



# **Nebraska Community Foundation Brand Platform**

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## I. Define and Protect: Why a Solid Brand is Essential

### **What is a brand?**

For many people a brand is the organization's logo or its look and feel. For some it's a tagline. These are only parts of a brand. A brand is a combination of messages, images and experiences that give an organization the correct "parking place" in the minds of target audience members. It is what sets an organization apart from others doing similar work.

*Another simpler definition is that a brand is a promise of an experience.*

A brand is about clear, consistent messaging; an engaging and systematic presentation of messages and imagery; and, most importantly, a positive, fulfilling experience with every contact. A well-developed brand creates an emotional connection with stakeholders and community members that translates into top-of-the-mind awareness and loyalty.

### **Why is a brand important for the Nebraska Community Foundation?**

As the Nebraska Community Foundation builds and protects its brand, it will foster an emotional connection with its stakeholders. As that connection grows, it builds loyalty and trust. The brand will guide the staff and board members on decision-making, and will distinguish the Nebraska Community Foundation from other organizations who may do similar work or who may be seen as competitors.

The goal is to secure that emotional connection. The brand is a tool for getting there. Branding is an investment, but one that pays off in myriad ways for organizations that are disciplined about developing and maintaining their brand.

This document is designed to help the Nebraska Community Foundation's staff and board members build and protect its brand by providing a solid foundation from which to build.

## II. The Nebraska Community Foundation Brand Position

The Nebraska Community Foundation's **brand position** is the "parking place" that the Nebraska Community Foundation wants to occupy in the minds of its target audience. The Brand Position is NOT intended for direct public communication, but is instead an internal rallying point that all staff and board members should understand and embrace. All communications efforts from the Nebraska Community Foundation should demonstrate this position.

The Nebraska Community Foundation's top audiences are:

- Affiliated fund advisors (all types of affiliated funds)
- Community and political leaders in communities where affiliated funds exist, or where the establishment of an affiliated fund is desirable/feasible
- State-level donors – including those who live in Nebraska's urban areas or out of state who could be compelled to see the value of growing philanthropy in Nebraska's rural communities.

Other audiences include:

- Financial advisors
- Local donors
- National funders
- Other nonprofits and foundations
- Media outlets

After reviewing findings from the Nebraska Community Foundation interviews with stakeholders and engaging in a brand development workshop, Last Word, LLC recommends the following Brand Position for the Nebraska Community Foundation:

### **"Pioneers" or "guides" to Nebraska's "Philanthropic Frontier"**

**Rationale:** Nebraska's history is built on the self-determination of pioneers who had the ability to explore and develop this new territory. Those pioneers were often led by frontiersmen – bold adventurers with the courage and savvy to see the way and guide others to their goals. NCF is building on that history and tradition within the "new frontier" of rural philanthropy. NCF is the only organization that seeks out rural communities with a pioneering spirit who are ready to explore the reaches of organized philanthropy as a means of community and economic development. NCF helps rural communities put a philanthropic "stake in the ground" by establishing and building endowments. NCF accomplishes this work by delivering cutting-edge tools, knowledge and connections to help communities claim and capitalize on their inherent philanthropic resources. Nationally, NCF is a recognized leader on the "new frontier" of rural philanthropy. NCF will cease being philanthropic pioneers when the frontier no longer exists (e.g., there is a healthy endowment in every rural community.)

### III. The Nebraska Community Foundation’s Brand Attributes

The Nebraska Community Foundation’s **brand attributes** are words, phrases or ideas that are uniquely suited to describing the Nebraska Community Foundation and that cannot readily be applied to other organizations in the state, regionally or nationally doing similar work. The brand attributes work together to provide the “feel” of the Nebraska Community Foundation among target audiences and carve out the Nebraska Community Foundation’s niche in their minds.

Brand attributes include both the “personality” of the organization and the “reasons to believe” that reinforce the brand promise.

Words and phrases that describe the “personality” of the Nebraska Community Foundation are:

- Rural
- Innovative
- Reliable
- Visionary
- Hardworking
- Engaged
- Genuine
- Powerful
- Connected

Attribute	Descriptors	What it really means (emotional hook) to me
<b>Rural</b>	Small town, Outlying areas, Non-urban	The Nebraska Community Foundation specializes in rural communities like mine and understands the reality of life here. <b>They “get it.”</b>
<b>Visionary</b>	Courageous, Inspirational, Forward-thinking	The Nebraska Community Foundation sees how life in my community could be, and is a valued guide as we move toward <b>the future we envision.</b>
<b>Genuine</b>	Honest, Upfront, Direct, Nebraskan	The Nebraska Community Foundation is people like me, who have an honest interest in my community and are transparent in their work. <b>I trust them.</b>
<b>Innovative</b>	Creative, New, Bold, Different	The Nebraska Community Foundation gives me <b>new ideas and new hope for my community.</b>
<b>Hardworking</b>	Committed, Dedicated	The Nebraska Community Foundation is dedicated to my community’s success and realizes that this work takes time. <b>Their work helps make my task(s) easier.</b>
<b>Powerful</b>	Strong, Durable	The Nebraska Community Foundation is a solid organization that <b>gives my community strength it might not have on its own.</b>

<b>Reliable</b>	Trustworthy, Dependable, Solid, Responsible	I can count on the Nebraska Community Foundation and <b>trust them with my investment.</b>
<b>Engaged</b>	Team player, Hands-On	The Nebraska Community Foundation works with me to understand my community and its potential. <b>It's almost like they live right down the road.</b>
<b>Connected</b>	Linked, Networked, Plugged in	The Nebraska Community Foundation puts me in touch with other people in communities like mine so that we can learn from one another. It also gives me <b>access to the national knowledge and resources to further my work.</b>

#### IV. The Nebraska Community Foundation’s Brand Promise

“If I am attracted by the attributes of the Nebraska Community Foundation’s brand, and I choose to engage or interact with the organization, what do I get in return?” The answer to this question forms the **brand promise**. The brand promise is not meant to be used for public communication. Rather it serves as the benchmark for measuring how well the Nebraska Community Foundation is (or could be) delivering the communications and services that meet the brand promise, and is thereby building loyalty among stakeholders.

**The Promise: When you work with the Nebraska Community Foundation, you will discover a new path to your community’s future, and receive the tools, advice, knowledge and connections you need to explore and develop your community’s “philanthropic frontier.”**

#### How does the brand promise work?

Every program that the Nebraska Community Foundation develops and every publication, e-mail communication or product that it produces should live up to the brand promise. In evaluating current work or when considering new work, the Nebraska Community Foundation should ask itself: “Is this targeted toward the needs of our ‘local pioneers’? Are we helping communities discover paths rather than obscuring them? Will it help them explore and/or develop their resources? Are we delivering a tool or piece of knowledge that will be of value in their work? Does this work embody our brand attributes in the eyes of our target audiences?”

If not, determine what can or should be changed or improved to deliver the brand promise.

## V. The Nebraska Community Foundation's Key Messages

Key messages form the backbone of every Nebraska Community Foundation communication or marketing tool. Global messages below should be used with every audience segment. There are also specialized messages targeted to particular audiences. It is not necessary to use these messages verbatim – in fact, the more they are personalized and delivered in genuine and unique ways, the better. The Nebraska Community Foundation comprises a group of passionate and compassionate individuals. It's important that their unique voices stay true. However, the meanings in these messages must be delivered clearly and consistently at every turn by every Nebraska Community Foundation representative.

### **Primary Message:**

The Nebraska Community Foundation helps our state's rural communities break new ground and start a new chapter in their history by creating and developing their own philanthropic assets.

### ***Supporting Messages***

- NCF shows pioneering communities (and organizations) a new way to achieve self-sufficiency and sustainability through philanthropy.
- NCF helps rural communities/organizations build philanthropic endowments that will be a community asset for generations to come.
- NCF works with rural communities/organizations as they move beyond the status quo and revitalize themselves as attractive, promising places to live and work.
- NCF helps communities attract and retain pioneering young people who will ensure community viability going forward.

**Note:** If these messages are true, the Nebraska Community Foundations moves communities toward three desired outcomes:

- Leadership is "In Place"
- New Opportunity Capital is available
- Impact Grantmaking is the norm

## **VI. The Nebraska Community Foundation Brand Experience**

One of the most memorable aspects of the Nebraska Community Foundation's brand – and the aspect that is most likely to influence brand loyalty – is the experience that individuals have when they interact with the Nebraska Community Foundation on the phone, via electronic or print media, and especially in person.

A high-quality experience, delivered consistently during any and every interaction with the Nebraska Community Foundation's staff and board, both in and out of the office, will make the difference in a brand that grows strong or one that falls flat.

Ideally, anyone who interacts with the Nebraska Community Foundation staff and board members should feel that the Nebraska Community Foundation is focused on rural communities, visionary, genuine, innovative, hardworking, powerful, reliable, engaged and connected. In other words, the brand attributes should shine through in every interaction.

**In keeping with the brand promise, Nebraska Community Foundation should train existing affiliate fund leaders about their role as “Philanthropic Pioneers” and Brand Ambassadors for the Nebraska Community Foundation.**

**Of course, this training MUST include a clear explanation of “what’s in it for me,” from the affiliate funds’ perspectives.**

## **VII. Visual Brand**

**Word One Recommended Tagline:** Rural Communities on the Leading Edge

**Recommended Logo:** No change recommended at this time.

## **VIII. Marketing Recommendations**

**(To come as current marketing plan is developed and integrated with findings from Ford RDPEI feasibility study, June 2009)**