INTRODUCTION

CHANGING PEOPLE’S UNDERSTANDING OF SUCH A WIDELY KNOWN AND RESPECTED BRAND BEGINS WITH THOSE CLOSEST TO THE ORGANIZATION. THIS MESSAGE PLATFORM IS NOT JUST FOR MARKETING STAFF; IT IS A TOOL TO ASSIST STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS ACROSS FUNCTIONAL AREAS ORGANIZE THEIR CONVERSATIONS TO MORE ACCURATELY REFLECT UNITED WAY’S WORK. IT ALSO MAKES A COMPELLING CASE FOR SUPPORT FOR A VARIETY OF AUDIENCES.

In recent years United Way has undergone dramatic shifts in how it works to serve our community - moving further down the Community Impact trail to become a real change agent. Our communications needs to shift as well, to accurately portray our organizational shift using language our audiences can embrace and making a compelling case for broad support.

Every conversation should be organized around four main ideas:

**BRAND POSITION:**
WHAT WE STAND FOR

United Way advances the Common Good

**GOALS:**
WHAT WE ARE WORKING TO ACCOMPLISH AND WHY

Our focus is on Education, Income and Health – because these are the building blocks of a good life.

**ROLE:**
HOW WE WORK TO ACHIEVE OUR GOALS

We recruit the people and organizations from all across the community who bring the passion, expertise and resources needed to get things done.

**CALL TO ACTION:**

We invite you to be part of the change. You can give (donate), you can advocate and you can volunteer. That’s what it means to LIVE UNITED.

Whether you are having a casual conversation, writing an email or speaking before a large group – you should weave these ideas throughout.
COMMUNICATIONS TONE

Our Message is Emotional and Uplifting, while Factual and Goal-Oriented.

Think “Little Engine That Could” not “Chicken Little.”

**Chicken Little** – There is a crisis, people are hurting, you should feel sad, scared

**Little Engine That Could** – We have a goal, it takes hard work, hard work is (or will be) rewarded, we make a difference

**Solutions Trump Problems.** Framing our work around solutions, not problems, is what draws people in. People know the problems. They aren’t sure solutions exist. When we start the conversation with results – even interim indicators – people want to join in.

**Link Individual and Agency Stories to the Big Picture.** Individual and agency success stories can put a human face on solutions, and explain our work in a compelling way – if the story is about more than the individual or the agency. It works best if the story exemplifies a larger community change strategy, and shows the “through line” to change that impacts more than one person.

**Here’s one way to say it:** Today, Erika is a noted advocate for people living in poverty, and her life and those of her children are getting better day by day. Not long ago she was working two jobs while taking care of her children and still not making ends meet. Here’s how her life changed and how she is working with Summit Bridges to help others create their own pathways out of poverty.

**Here’s is another:** Family Promise does great work in helping the homeless into stable housing – but one agency can’t solve the problems of homelessness alone. Ultimately, all of us would like a community where people don’t become homeless in the first place. That’s where United Way’s work comes in -- by focusing on the conditions that create homelessness and working to change them.
Explain The Change – Simply. People don’t always connect the dots. It’s clear to us that children who are prepared to succeed by the time they enter kindergarten helps boost success in school later on. But not everyone gets it. Use common-sense language to show the causal relationship.

Here’s one way to say it: Kids who are not ready to succeed by the time they enter kindergarten find it harder to catch up each year and get increasingly frustrated. That’s why simple solutions like the SPARK and READY programs and Imagination Library that help families prepare their children for kindergarten have proven to be so successful in helping kids succeed in school through graduation and beyond.

Talk About Lasting Change – Explicitly. Donors are frustrated with “Band-Aid” approaches to pressing social problems. The fact that United Way is about lasting change instead of charity resonates with them – if we say it explicitly. Using that idea, if not that phrase, signals that United Way is doing something unique and important, and connects to our work. It generates excitement, and leads to greater engagement.

Here’s one way to say it: United Way isn’t about short-term charity, it’s about lasting change. We look at the big picture - what resources are lacking, down to food, shelter and health needs, and how can we address that to keep kids on track for success in school, work and life.
The following section discusses each of these points in more depth, including the rationale, detailed descriptions, examples and alternatives.

**BRAND POSITION:**
**ADVANCING THE COMMON GOOD**

**RATIONALE AND DESCRIPTION**

A community of connected individuals, all people, united and working together for the benefit of all, is at the heart of what United Way represents. Unlike charities that base their appeal on giving to the needy (the “haves” giving to the “have nots,” “us and them”) United Way recognizes that we are all part of something greater, and that a tear anywhere weakens the entire social fabric.

Not only is this brand positioning an accurate reflection of the community impact approach, it also sets United Way apart from other charitable organizations. Our approach is holistic – donors appreciate that United Way is looking at the big picture.

Not helping the less fortunate, the needy, people suffering – which is an altruistic position. United Way’s message is about “all of us.”
BRAND POSITION:
ADVANCING THE COMMON GOOD

EXAMPLES AND ALTERNATIVES

United Way brings people together to solve problems that affect us all. And people love that about us. Don’t hesitate to talk about interconnectedness. “We are all in this together” is a powerful idea that takes people right to the unique value-add of United Way.

“Advancing the Common Good” is a compelling, research-based phrase to communicate the brand position. In addition, communicators should weave this idea throughout communications using a variety of expressions, such as:

• “United Way works on behalf of the common good...”
• “United Way advances the common good by creating opportunities for a better life for all.”
• “Advancing the common good is less about helping one person at a time and more about changing systems to help all of us.”
• “We’re doing something different – we’re looking at the big picture, the whole person, the whole situation, the whole community.”
• “Helps make steady advances in society by identifying and addressing common problems...”
• “All of us want to make Summit County a thriving community, where we can raise our kids in a healthy environment, get good jobs and lead good lives.”
• “At United Way we embrace the idea that no man is an island — we all depend on each other.”
• What does it mean to LIVE UNITED? It starts with recognizing that we’re all in this together. And then acting on that knowledge.”
• “This is OUR community; it’s up to us to make it the best it can be.”
• “We may disagree on a lot of things, but we all share a vision of a community where everyone succeeds in school, work and life.”
• “We all win when a child succeeds in school, when a neighborhood turns around, when families have good health and workers have solid jobs.”
• “...with benefits that will ripple out to the community as a whole.”
• “It’s in all our interest to move people back from the margins of society and into the mainstream.”
• “We’re stronger as a community when everyone has the ability and opportunity to be a supportive, productive member.”
• “…ensuring society will continue to progress and our children will have a better future.”
• “It takes the whole community working together to reach our mutual goals.”
• “United Way is helping our community rise above challenges to reach its full potential.”
• “A rising tide lifts all boats.”
• “That’s what it means to LIVE UNITED.”
GOALS: FOCUS ON EDUCATION, INCOME AND HEALTH

Our focus is on Education, Income and Health – because these are the building blocks of a good life.

Communicators should weave this idea throughout communications using a variety of expressions, such as:

• “For a building to be stable for the long term, it needs a solid foundation. The same is true in life, and the building blocks for a solid life are a strong education, financial stability and good health.”

• “For a building to be stable for the long term, it needs a solid foundation. The same is true in a community, and the building blocks for a solid community are a strong education system, economic prosperity and quality health care.”

Remember to describe how the impact areas are interrelated (building blocks, pillars, foundation):

Here’s one way to say it: A child is more likely to succeed in school if she has enough to eat and knows where she is going to sleep each night.

And another: A young mother is more likely to create a pathway out of poverty for herself and her children if she has access to education and has good physical and mental health.
Describing United Way’s Education-related work:

Education is a cornerstone for success in school, work and life. Well-educated residents earn more and contribute more to their local economies, are more engaged in their communities, and are more likely to raise kids who also succeed in school. To advance academic performance, United Way is helping children and youth by focusing on:

- Ready to succeed by kindergarten
- Third-grade reading
- Eighth-grade math
- On-track in ninth grade
- Graduating ready for success
- Persistence in college and career

Only by working together can we help every child unlock their full potential and empower the workforce of tomorrow.

Describing United Way’s Income-related work:

The whole community benefits when more working individuals and families are able to support themselves and get on solid financial ground. We focus on lasting solutions that lead to financial security because financially stable people are more likely to access quality healthcare, provide a good education for their children, and contribute to their local economies. To support self-sufficiency, United Way focuses on building:

- Skills and education toward jobs that provide a livable wage
- Opportunities for seniors to stay in their homes
- Strong neighborhoods where people support and look out for one another

Only by working together can we build a strong community where people are able to earn a livable wage and maintain their independence.

Describing United Way’s Health-related work:

Good health is essential for individual success and a thriving community. Healthy kids are more likely to succeed in school. Healthy adults are more productive at work. The whole community will flourish when all of our residents have access to safe physical activity, healthy foods and quality health care. United Way’s strategies to build a healthy community include expanding access to:

- Healthy foods and opportunities for physical activity
- Quality physical and mental health care.

Only by working together can we build a healthier community.

Describing United Way’s work in addressing Basic Needs:

Annually, United Way invests more than $1 million from its Community Impact Fund in community programs and initiatives that provide for people’s most basic needs of food, shelter, health, and safety. United Way will distribute the investment through a network of well-established organizations throughout Summit County.

While United Way’s funding has become much more strategic in recent years in the areas of education, health and income stability, there is still a great need to provide basic human services for our most vulnerable residents. Despite the technical end of the recession, much of our population still deals with long term unemployment, underemployment, and debt from medical bills and other crises in the recession’s wake. United Way’s strategy in providing for basic needs is to fund the agencies that are most effective, efficient and best positioned in the community to reach those that need help.
ROLE:
INVITE, CONNECT, COMMIT

How does United Way make change happen in a community? We:

- Engage the community in setting a vision and priorities.
- Work together to build strategies to reach the community’s goals.
- Get commitments in time, money and expertise to advance those strategies.
- Measure the effectiveness of the strategies.
- Report back, and adjust strategies when needed.

We recruit the people and organizations from all across the community who bring the passion, expertise and resources needed to get things done.

Communicators should weave this idea throughout communications using a variety of expressions, such as:

- “We galvanize and connect a diverse set of individuals and institutions, and mobilize resources to create long-term social change.”
- “United Way trains a spotlight on critical issues, engage with private and public sector leaders and coordinate agendas with partners to create community change.”
- “Think of the work of United Way as a barn-raising.”
- “Think of the work of United Way as a series of barn-raisings -- sometimes United Way is the organizer of the barn-raising, sometimes our role is to recruit others to the project, and sometimes we have our own skills, tools and other resources to bring to help get the project done.”
- “Connecting people to people, needs to resources, experts to advocates, and getting real commitments for action.”
- “Connecting the seemingly unrelated – that is our magic.”
- “The measure of United Way is not in the fundraising campaign, but in the ways we are impacting the community — in connecting people across the region, and in improving the foundations of our communities.”
- “Many small streams come together to create a powerful river.”
- “United Way does the critical but largely invisible work required to reach community goals — we recruit people to the cause, get commitments for action, and pull together the expertise and resources that get it done.”
- “Synergy – 1+1 = 3” (or 1+1+1 = 5)
Describing our Collective Impact work:

A new way of doing business is sweeping the nonprofit sector. It promises broader community involvement and more powerful results. Collective Impact is achieved through an unprecedented level of structured collaboration. Solving complex issues requires that many partners work together in a purposeful and systematic way. United Way is a leader in the Collective Impact approach in Summit County and is pushing it forward with real, long-lasting results.

United Way of Summit County is acting on opportunities to propel our community forward through powerful collective effort. We understand where community resources already exist, and we align them for maximum impact. We promote collaboration among local agencies to improve results. We invite nonprofits, foundations, government, social services, corporations and faith-based organizations to come together to drive real community change by breaking down silos, working across sectors and aligning resources.

Describing how we invest gifts to United Way’s Community Impact Fund:

By coordinating program investment in a highly strategic manner we are able to stretch each dollar further while delivering even better results. It is a model with proven results in other regions and we’re seeing significant impact from this strategy in Summit County.
CALL TO ACTION:
GIVE, ADVOCATE, VOLUNTEER

Every communication needs to include an invitation to commit to participating in our work in some way. Specifically, the following invitation is compelling:

*We invite you to join us. You can give (donate), you can advocate and you can volunteer. That’s what it means to LIVE UNITED.*

Communicators should weave this idea throughout communications using a variety of expressions, such as:

- “Be part of the change.”
- “Your participation is essential to the success of these efforts.”
- “Join us.”
- “Be part of something bigger than yourself.”
- “Change won’t happen without your support.”
- “You can make a difference.”
- “There are lots of different ways to engage – you can give, you can advocate, and you can volunteer.
- “Please join with me, and feel what it means to LIVE UNITED.”
- “It takes an entire community to make a difference, and we need you.”
Gifts to United Way help create opportunities for:

- More children to start kindergarten ready to succeed
- More high school graduates to be successful in career and college
- More individuals and families to earn a livable wage and to learn to manage their assets and debt
- More people to create their own pathways out of poverty
- More seniors to stay in their homes
- More citizens returning from prison to become productive members of our community
- More neighborhoods to grow stronger as neighbors support and look out for one another
- More access for all to healthy foods, physical activity and quality physical and mental health care
COLLECTIVE IMPACT INITIATIVES:

Cradle to Career Alliance
United Way is working in partnership with Summit Education Initiative, GAR Foundation, local schools and others to improve student success by collectively focusing on ready for success by kindergarten, third-grade reading, eighth-grade math, on-track in ninth grade, graduating ready for success and persistence in college and career.

Our Shared Goals for Education IN Summit County by 2020:

- Ready for Success by Kindergarten – Increase from 71% to 80%
- High School Graduation – Increase from 88% to 90%
- College and Career Readiness – Increase from 38% to 50%

United Way’s Role: United Way raises awareness for the initiative, co-sponsors training seminars and provides more than $1 million in annual funding for education programs that align with the collaboration’s six critical transition points for student success.

Summit County Re-Entry Network
An estimated 2,500 citizens return to Summit County each year from Ohio prisons. Most arrive with no job, little money, and a desire to become productive members of the community. United Way and Oriana House Inc., together provide backbone support for more than 70 other partner agencies working collectively to provide counseling, housing assistance and employment services for felony ex-offenders.

The result:

- Increased public safety
- Fewer returns to prison
- Families reuniting
- Positive impact for the local economy

United Way’s Role: United Way and Oriana House provide backbone support for the Summit County Reentry Network by providing strategic planning assistance, grant writing and community connections. United Way also provides direct funding support to the Reentry Network as well as programs that align with reentry objectives.

Bridges Out of Poverty
With backbone support provided by United Way, the Bridges Summit County collaborative is establishing better understanding between economic classes with the goal of breaking the cycle of generational poverty in Summit County.

- Getting Ahead Classes – Provide opportunities for motivated people living in poverty to understand WHY they are in poverty and to develop plans for their futures. More than 550 individuals have graduated to date.
- Circles Program – Getting Ahead graduates are paired with economically stable “Allies” – intentional friends who provide counsel and encouragement.
- Bridges Workshops – Service providers and employers gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by those in our community who struggle financially. More than 5,000 professionals have participated thus far.

United Way’s Role: United Way rallies significant support around Bridges Summit County providing backbone support by acting as community connector, fiscal sponsor, grant writer and providing office space for the initiative.
UNITED WAY OWNED AND PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMS:

Neighborhood Leadership Institute
The Neighborhood Leadership Institute is an annual 11-session program that trains residents in Summit County’s diverse communities to improve quality of life through grassroots collective engagement, advocacy and action. The curriculum is developed and led by some of Summit County’s most high-profile facilitators. Workshop topics include team-building, neighborhood assessment, strategic planning, criminal justice, raising and managing funds, communications and government. A bus tour of Summit County neighborhoods is a highlight of the curriculum. Class members also complete and present group projects. This unique partnership program is in its sixth year and is jointly sponsored by United Way of Summit County and the Akron Area YMCA in partnership with 10 other organizations.

United Way Volunteer Center
The United Way Volunteer Center engages people in service and inspires change. We connect people to quality opportunities to serve, build capacity for local volunteering, raise awareness of the value volunteers bring to our communities and mobilize volunteers to effectively and efficiently meet local needs.

Day of Action
Each year in June Summit County corporate teams come together to harness the volunteer spirit and improve conditions in our community. United Way Day of Action is a day that we ask volunteers to help put our mission into action by improving the building blocks for a good quality of life – Education, Income, and Health. In 2013 nearly 1,200 volunteers representing 26 organizations provided approximately 7,200 hands-on volunteer hours for nonprofit organizations. Teams worked across Summit County at 60 agency sites providing landscaping, painting, office work and more. FirstEnergy Foundation was the event’s major sponsor.

Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library
Through the Dolly Parton Imagination Library and United Way, preschool children in Summit County receive free books. Every month in 2013, United Way arranged for a new and carefully selected book to be mailed to 529 children enrolled in the program. United Way adopted the program in 2008 to foster a love of reading and to insure that every preschool child would have books, regardless of family income. With the arrival of the first book, the classic “The Little Engine That Could,” children begin to experience the joy of finding their very own books in their mailboxes. These moments continue each month until the child turns five. For their last book each child receives “Look out Kindergarten Here I Come!”

Fatherhood Initiative
The Summit County Fatherhood Initiative is a county-wide collaboration formed in 2013 to help at-risk fathers develop healthy relationships with their children. United Way acts as fiscal sponsor to the initiative that provides education and resources to men who are transitioning out of the court system or have otherwise been absent from their children’s lives. The initiative equips participants with skills and resources they need to become involved, responsible and committed parents. The result – stronger families and children that grow up to be responsible adults. Programs are available to both custodial and non-custodial parents.
Launch Fund
With grant writing support from United Way of Summit County, Family Promise received a grant from the Omnova Solutions Foundation to establish the Launch Fund. This fund provides small loans and gifts to help low income individuals achieve goals. Money can be used to pay for work boots, or tools needed for employment, certification fees or other expenses. People served by Bridges Summit County, the Summit County Re-Entry Network and Family Promise are eligible to receive money from the fund. Other foundation grants and corporate gifts are being sought to add to the fund in the future. Family Promise, an agency that helps homeless families achieve independence, acts as the Fund’s administrator.

Women’s Leadership Council
Created and led by women, United Way Women’s Leadership Council is an integral part of United Way. Its proof-positive mission is simple: Mobilize the power of women to advance the Common Good in our community. Research has revealed that women’s number one philanthropic motivation is “connection to a cause,” a point well understood by the Women’s Leadership Council’s 697 members.

Power of the Purse Luncheon - The Women’s Leadership Council’s most visible event is an annual luncheon that is held each summer. The “Power of the Purse” luncheon has featured wonderful and inspiring keynote speakers. It is also at this annual luncheon that the Women Philanthropist of the Year Award is presented.

Women On The Rise - “Women on the Rise,” was a new event for the Women’s Leadership Council held in October 2013. It was a great success as more than 125 current and prospective women leadership donors who joined us for an evening of powerful networking, thought-provoking dialogue among brilliant leaders and a fabulous reception to wrap it all up.

Young Women’s Mentoring Program - The Women’s Leadership Council also initiated a Young Women’s Mentoring Program. Women within the first three years of their career desiring to foster their professional and personal growth, community involvement, and philanthropy are matched with women from the Women’s Leadership Council.

Women philanthropists, giving at the leadership level of $1,000 and above (individually or combined with their spouse), are automatically a welcome member of The Women’s Leadership Council.

Dorothy O. Jackson Society
The Dorothy O. Jackson Society recognizes the generosity of our richly diverse and dynamic minority community and encourages the involvement of minorities in United Way. By increasing understanding of United Way’s work on underlying community problems, building bridges between minorities and our business and community leaders and increasing the number or minority leadership givers, the Dorothy O. Jackson Society supports the United Way of Summit County’s mission to improve lives by mobilizing community resources to advance the common good.

The Society was named in honor of Dorothy O. Jackson, retired Deputy Mayor of the City of Akron, and longtime community activist.

Young Leader’s Society
The Young Leaders Society is comprised of young professionals who value the importance of philanthropy and who believe in and support the work of United Way. This group exemplifies the best Summit County has to offer in the form of young women and men who share their spirit and resources for the betterment of our community. Through volunteer projects, their annual donation, and sharing the importance of giving back with other young professionals, this group of dedicated individuals is committed to making Summit County a better place not only for their generation, but every generation to follow.

Membership in United Way’s Young Leaders Society is open to those individuals and couples age 40 or younger who are members of the Leadership Society or Tocqueville Society.
UNITED WAY FUNDED PROGRAMS:

United Way is Summit County’s largest source of non-government funding for nonprofits and strategically funds 80 education, income and health programs and initiatives within 50 agencies. We know that by coordinating program funding in a highly strategic manner we are able to stretch each dollar further while delivering even better results. It’s a model with proven results in other regions and we’re seeing significant impact thus far in Summit County.

United Way review teams are largely comprised of impact area experts and United Way board members with specific interest in the particular impact area. We believe that having the people with the most knowledge at the table leads to an unprecedented the best process to determine how best to utilize scarce dollars in a time of increasing need, rapid change and new opportunities.

**Education Funding**

Each education program funded by United Way is selected for educating students or providing intervention prior to one of six “critical” transition points as identified by the Summit County Cradle to Career Alliance:

- kindergarten readiness
- third-grade reading
- eighth-grade math
- on-time completion of ninth grade
- graduating ready for success
- persistence in college and career

To assess each program’s impact and to continue the research that drives United Way’s funding methodology, Summit Education Initiative receives significant funding.

United Way dedicates nearly half of all education funding to programs that reach children before they enter school — funding three preschools, three home-visitation programs and an organization that trains grant recipients on data collection.

**Income Funding**

United Way invests in programs and initiatives that help more people in Summit County to be self-sufficient. United Way’s income investments focus on building skills and education toward jobs that provide a livable wage, opportunities for seniors to stay in their homes and strong neighborhoods where people support and look out for one another.

In conjunction with our funded agencies, United Way is providing education, training, and workforce development strategies to connect workers with jobs that offer the potential for family-sustaining employment. Because we believe that communities with a stable, skilled workforce are more economically competitive and have a greater potential to attract business and revitalize neighborhoods.

Programs that address three critical community income issues receive funding:

- **Workforce Development**
- **Self-Sufficiency for Vulnerable Populations**
- **Community Stabilization**
Health Funding

United Way of Summit County strategically funds programs and initiatives that will enable more people in Summit County live healthier lives. United Way investments provide access to physical and mental health care services, help individuals and families learn healthy behaviors that prevent future problems and deliver services so older adults and people living with disabilities can remain active and independent.

United Way is working to support health strategies at the individual and family level that will have an impact at the community level. We envision Summit County as a community that embraces wellness and prevention and provides access to comprehensive, affordable, quality health care.

Programs that address three critical community issues received a significant part of the funding:

- **Access to Mental Health Services**
- **Access to Prescription Medications**
- **Access to Active and Independent Living for Seniors Citizens and Persons with Disabilities**

Basic Human Services Funding

United Way invests community programs and initiatives that provide for people’s most basic needs of food, shelter, health, and safety – distributed through a network of 13 well-established organizations throughout Summit County.

While United Way’s funding has become much more strategic in recent years in the areas of education, health and income stability, there is still a great need to provide basic human services for our most vulnerable residents. Despite the technical end of the recession, many in our community still deal with long term unemployment, underemployment, and debt from medical bills and other crises in the recession’s wake. Our strategy in providing for basic needs is to fund the agencies that are most effective, efficient and best positioned in the community to reach those that need help.