION, and ABOUT US, along with a search icon. The main content area is a large image of a welder working, with the Shenandoah Valley logo overlaid. Below the image, there are four key statistics presented in white boxes with blue headers:

CAREER	TRAINING TIME	UP-FRONT COST	AVERAGE SALARY
Heavy Equipment Operator	Part time 10 weeks at LFCC	\$900	\$50,000 (when you walk out of the program)

At the bottom of the page, there is a teal bar containing social media icons for Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

## CAREER TRAINING DIGITAL PROMOTION

Sample “career training ambassador” Facebook post. Local employers in the “Career Training Network” should encourage employees to share their training story, post job openings, and drive traffic to the new Career Training Digital Hub.

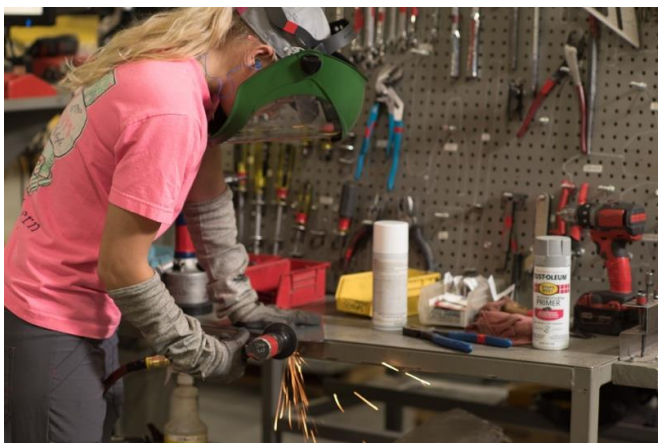
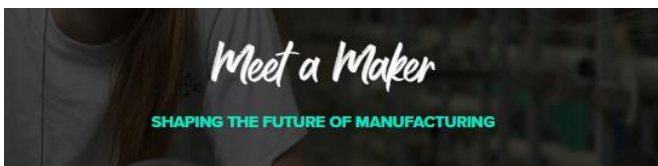




## CASE STUDY

The talent website for Charlotte's Backyard (Cleveland County, NC) spotlights the real stories of millennials in manufacturing and how they made the career change.

[www.charlottesbackyardnc.com](http://www.charlottesbackyardnc.com)



### Trading in Retail for a Career in Manufacturing

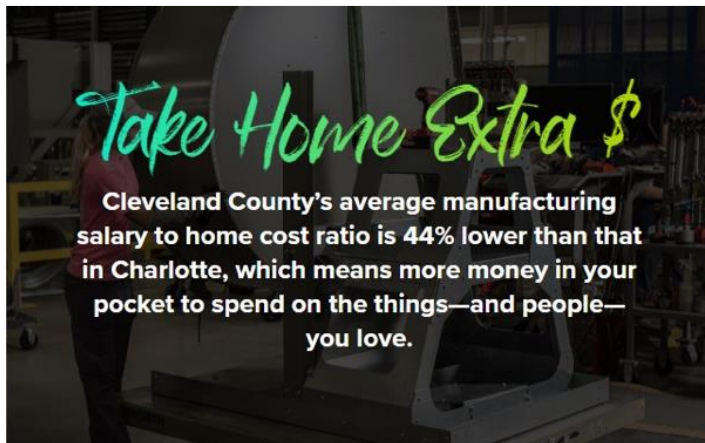
When Emily Bolton graduated from high school, she realized pretty quickly that working in retail wasn't going to pay the bills or be fulfilling long-term. The answer to this realization, as it turned out, was a career in manufacturing, which, not only pays well, but also gives her the resources to learn on the job and the flexible hours to continue her education.

Emily started with part-time work through a temp agency and within a couple of months was hired full-time at [Greenheck](#), a leading manufacturer of air movement, control and conditioning equipment with Cleveland County operations in [Kings Mountain](#) and [Shelby](#). Today, she works first shift as an assembly worker and takes classes in the evenings toward her Associate's Degree in Business Administration at [Cleveland Community College](#).

As a young woman with no prior experience in manufacturing, Emily had a lot to learn in her first several weeks of work. "I had zero experience with power tools," she said. "The first two weeks was all hands-on training—learning proper safety and technique. It was intimidating at first, but now I know what I'm doing and I really like it."

Emily was a fast learner and is now an integral part of the assembly team. Despite the eight-hour days, she has still been able to balance time for school. "[Greenheck] is really on board with me continuing my education," she said. "They really encourage us in general to continue to learn."

Born and raised in Shelby, North Carolina, Emily enjoys Cleveland County's small-town character, coupled with its [proximity to major metros](#) like Charlotte. "I love the environment," she said. "It's small-town without feeling too small. You run into people you know around town, but you don't have to travel far to get to places like Charlotte, Spartanburg and Asheville. Any direction you go, you'll find things to do."



## 4. USE DIGITAL TO DRIVE TRAFFIC

Once the new website is created, the Northern Shenandoah Valley region should ensure local partners are aware of the new resource and share it heavily with talent. In order to drive even more mass exposure, invest in paid digital + social advertising to reach target audiences in the target markets DCI identified. You want to interrupt those who may be already looking for a new career and/or location.

The advertising copy should promote lower costs, career training and benefits.

With social media targeting capabilities, such as Facebook's you can target advertising to those looking for a new job (i.e. people who have "liked" Indeed.com), and people currently living in your target markets.

### Keywords with search volume to consider targeting with search ads:

- Best places to live in Virginia
- Shenandoah Valley Things to Do
- Living in Winchester VA
- Affordable places to live in Virginia
- Affordable places to live near DC

## CASE STUDY:

Upstate South Carolina launched a paid search and paid social campaign on Facebook and Instagram to direct people to the jobs page of their talent website. The targeting is specific to mid-metros within five hours and feeder cities based on in-migration data. From May 20-September 2019, the paid campaigns have driven:

- 1,388 Job Views (50% of the total jobs views outside of the region)
- 19,836 Sessions (83% of all sessions from outside the Upstate region)
- 2,362 Total Conversion Events (including job views, contact clicks, outbound link clicks to company websites, video views and social button clicks)



**Over 7,000 new jobs posted  
each month in Upstate SC.  
Find yours. >>**



## 5. CONNECT YOUNG TALENT TO INTERNSHIPS

Internships are an important path to careers and an opportunity to build perceptions of your community as a great place for careers with local young talent. According to DCI's national research 65% of the next generation have never had an internship. The Northern Shenandoah Valley region can break the campus bubble by connecting young talent to internships through a major regional "internship fair" event over winter break to prepare for summer internships.

Identify the top regional colleges/universities as well as top out-of-market schools that local students leave to attend. Collaborate with these higher partners to invite students either living in the Shenandoah Valley region, or coming home to the region for the holidays, to attend the regional internship fair event over winter break.

At the event, students will have the opportunity to hear from young professionals living in the region and working in top industries, as well as local employers, in addition to other valuable content, such as professional development tips for students to land internships and then make the most of them.

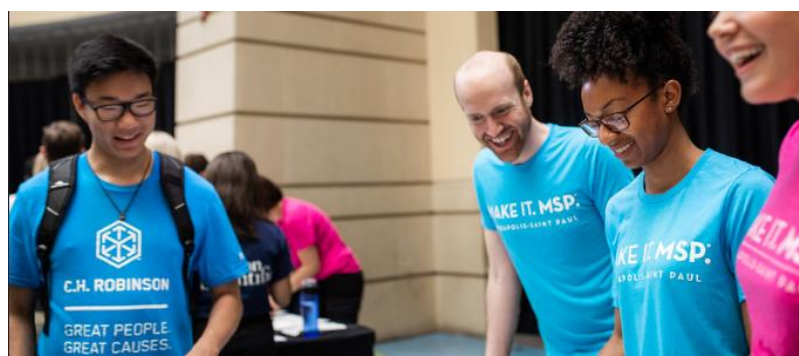
### CASE STUDY

Greater MSP hosts a "Make It. MSP." event for 1,200 students interning for 21 different companies in the region. The event includes networking and relationship-building activities for both employers and interns and showcases why region is great for young professionals to live and work.


In addition to connecting young talent to local internships, the region should also make sure local employers are using internships to capitalize on talent. InternBR is a program designed to connect local employers to millennial talent. The program tackles the talent equation from both the student and employer side. For students interning for local companies, InternBR




According to DCI's research of Gen Z and millennials, 65% of respondents never had an internship."



offers an additional component – a curriculum to give interns the professional communication and leadership skills needed to excel in their current internship and ultimately, launch their career in Baton Rouge. For employers, InternBR provides workshops and consultation to take the guesswork out of the daunting task of starting an internship. After the first two workshops, 31 Baton Rouge companies committed to starting or expanding their internship program.

**Baton Rouge Area Chamber**  
October 29, 2018 · 🌐


Want to start or expand your company's internship program? Join BRAC for one of its InternBR Employer Workshops to learn internship program best practices. Register now: [brac.org/events](http://brac.org/events).

**INTERBR**  
Employer Workshops

How to Start an  
Internship Program  
Tuesday, November 13

How to Expand an  
Internship Program  
Tuesday, November 27

Hosted at the  
BRAC Office  
564 Laurel Street

 Baton Rouge Area Chamber.

Space is limited  
Register at  
[brac.org/events](http://brac.org/events)

## 6. CANDIDATE TOURS

DCI learned that employers are doing the process of regional tours for candidates on their own, either in-house and/or partnering with realtors. This approach is not only time-consuming to recreate for candidates, it leaves room for error—some guides may be better than others and the messages they share may be limited to the employer and its town, instead of regional.

Instead, the Northern Shenandoah Valley should offer a regional tour resource for employers to tap into when bringing candidates to visit before accepting the position.

The Northern Shenandoah Valley can train a tour guide, or a team of freelance tour guides that may also be realtors. The tours can also be promoted at events that draw visitors to the region as a paid experience—we heard that regional visitors sometimes explore housing when visiting, the tours take it one step further.

## 7. START STORYTELLING

First-hand experience and word of mouth remain the dominant factors for talent to form location impressions. In order to raise awareness of the Northern Shenandoah Valley region as a great place to live, you will need the third-party validation and larger platform that the media can provide.

Share the region's top stories that uncover why people are relocating to and visiting the Northern Shenandoah Valley:

- Pitch the Northern Shenandoah Valley as an ideal getaway to target markets (DC, Baltimore, Charlotte)—this is strategic given the strong ties between tourism and talent
- Work with media outlets that have large online audiences and social media followings
- Place stories that showcase Northern Shenandoah Valley transplants, entrepreneurs, etc.



## CASE STUDY

Greater San Marcos Partnership invited Thrillist travel writer Matt Meltzer to visit the region. During the visit, Matt had opportunities to not just experience travel assets, but actually meet with people who relocated and could speak to why the region was attracting people from nearby Austin, Texas.

The Northern Shenandoah Valley should work with tourism partners on existing media efforts to see if there are any opportunities where the talent key messages and relocation stories could be infused on storytelling.

# THRILLIST

TRAVEL

## *The Coolest Small Town in Texas Is Building a Better Austin*



By MATT MELTZER  
Published On 06/15/2015  
@mmeltzer



But let's be honest, it's not just the refreshing river and rolling Hill Country setting that entice people to San Marcos; Austin has all that stuff, and the Greenbelt to boot. The secret might lie in the relative affordability."

- Thrillist

## 8. GET TALENT ON THE GROUND

According to DCI's research, 73% of talent in target markets that said "Yes, I would be willing to relocate to the region" were very familiar with the region and have visited several times and know it well. This means that marketing to existing visitors and reaching new visitors is an important part of Northern Shenandoah Valley's talent strategy.

The Northern Shenandoah Valley region should also make sure its talent message is being shared at existing events that draw visitors—such as Apple Blossom Festival and GenreBlast Film Festival at the Alamo Drafthouse. The region should work with local tourism partners to identify top events that draw outsiders. Getting the talent message at these events can be as simple as setting-up a branded booth with promotional materials and someone on-hand to answer questions about living and working in the region. Make sure to offer an incentive for visitors to stop by, like a chance to win a free return trip, free food/drink, or free photo opportunities in exchange for visitors' phone or email.

Tourism partners should also consider luring major events where the talent message can be shared as well. For example, [Reel Rock Film Tour](#), which draws 150,000+ climbing fans to the cities where the event is held.

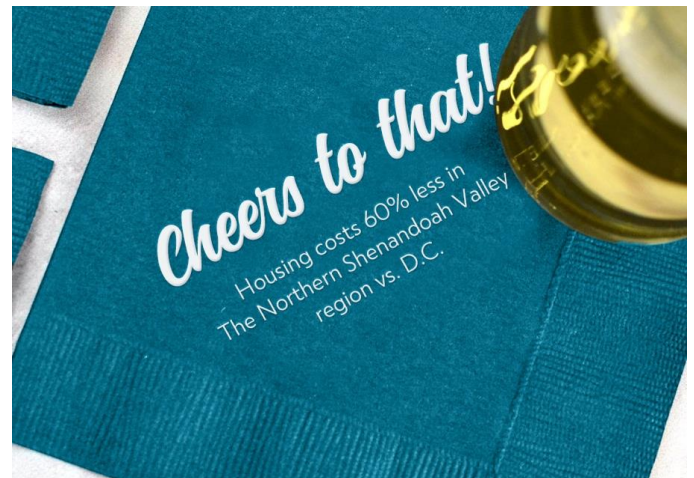
### Promote The Northern Shenandoah Valley During the Fall Getaway Frenzy

During the fall D.C. media outlets and millennials alike are itching to escape the city to find the best foliage and Instagram-friendly getaway spots, like pumpkin patches or apple orchards. Capitalize on this frenzy by solidifying the Northern Shenandoah Valley as the ideal fall getaway and creating an event and messaging that promotes the region as a great place to visit, as well as to live and work.

Create the ideal weekend for young professionals and young families to visit the Northern Shenandoah Valley.

Here are a few additional ideas for launching a brand-new event to bring DC-based talent to visit the Northern Shenandoah Valley region:

- "The Northern Shenandoah Valley launches first-ever Run for Wine 5K" or "The World's First Wine Walkathon"
- "This is the Best Place to Celebrate Friendsgiving"
- "First-Ever National Park Social Media Scavenger Hunt"



## ADDITIONAL MARKETING IDEAS

While the top eight talent marketing tactics should be the region's priority, DCI would like to put forward a few additional ideas that address the local needs and challenges of attracting and retaining talent in the Northern Shenandoah Valley. These ideas would likely be best executed in partnership with other local organizations.

- **Newcomer events:** While some newcomer events may exist, it seemed like they could be improved and publicized through employers. Make sure newcomer events are accessible to everyone and should not require any membership or fees and provide value. For example, we heard one newcomer event in Winchester offers free food sponsored by a local restaurant.
- **Grow and connect young professional programs:** Young professional groups can be a key factor in growing and retaining young talent. However, it is very difficult to find young professional program information online for each county, plus many of them require membership. Local employers should offer to comp membership for young employees. Young professional groups can also have quarterly meet-ups across the different counties in the Northern Shenandoah Valley region. This will address the sentiment we heard from young professionals that there are not enough new places/people to interact with.
- **Pop-up entrepreneurship program:** The region's low cost of doing business and tourism assets make it an ideal canvas for entrepreneurs that want to service visitors—i.e. outdoor adventure, food and beverage, shopping. Similarly, we also heard the need for more “things to do” from young professionals. Consider launching a pop-up entrepreneurship

program for the region's downtown/main street areas that offers low cost or no cost real estate for entrepreneurs looking to relocate to the region.

- **Incentives for housing and/or training:** Address the region's two biggest challenges—housing for young professionals, and training for in-demand occupations—with targeted incentives. Incentives drive action as well as generate awareness for the region. For example, launch a first-time home buyers incentive, or a training incentive that covers or loans the initial training costs for those looking to make a location and career change.

**Initiative pays recent grads' student loans to move to Decatur**

Alabama city hatches plan to attract America's most brilliant STEM workers

## CASE STUDY:

The entrepreneurial center for rural Decatur-Morgan County, Alabama did private fundraising to launch the country's first comprehensive incentive package for STEM graduates – called “The Best and Brightest Initiative.” Since the launch four years ago, 34 young professionals have moved to Decatur.

[www.bestandbrightestdecatur.org](http://www.bestandbrightestdecatur.org)

## TALENT TOOLS FOR HR

In addition to training HR executives on the region's key messages for talents, there are a few easy tools and tactics they can start using right away:

**Commute Cost Calculator:** Use this to quantify how much a candidate may be spending currently on their commute. Talent may be turned off by lower salaries in the region—this tool can help them understand the hidden costs of commuting. HR executives should note to talent that while the commute distance varies depending on where talent chooses to live, the commute consists of open roads, not stressful stop and go traffic. [www.commutesolutions.com/commute-cost-calculator](http://www.commutesolutions.com/commute-cost-calculator)

**Sperling's Best Places:** Use the “city compare” function to showcase the differences in cost of living and other factors, such as crime rate. We recommend only HR executives use this tool, and do not share the tool with talent (sometimes negative user comments are found on community profiles). [www.bestplaces.net/compare-cities](http://www.bestplaces.net/compare-cities)

**Audit Career Pages:** All employers should self-audit the career pages of their company websites. Make sure all links are working and accurate, and that information on the location of the job is included. Ideally, employers should also list if certain positions are open to candidates without formal training, or if they are willing to train the right candidate.

### 2019 Compare Cities Overview: Winchester, VA vs Washington, DC

[Change Cities](#)

#### Highlights

- The Median Age in Washington is 3.7 years younger than in Winchester.
- Washington [housing](#) costs are 125.0% more expensive than Winchester housing costs.
- The average commute for residents of Washington is 5.3 minutes longer than it is for residents of Winchester.

## MARKETING STRATEGY EXECUTION

There is no one size fits all approach to executing talent attraction marketing programs. However, there's a few things the most successful programs have in common:

**A regional approach**—Marketing regionally not only means you have more resources to put into a program, it also means you have more to offer to talent in terms of job and lifestyle options.

**Dedicated resources**—The most effective programs have a staff member, or a team, that oversees and executes talent attraction marketing efforts. DCI strongly recommends the Northern Shenandoah Valley hire a regional Talent Director to oversee execution – a sample job description is included to the right.

**Collaborate with partners**—DCI believes that local tourism partners could be a great resource for many of the marketing assets and programs needed for talent attraction marketing. Make sure to capitalize on existing resources as much as possible.

**Employers are highly-involved and invest**—Talent attraction marketing should serve the needs of local employers. When employers invest, they not only have a stronger stake in the program, but they are streamlining talent attraction efforts they would have otherwise done on their own.

DCI recommends hosting a talent training for local HR executives and recruiters, it could be titled “Attracting Talent to the Northern Shenandoah Valley.” Inspired by Winchester CVB’s Tourism Ambassador training program, this training aims to help local employers tout the region’s location advantages to talent. The agenda could include presenting the internal and target market research findings, showcasing the talent key messages, and an update from each of the county CVB representatives and realtors to address any tough questions employers may get from talent on “things to do” and real estate. As new talent marketing assets/programs are launched, new talent trainings can be hosted to brief local employers—i.e. when the new website is launched.

**MEASUREMENT**

## MEASUREMENT

At the end of the day, attracting talent is in the hands of employers—they ultimately make the decisions on job offers, training and relocation. What the economic developers within the Northern Shenandoah Valley region can do is help *market* the job and location opportunities in the region. The below metrics will help benchmark and track the success of the recommended marketing tactics in this suggested document.

**Employer Engagement & Satisfaction:** Track the number of employers engaged with the region on talent attraction efforts. After a number of talent marketing initiatives are launched, survey local employers to discover if they are finding these tools helpful and their overall ease of attracting/retaining talent (this can be anecdotal and/or hard numbers). Have employers ask new hires how they found information about the region before relocating.

**Conversations/Inquiries:** Track engagement with talent demonstrating preliminary interest in the region.

**Perceptions:** After two years of fully executing the marketing strategy, we recommend distributing the same perception surveys that we conducted at the onset of this project to the same target markets, to compare perceptions and see how you have moved the needle. Perception survey copies were provided to the Coalition separate from this document.

**Talent Website:** Track the following metrics with Google Analytics:

To Track Awareness:

- Users & New Users
- Acquisition
- Sessions
- Location

To Track Behavior:

- Session Duration
- Pages/Session
- Bounce Rate
- Top Pages
- To Track Engagement:
- Key events and conversions

Additionally, we recommend setting up custom goals to track key performance indicators (KPIs) for the website for following metrics, in addition to any other KPIs your team identifies:

- Employer key message access and downloads
- Candidate tour submissions
- Call-to-action clicks
- Outbound clicks to key pages
- Contact us submissions/email clicks



## Digital Advertising:

### Paid Search & Display Campaigns:

**Impressions, Clicks and CTR (Click-Through Rate):** Keeping an eye on impressions on search campaigns, especially on the keyword level, is a good way to understand how often your ads show up when targeted keywords are searched. The CTR metric illustrates how many users clicked on the ad compared to how many impressions the ad received overall. For paid search ads, the benchmark CTR is around 2.41 percent. For display campaigns, the benchmark CTR is 0.46 percent.

**On-site Conversions and Engagement:** Tracking important conversion events, such as contact link clicks, form submits and PDF downloads is a good way to measure the success of a campaign, as it helps understand which platform or ad is producing the most valuable users. Tracking on-page engagement data such as Bounce Rate, Time on Page and Pages per Session can also be a good indicator of how deeply users interacted with the site.

**Keyword Quality Score:** Keep an eye on the quality score for targeted keywords in the search campaigns. Quality scores are ranked out of 10 and provide insight into how relevant the ads and landing pages are to each keyword, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest. Higher quality scores result in lower cost-per-clicks and higher placements, which typically results in more clicks. To improve a low-quality score, evaluate the relevancy of the landing pages and ads associated with each keyword.

### Paid Social:

For Facebook and Instagram paid campaigns, track performance through:

- Link clicks
- All post clicks
- Reach
- Click-through-rate (CTR)
- Conversion rate
- Amount spent
- Top metros
- On-page engagement

**Public Relations (Storytelling):** Track number of editorial placements, audience reach, key messages communicated and advertising equivalency.

**Internship Connection Events:** Number of participating employers and attending students. Over time, track number of interns that decide to live/work in the region after graduation.

**Candidate Tours:** Number of participating employers and candidates that decide to relocate to the region after experiencing a tour.

**Talent Event:** Number of participating employers, number of Facebook event RSVPs, and depending on the exact execution, number of attendee emails/numbers collected.



# TIMELINE

## SUGGESTED TIMELINE

Below is the ideal timeline for executing year one of the marketing strategy. The timing is based on DCI's experience of what other client communities have been able to execute.

### **Q1 (January - March)**

- Host "talent training" with local HR executives and recruiters to reveal research findings, key messages and marketing strategy
- Identify existing partners, assets and funds to execute marketing strategy
- Fundraise with local partners and employers to execute marketing strategy
- Begin search/hire new regional Director of Talent Attraction to oversee execution and if possible, Talent Marketing Manager

### **Q2 (April - June)**

- Begin search/select local or national firm or freelancer to build new talent website, content and manage digital advertising
- Begin search/select local or national firm or freelancer to begin public relations campaign
- New Director of Talent Attraction launches regional candidate tours and begins planning for "Fall Getaway" talent event + winter "Internship Connection" event
- Convene employers for "Career Training Network"

### **Q3 (July - September)**

- By end of Q3, website complete – including "Things to Do" resources and "Career Training Digital Hub" and digital advertising begins
- Continue pitching lifestyle stories to target market and national media, identify and invite media contacts for hosted press visits
- Final planning for "Fall Getaway" talent event in October or November
- Begin outreach to employer and higher-ed partners for "Internship Connection" event

### **Q4 (October - December)**

- Optimize website and digital advertising as-needed
- Continue pitching lifestyle stories to target market and national media, identify and invite media contacts for hosted press visits
- Final planning/hosting for "Fall Getaway" talent event in October or November
- Final planning/hosting for "Internship Connection" event during student's winter break