“Creating Jobs, Building Communities”
A campaign plan for USDA Rural Development
Organizational Background

The national United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development program (USDA RD) responds to and receives funds from the federal USDA organization according to our interview with the Illinois Rural Development (Illinois RD) representatives (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal interview Feb. 1, 2012). The USDA has led the nation’s efforts in rural development since 1980 when the Rural Development Policy Act was passed (Burlington, Arnold & Townsand, 2008). Burlington, Armond and Townsand (2008) said the different elements that fall under USDA RD were created by national legislation. In 1994, the Federal Crop Insurance Reform and Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act created the Office of the Undersecretary for Rural Development. This entity constituted the four different areas that the USDA RD focuses on today. These areas are the Rural Housing Service, the Rural Business Cooperative Service, the Rural Utilities Service and the Office of Community Development.

Illinois RD focuses on a niche market: Illinois rural communities. They define rural as a population of 50,000 or less (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012). Illinois RD is able to work through the different county Farm Bureaus located throughout the state. In this way, they are able to reach their target audience.

Colleen Callahan is the Illinois RD State Director. However, as mentioned earlier, she ultimately has to report to the national-level USDA for much of their approval according to the website (USDA Rural Development, 2012). From this state office, they report to their national superiors at USDA, located in Washington, D.C. All of the ILLINOIS RD’s funding comes from the national USDA. The USDA’s money, in turn, comes from Congress and thus taxpayer’s dollars (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012).

While the USDA RD’s loan program has only been in effect since the early 2000s, it has already gained some supporters. Kandilov and Renkow (2010) discuss how the USDA RD loan program has already had a positive effect on rural communities. By comparing loans under the Pilot Broadband Loan Program from 2002 and 2003, they were able to conclude that there had been measurable improvement in many different areas, including annual payroll, employment, and small business establishment.

In studies of the USDA RD’s loan program, Johnson (2009) found that there is a strong correlation between receiving a loan and the growth of the business that accepted it. This can be as much as a 3 to 6% increase in business growth. However, he found that over the next two years after receiving the loan, there would be an average decrease in the amount earned per employee of about 3 to 5%. Therefore, Johnson (2009) was unsure of how the total earning per county would be affected since there was an increase in business but a decrease in wages earned (Johnson, 2009).

While the USDA RD’s programs have drawn positive attention from some, others are not as supportive. According to a GAO Report (2001), the USDA RD tends to have a history of having a problem of accurately estimating the cost of its credit programs. This must be done to remain in accordance with the Federal Credit Act of 1990, according to the aforementioned source. By not making accurate estimates, this keeps the USDA RD from “achieving an unqualified opinion on its unconsolidated financial statements” (GAO Report, 2001).

Communications Analysis

Because it is a government entity, it is important to consider how the government’s popularity may affect USDA RD and ILLINOIS RD’s reputations. Saad (2011) said that the 111th Congress received among the lowest average approval ratings, at 25%, over the past two decades. Government agencies, such as the USDA, that are associated with and overseen by
Congress may be seen as guilty by association. The hierarchical relationship between USDA RD, the USDA and Congress may damage the reputation of the RD programs, especially when a lack of visibility means notions of the USDA and Congress are the only basis for public opinion.

Still, the ILLINOIS RD program benefits from being a part of the USDA and the USDA RD efforts. The RD program is heavily associated with USDA throughout their promotional efforts. Their logo echoes the landscape in the USDA’s logo, and they use mutual social media outlets. The USDA provides a frame of reference for the public when they first hear about the USDA RD program. This organization does not have to build a reputation from the ground up, which is both a benefit and a risk.

A lack of visibility is a key issue for the Illinois RD. The clients said that their organization struggles to communicate to the masses because of the difficulty in communicating through decentralized rural media (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012). ILLINOIS RD’s strength is in their one-to-one contact with customers that many believe is not commonly found with federal agencies (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012). As a small federal agency, they lack the “big headlines” that help other organizations such as the FDA gain national visibility. It is harder for them to be distinguished (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012).

Robinson (2012) wrote an article in New Mexico Business Weekly entitled “USDA helps fund Los Ebanistas solar power system.” A person skimming the publication would not be aware of the RD program’s involvement in this project unless they read to the third paragraph. This article solidifies the relationship between USDA and RD. It illustrates how relatively small newsroom decisions impact the visibility of this program across the country.

The ILLINOIS RD relies almost exclusively on public relations efforts due to the government’s advertising restrictions (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012). Their current public relations efforts include public service announcements (PSA) and earned media through personal interviews (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012).

Callahan is a key component of their public relations efforts. She is often interviewed by media channels and speaks to large organizations. ILLINOIS RD uses press releases to inform the public about funding that is available or funding recipients (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012).

In addition, Illinois RD holds events to make funding announcements (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012). They also participate in “road shows” to explain what Illinois RD provides for rural residents. They replicate a similar format in each area. They also provide visits and tours at their funded projects. Finally, they hold meetings and webinars for categories of applicants, such as economic development groups or “intermediaries” who help “sell” their programs or re-lend their original funds locally, such as non-profit organizations and electric cooperatives (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012).

As mentioned earlier, Illinois RD has used social media “very modestly” because they are not able to use their own Facebook account but rather the national USDA’s account (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012). Outside of PSA and earned media, the Illinois RD communicates with the public primarily through their national organization’s website and its social media tools. While these media include many messages that are not from Illinois RD, they are still accessible to Illinois residents and thus pertinent. Overall, the national and state communication channels relay a common message committed to rural communities.

The primary messages being communicated by the Illinois RD and USDA RD programs are: increasing access to broadband and continuous business creation; facilitating sustainable
renewable energy development; developing regional food systems; capitalizing on climate change opportunities; and generating and retaining jobs through recreation and natural resource restoration, conservation, and management (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012).

The USDA RD website provides news releases to increase the programs' visibility (news releases, 2012). The ILLINOIS RD program increases its visibility through a homepage linked to the USDA RD website. This relationship may serve to increase traffic to their website and make it more recognizable by search engines. In addition, press releases that are picked up by media sources only increase the visibility of this organization.

The USDA RD website features a “stay connected” banner on the homepage that links to several communication tools, including the national RD Twitter account, @usdaRD; the USDA blog, at http://blogs.usda.gov/category/rural-development/; an RD Flickr account, at http://www.flickr.com/photos/usdagov/collections/72157624800220629/; the U.S. Department of Agriculture Facebook page; and the option to sign up for email updates. ILLINOIS RD Facebook and blog posts require approval from the national organization. Flickr is not available at a state level at this time (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012).

The RD Twitter account tweets several times each day. It utilizes hashtags but does not communicate with other users. It only follows 31 Twitter users, but has a following of 3,294 users (@usdaRD, n.d.). Messages communicated through this account range from state RD news to national RD news. A few key tweets related to ILLINOIS RD and USDA RD’s primary message related to RD’s role in rural job security include: To Create #Jobs & Strengthen the Economic Foundation of Rural America News: go.usa.gov/nJp and USDA Announces Investments to help support businesses, improve medical care, & create/save hundreds of jobs (@usdaRD, n.d.)."

The blog continues to spread similar messages as the organization’s Twitter feed. One title says, “Building the Connection between Federal Programs and Job Creation in Rural America.” The article goes on to say, “Here at the USDA, we are doing our part [to increase jobs] by supporting rural businesses, building modern, reliable community infrastructure, and working with farmers and ranchers to export products grown in America” (USDA Blog, 2012, para.1).

Another RD blog post entitled “A Partnership to Create Jobs and Develop Energy Efficient Housing for Rural Residents” said “The Houseboat to Energy Efficient Residences initiative has created green jobs and is bringing back 575 skilled workers and 1,000 related jobs that were lost in the houseboat manufacturing and marine industries due to the economy (USDA Blog, 2012, para. 1).

The USDA Facebook page ushers users to longer articles similar to the Twitter account. This page communicates many messages that are unrelated to rural development. RD’s messages may become buried. Out of the 30 posts appearing on the Facebook page, only two are posts related to rural development: The City of Murdo, South Dakota, is located at the crossroads of Interstate 90 and Highway 83 in the middle of the State. A town with a population of 500 in a county with one person per square mile; Murdo has several new businesses and recreational activities that keeps the town thriving. (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2012)

With USDA news, programs and affiliates across the country competing for the attention of 33,089 users that “liked” the page, it is easy to imagine that ILLINOIS RD messages are lost among clouded feeds.

One of the neat features of the USDA RD website is a page that is broken down into categories to help the organization better communicate their mission and opportunities to specific individuals and entities with unique needs. The categories include: business, community
development, cooperatives, energy, housing utilities, loans, grants, technical assistance, forms and publications, regulations and guidance, and online services (USDA Rural Development, 2012).

The community development page linked to useful web pages where a person could take action, but it was a “multi-click” process. A user could lose interest or be unwilling to wade through the several pages to find the program that is right for them (USDA Rural Development, 2012).

The cooperatives, energy and technical assistance pages linked directly to applicable grant programs and information. These pages and the housing page were user friendly. A spotlight section on the housing page shares helpful resources and information. In addition, the forms and publications, regulations and guidance, and online services pages communicate through helpful links and succinct, easy-to-understand information (USDA Rural Development, 2012).

The USDA RD uses these pages to communicate key messages about their organization. The community development page’s key message is the importance of RD to help communities improve their economies through loans and grants that help them realize their long-term goals. The organization helps cooperatives form and expand because of their value to a variety of rural institutions and people, including cooperative members, directors, management, educational institutions, rural residents, etc. (USDA Rural Development, 2012). However, due to fewer staff, ILLINOIS RD is working less with cooperatives than in the past (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012).

The energy page’s message relates to the organization’s federal roots and the program’s part in implementing the president’s “Win the Future” plan by providing funds for energy audits and feasibility studies, completing energy-efficiency improvements, and installing renewable energy systems (USDA Rural Development, 2012).

The key message on the housing page is what RD can do to improve rural residents’ quality of life. They provide loans for single-family homes, apartments for low-income persons or the elderly, housing for farm laborers, childcare centers, fire and police stations, hospitals, libraries, nursing homes, schools and much more (USDA Rural Development, 2012).

Economic opportunities are highlighted on the utilities page: Reliable and affordable water, waste treatment, electric power and telecommunications services can help rural areas expand economic opportunities and improve the quality of life for rural residents (USDA Rural Development, 2012).

The business section of the website communicates the organization’s goals but does not provide specific information about opportunities for rural businesses. A link called “Rural Business Programs” actually links to Rural Cooperatives Magazine (one of RD’s communication tools) (USDA Rural Development, 2012). While valuable information is communicated through this publication, it fails to communicate what programs are available and how people on this website can take action. The utilities page only communicates how utilities benefit rural communities. It fails to direct the user to pages where they can begin the process to better their community’s utilities.

The loans page provides some of the information lacking the aforementioned pages. It links to programs related to business and cooperative loan assistance, housing and community facilities loan assistance, and utilities loan assistance. Likewise, the grant page provides the user access to pertinent information with the click of a mouse instead of scanning through pages (USDA Rural Development, 2012).

The Illinois section of the USDA RD website provides an area where this organization can promote its work with rural communities. The “In the News” section provides Illinois RD a communication channel with stakeholders, including individuals interested in their programs, the media, etc. Through the website, Illinois RD is able to share annual reports, newsletters and
more to many people without sacrificing their precious budget (USDA Rural Development, 2012).

Interestingly, State Director and former farm broadcaster Callahan uses sound bytes to communicate on their website. In one byte, she encourages people to explore the website and ultimately apply for their programs. She also communicates the dedication of the employees to a program that works to improve the economic standing of rural communities.

Below is a SWOT Analysis that outlines the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of this organization. The client provided many of the ideas that are included in this SWOT analysis (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SWOT Analysis on IL USDA Rural Development</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strengths</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• People-to-people agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Number and variety of programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Part of the USDA/government Agency</td>
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<td>• Federal financial support, not reliant on donation drives</td>
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<td><strong>Weaknesses</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Effectively reaching the West Central Illinois region</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Small federal agency receiving small headlines compared to FDA and other large organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lack of visibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Number and variety of programs can cause confusion and spread resources too thinly</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Opportunities</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Reaching out to the West Central Illinois region</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Expanded social media use</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Shows rural communities benefits of USDA RD programs (e.g., creating jobs)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increase visibility</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Threats</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Budget cuts/funding level</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Federal government restrictions to communications</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Limited advertising (can't pay for advertising, which leads to inherent limitations)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Programs overlap with other agency initiatives</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Government popularity</td>
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**Issue Analysis**

USDA RD is committed to improving rural communities; however, the key problem is that too few people, especially in West Central Illinois, know about the programs USDA RD has to offer (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012). The key issue that needs to be addressed is the USDA RD’s lack of visibility. The client wants citizens of rural communities to know how the programs USDA RD has to offer can benefit and improve where they live (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012). The client also stated that it takes more effort to be able to get the message to all of [the small communities] rather than the larger communities that probably have more access to television and other online communications to capture more attention. Illinois RD is
not able to get “as much bang for one buck” in rural communities that are scattered about (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012).

The client’s ability to educate the public about the programs they have to offer is going to be a challenge due to the previously mentioned restrictions that they face. USDA RD is not allowed to have any form of paid advertising; rather, they must do public service announcements, radio interviews and earned media time (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012).

Another threat that USDA RD faces is budget cuts. The funding levels that are allocated to the USDA RD programs are determined by Congress. As the client (2012) said, “What Congress allocates is what is used. That changes from one budget to the next.” There are organizations other than USDA RD that provide grants and loans, which are possible threats to this organization; however, USDA RD is unique because they run “the whole gamut of things” (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012).

The history of the USDA RD programs dates back to the Eisenhower Administration. In 1955, the Eisenhower Administration began a rural development type of program to aid low-income farmers (Cowan, 2007). It began because agriculture was the main economic source in rural areas at that time. It became an important rural policy focus. The 1960s placed focus on rural poverty; however, a decline in agriculture as the main economy caused the focus to shift from rural poverty to rural revitalization (Cowan, 2007). Rural America faced a crisis in the farm industry during the 1980s that made rural structure change a top policy concern (Cowan, 2007). Farming declined to less than 8% of employment in rural America, and the gap between rural and urban areas became obvious. Today farming remains a legislative focus (Cowan, 2007).

The challenges that rural America faces are a big reason why USDA RD programs are vital. These programs were put in place to help rural America become a competitor in the global environment once again (Cowan, 2007). Whitener and McGranahan (2003) said “rural America is a combination of races, geographies, businesses and more; it is very diverse” (para. 1). “Farming is no longer the main part of rural America like it once was in the 20th century; manufacturing and other industries have become common” (Whitener & McGranahan, para. 2).

Whitener and McGranahan (2003) said today’s rural economies depend heavily on three basic things: “natural amenities for tourism and retirement; low-cost, high-quality labor and land for manufacturing; and natural resources for farming, forestry, and mining” (para. 4). In order for rural America to be prosperous in the coming years, marketing strategies and educational efforts have to be used to attract people and jobs. A press release from the USDA website provided remarks prepared for Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack (2012) to give to the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry. The 2012 release states that a “vibrant American economy depends on a prosperous rural America” (Remarks as prepared, para. 3).

Even though rural communities have seen job growth, they are still facing many challenges, including outmigration, lower incomes, higher poverty rates, and access to capital (Vilsack, 2012). ILLINOIS RD programs help to overcome many of those challenges. ILLINOIS RD builds a stronger rural America by promoting development of rural housing, businesses, and more (Cowan, 2007). According to Cowan (2007), for close to 75 years, creating jobs in rural areas has been a key focus of rural development. Through technical and financial support, ILLINOIS RD continues to help ensure the future of rural America’s communities.

This campaign will help educate citizens of rural communities in ways that they will understand and be able to easily share within their rural communities. This campaign will also tell rural communities about rural development’s programs. Specifically, the campaign will communicate how USDA RD programs create jobs in rural communities and how those jobs help to improve their rural community’s economy. ILLINOIS RD’s lack of visibility can be
alleviated through educating rural community members about these programs and increasing awareness of the jobs these programs can provide.

The client ultimately wants to remain committed to the future of rural communities, as their motto states. Financial stability is the first step to ensure Illinois RD can continue to provide these programs to rural communities. In order to continue to support these communities in the future, they realize they must spend wisely today. “The loans we make are good loans. We don’t want them to go bad because they are being backed by taxpayer dollars.” (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012).

The organization realizes that communicating what their organization has to offer Illinois rural communities is also key to their success and the communities’ success (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012). “We want people to know what we have to offer them. Truly that’s the hardest thing for us to get out” (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012).

The client envisions the use of social media as an integral part of their public relations campaign. They hope to create a Twitter and YouTube account as part of their communication efforts. In addition, they would like to continue to use public service announcements. In particular, they believe that radio PSAs and interviews will be a key part in helping their message to reach more Illinois rural residents. They would also like to take advantage of earned media opportunities (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012). The communication efforts suggested in this campaign will be based on empirical research to maximize efficiency and effectiveness.

The client expects that our campaign will include those public relations tactics to communicate a key, simplified message to rural Illinois residents. The client said they were open to a regional campaign such as in West Central Illinois where they believe they have been less successful with their community and water programs. These two types of programs are key to job creation in rural communities. Illinois RD’s influence on job creation is one of the messages the clients said they want to relate to the public (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012).

The message that Illinois RD creates jobs is simple, but the number of programs that make that statement a reality are staggering. It will be difficult to incorporate Illinois RD programs into our message without damaging the simplicity of the message itself.

Due to the advertising restrictions, it will be challenging to get all the messages across effectively. The client said that it is challenging to reach the rural communities with their communication efforts (C. Callahan, J. Messina & M. Hammond, personal communication, February 1, 2012). For example, social media efforts will not reach rural residents with limited or slow connectivity. In addition, the chosen communication piece might not be effective for all audiences. Another challenge will be to gain approval for certain communications pieces from the USDA’s hierarchy.

This information has several implications for our campaign. First of all, we need to target a few programs that make job creation in rural communities possible. We might choose to base our campaign on their efforts on rural energy for America, utilities and business development. This will help us to effectively communicate our message without becoming overwhelmed with the amount of information we could communicate.

We will want to continue to use public relations tactics to communicate our message not only to follow federal law but also to preserve the organization’s limited budget. To reach rural community members from a variety of demographics, psychographics, etc., we should incorporate a variety of communication methods into our campaign. Radio and print communication should be a large factor to reach residents with limited access to social media, the website and other online communication efforts. By using a diversified approach, we hope we will reach a diversified audience as well.
Key Publics

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**Key Publics**

As previously stated, in the secondary research report, rural communities have seen job growth; however, they are still facing challenges such as outmigration, lower incomes, higher poverty rates, and access to capital (Vilsack, 2012). The key publics in this campaign are a public aware of these issues and USDA Rural Development. In the primary research report, it was stated that 89.1% \((n = 41)\) of the survey respondents had heard of USDA Rural Development. Forty-four respondents \((M = 3.73, SD = 1.40)\) felt somewhat knowledgeable about USDA Rural Development. Respondents \((n = 44)\) believed that single-family guaranteed rural housing loans to help purchase homes would be useful in their rural communities \((M = 4.43, SD = 0.73)\). In addition, 44 respondents \((88\%)\) believed business and industry guaranteed loans to help local small businesses expand would be useful \((M = 4.59, SD = 0.90)\). In fact, 95% \((n = 38)\) of the respondents would recommend USDA Rural Development and its programs to a friend or relative. This is an attitude that we are very satisfied with.

In our secondary research report, we identified our key publics as producers, consumers and small business owners and customers. Since then, we have discovered, through our primary research, that our key publics are not those we originally considered. Instead, the key publics for this campaign are local public officials, business owners, the general public, and lenders, such as those surveyed in our primary research. These included economic development officials, engineers, lenders, chamber officials, local legislators, and local and county government officials living in West Central Illinois.

The key publics for this campaign are aware and intelligent publics by nature. They want their rural communities to be successful but also independent due to local businesses. This preference for a self-sufficient community with local businesses is especially important to small business owners and lenders. As aware publics, they expect and believe that USDA Rural Development can help them keep their rural communities up to the aforementioned standards. This is a benefit that USDA Rural Development can offer this public.

While our key publics are aware publics as mentioned before, a better understanding of how the USDA Rural Development programs work is what they need. As stated earlier, the publics believe that they are somewhat knowledgeable. As an organization, we would like our key publics to be more knowledgeable of the programs offered by USDA Rural Development. The increase in knowledge would not only benefit USDA Rural Development, but also the publics themselves because they can then better utilize USDA Rural Development programs and thus improve their rural communities. Our main focus on education would be with public officials, as they are seen as the most influential members of rural communities.

Since the key publics already have a positive attitude toward USDA Rural Development, their loyalty to the organization can be assumed to be strong. This is a great motivator for USDA Rural Development to jump at the chance to inform this public. As they are somewhat knowledgeable and positive toward this organization, they are a public that is ready for action once they receive the right knowledge. Also, since this public is one that has not been addressed before, they have the potential to be very influential in West Central Illinois.

The key publics we have selected are active in receiving media. In fact, 43 respondents agree that news media is an important aspect of their lives \((M = 4.16, SD = .87)\). Along with accessing news media, 73% of respondents from our public used social media. The highest-used social media site is Facebook \((n = 21, 42\%)\). Since the public is actively pursuing news media sources, they are likely to act when receiving information on rural development. Some credible sources may be the USDA and the state and local Farm Bureaus.

The average age of our publics is 41 to 60-years-old \((n = 20, 46.5\%)\), and they are all located in West Central Illinois. The average income of our public is $90,000 or more \((n = 22, 51.2\%)\). Also, the majority of our publics are white \((n = 42, 97.7\%)\). Since our key publics tend to
hold positions that require secondary education, they are likely to be swayed more by knowledge than emotion, but appeals to emotion should not be completely absent. Also, since they are older, they are more likely to be motivated by appeals to the past.
Overall Campaign Goal

The overall goal for this campaign is to build brand recognition for IL USDA Rural Development, including the logo and tagline "Creating jobs, building communities" in order to promote IL USDA Rural Development's role in job creation. This goal does not contradict any of the other goals; rather, it serves as the guide for all of the sub-goals. The main focus, and goal, of this campaign is to promote how IL USDA Rural Development and the USDA Rural Development programs can help create jobs in rural communities. The creation of these jobs will help to build communities not only by size, but also by bringing the community members closer together to work toward a common goal of improving the rural areas where they live.

Sub-Goals

In addition to the overall campaign goal, there are three sub-goals for this campaign. They include:

1. Reputation Management Goal: To improve IL USDA Rural Development’s visibility in West Central Illinois rural communities through the use of toolkit pieces sent out in a timely manner. (Toolkit pieces can be found in the Appendices section).
3. Task Management Goal: Increase public participation in IL USDA Rural Development programs in order to increase jobs in West Central Illinois rural communities by directing them to the IL USDA Rural Development website and program applications through toolkit pieces.

These goals do not contradict each other. Instead, they support each other. For example, it will be easier to promote IL USDA Rural Development program appreciation among potential clients in West Central Illinois rural communities after the visibility of USDA Rural Development has improved in West Central Illinois rural communities. It will also be much easier to increase public participation in IL USDA Rural Development programs once the visibility has increased, the programs have been promoted, and program appreciation has taken place. The relative priority among the viable goals is creating jobs through USDA Rural Development programs and building communities in rural areas.

Position

IL USDA Rural Development wants to be known for its ability to create jobs through its programs and for its ability to help build rural communities.

The key publics include public officials, business owners, the general public, and lenders. The position that IL USDA Rural Development will seek for all of these key publics will be the same as mentioned before; IL USDA Rural Development wants to be known for its ability to create jobs through its programs and for its ability to help build rural communities. These publics will help do that through their spheres of influence.

IL USDA Rural Development does not consider other funding sources competition. However, there are other funding sources that IL USDA Rural Development’s potential customers might utilize instead of using the programs that IL USDA Rural Development has to offer. In most of the programs, the funding sources can in fact complement each other; this does not apply to the housing program. Some of the other funding sources include Illinois Finance Authority, Small Business Administration, Federal Housing Administration, Economic Development Agency, and state agencies such as the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (personal communication with client, April 2012).
Objectives

Again, the objectives are the same for all of the key publics. The key publics include public officials, business owners, the general public, and lenders. For each of these objectives, we want these publics to use their spheres of influence.

**Awareness Objective**

To have an effect on IL USDA Rural Development programs’ awareness in West Central Illinois rural communities, specifically to increase their understanding of how these programs can create jobs in their rural communities (30% within six months) for [rural community residents in West Central IL].

**Acceptance Objective**

To have an effect on IL USDA Rural Development programs’ acceptance in West Central Illinois rural communities, specifically to increase their positive attitudes toward IL USDA Rural Development programs (10% within six months) for [rural community residents in West Central IL].

**Action Objective**

To have a positive effect on the action of West Central Illinois rural community members; specifically to obtain and increase their number of applications for rural development programs provided by IL USDA Rural Development (5% within six months) for [rural community residents in West Central IL].
Strategic Programming

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Strategic Programming

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Theme
The Illinois USDA Rural Development educational campaign tagline: Creating jobs, building communities.

Messages
The tagline should inform the audience that USDA Rural Development creates jobs that support their local communities. They should believe that their investment in Rural Development programs is an investment in their community. They should feel empowered by this tagline. They should realize that their actions can help others and the actions of others can help them. This tagline should motivate local officials and businessmen and women to use the Rural Development programs to benefit their community’s job market and their community at large.

Rational appeals messages
The factual proposition message will be based on the USDA Rural Development programs’ primary advantage for local communities and its residents: creating jobs. This rational appeal will be founded on statistics. Statistics will support our message that USDA Rural Development creates jobs. We will also include personal endorsements, or examples, from small business owners and others that have employed or been employed as a result of these programs.

This message will be communicated through a fact sheet that can be disseminated electronically to cut the need for additional financial resources (see appendix G).

The clear, fact-based message will appeal to the business savvy of business owners, lenders and community officials. They will know how likely and in what ways these programs are to benefit them by scanning a sheet quickly. A major advantage of this medium is that it will require a minimum of their time.

Our rational messages will also include a conjecture proposition that more jobs means better resources for communities, including better schools and infrastructure that encourages other businesses to come to the community and continue the positive economic cycle. We will also include personal endorsements from small business owners and others who have seen the economic growth that results from USDA Rural Development programs.

This message will be communicated through a press release that will draw on several reputable sources to clearly outline the various benefits (see appendix C). It will appeal to the general public who is concerned about their community’s welfare. This general format will encourage the press release to be placed in local publications.

An electronic newsletter will allow us to highlight specific experiences, or success stories, in which USDA Rural Development programs benefited rural communities in Illinois (see appendix H). Local officials will appreciate this format highlighting the benefits to other communities’ resources. The newsletter’s electronic format will cut costs. Also, officials can forward the newsletter on to their relevant contemporaries. In addition, they will able to skim the publication in order to find the most relevant information instead of hunting through a sea of words in a press release.

Emotional appeals messages
Our message will include a fear appeal. We believe that the thought of their communities emptying out to seek jobs elsewhere will persuade community members to act. We think it is an appropriate tactic if handled tastefully and tactfully. It would affect a large number of people in the community who are passionate about their hometowns. The message will also include a solution to overcome the fear: to use USDA Rural Development programs. Fear will enhance
our message and put it in perspective for community members. It will also help us to have the entire community support the use of several USDA Rural Development programs. Visual images of for-sale signs and empty restaurants will reinforce this idea. Testimonies and endorsements will encourage people to overcome their fear.

This message will be communicated through an e-advertisement (see appendix F). An e-advertisement will communicate a simple message quickly for professionals with limited time, including public officials, lenders and business owners in the community. A strong, relevant image will dominate the advertisement with text to complement it. It will also provide them with a link so they can take action. The advantage of an e-advertisement is that it communicates through emotions, which can be stronger than facts. It is communicated in a brief amount of time and does not require the reader to make a large time commitment, like with a magazine article. It could be forwarded on and would not require the same amount of expense as a printed advertisement.

Our message will include guilt appeal. The guilt appeal will highlight the fact that just because they have job security doesn’t mean John Doe next door does. If they don’t act for themselves, they should act for their neighbor. This tactic is relevant and appropriate for the audience and our organization if it is handled tastefully and tactfully. The message will include a solution to overcome their guilt: to use USDA Rural Development programs. Guilt will enhance the message and put it in perspective for community members. It will also help us to have the entire community support the use of several USDA Rural Development programs. Testimonies and endorsements will encourage people to create jobs for others in their community.

This message will communicate to the general public through a public service announcement (PSA) (see appendix D). This tactic will reach a large number of people in the specified Western Illinois region. It will create brand awareness for the campaign and encourage people to seek more information through other mediums. PSAs are virtually cost-free if they are created with prepackaged sound bites and an accompanying script.

A blog post (see appendix E) will also be created to tie together all of these messages and pieces. This tactic will reach a large number of people in the Western Illinois region. It will help to create awareness of IL USDA Rural Development and its programs, as well as share information on how rural communities can utilize the programs that are offered.

**Conclusion**

Through these messages we hope to communicate the campaign theme, “Creating Jobs, Building Communities”, to the key publics: local officials, business owners, lenders and the general public.
Timeline

**January 2012**
- Begin outline for secondary research and establish budget for campaign

**February 2012**
- Conduct secondary research – allow two weeks for completion
- Middle of February – identify key publics, select and create primary research method and tool
- Last week of February, disseminate or conduct primary research

**March 2012**
- First week of March – send out a reminder email if necessary (depends on primary research tool)
- Second week of March – collect primary research results and analyze
- Last week of March – reassess key publics

**April 2012**
- First week of April: Structure a campaign plan outline
- Second week of April: Create messages for campaign
- Third week of April: Create communication toolkit pieces
- Last week of April: Create communication plan

**May 2012**
- First week of May: PSA about job creation, which helps to build rural communities
- Third week of May: Press release sharing “creating jobs, building communities” message

**June 2012**
- First week of June after unemployment rates announced: Fact sheet sent via email sharing facts about jobs created in Illinois and rural communities

**July 2012**
- First week of July around July 4th: E-advertisement, “hometown or ghost town”
- Third week of July: E-newsletter discussing success stories from RD programs

**August 2012**
- First week of August after unemployment rates announced: Blog post tie together all key messages
- Third week of August: Press release sharing “creating jobs, building communities” message

**September 2012**
- First week of September after unemployment rates announced: Fact sheet sent via email sharing facts about jobs created in Illinois and rural communities

**October 2012**
- First week of October after unemployment rates announced: E-advertisement relating to Halloween
Timeline (cont.)

November 2012
- Week before Nov. 15 (American Enterprise Day): Press release sharing “creating jobs, building communities” message
- Week before Nov. 15: Blog post highlighting American Enterprise Day

December 2012
- First week of December: PSA about job creation, which helps to build rural communities
- Third week of December: Fact sheet sent via email sharing facts about jobs created in Illinois and rural communities

January 2013
- First week of January after unemployment rates announced: E-advertisement relating to New Year’s resolutions
- Third week of January: E-newsletter discussing success stories from RD programs

February 2013
- First week of February: Blog post sharing success stories from the winter months where jobs were created and communities were built
- Third week of February: Press release sharing “creating jobs, building communities” message

March 2013
- First week of March after unemployment rates announced: Fact sheet sent via email sharing facts about jobs created in Illinois and rural communities

April 2013
- First week of April after unemployment rates announced: E-advertisement “April Showers”

May 2013
Campaign ends
Begin evaluation

A media plan flow chart of this timeline can be found in appendix I.
Budget Breakdown

All of the materials that we have created for this “Creating Jobs, Building Communities” campaign will not cost IL USDA Rural Development anything. All of the designed pieces will be sent in the form of email or will be public service announcements. The only thing that they will have to spend money on is some additional time to implement these ideas.

They will, however, need to spend money to evaluate the effectiveness of the campaign once it is complete. We estimate the total cost of evaluating the campaign will be $500. In the next section, Evaluation, we will discuss specific evaluation methods that should be used. Figure 4 below shows the allocated budget for this, “Creating Jobs, Building Communities” campaign.

![Budget Breakdown](image)

Figure 4. IL USDA Rural Development’s $3,000 allocated budget for, “Creating Jobs, Building Communities” campaign

Overview of Staffing Needed for Campaign

The current staffing at the IL USDA Rural Development office in Champaign, IL would be enough to complete this campaign. It would be up to the office to determine who would be in charge of specific tasks. Each of the tasks listed below involves creating various communication pieces that will be distributed to rural communities in West Central Illinois. There are specific technology requirements for certain pieces. These requirements are listed below. The knowledge that is needed to operate any Adobe programs can easily be obtained by watching YouTube how-to videos or by following how-to videos on the Adobe TV website: [http://tv.adobe.com/channel/how-to/](http://tv.adobe.com/channel/how-to/).

- IMC toolkit creation
  - PSA
    - Technology Requirements:
      - Microsoft Word
      - Final Cut Pro or a similar recording program
  - Press release
    - Technology Requirements:
      - Microsoft Word
o E-newsletter
  ▪ Technology Requirements:
    • Dreamweaver - needed to create the newsletter
    • Mail Chimp Templates – easy-to-use and free downloads from their website: http://mailchimp.com/resources/html-email-templates/
    • Photoshop – needed to prepare images for the web and newsletter
    • Microsoft Outlook – needed to embed and email the newsletter

o Blog post submission to national USDA RD blog
  ▪ Technology Requirements:
    • Microsoft Word

o E-advertisement
  ▪ Technology Requirements:
    • Dreamweaver - needed to create the e-advertisement
    • Mail Chimp Templates – easy-to-use and free downloads from their website: http://mailchimp.com/resources/html-email-templates/
    • Photoshop – needed to prepare images for the web and e-advertisement
    • Microsoft Outlook – needed to embed and email the advertisement

o E-fact sheet
  ▪ Technology Requirements
    • Dreamweaver - needed to create the fact sheet
    • Mail Chimp Templates – easy-to-use and free downloads from their website: http://mailchimp.com/resources/html-email-templates/
    • Photoshop – needed to prepare images for the web and fact sheet
    • Microsoft Outlook – needed to embed and email the fact sheet

The IL USDA Rural Development office would not have to purchase the Dreamweaver or Photoshop software, as they already have it available to them; therefore, extra money would not have to be spent to purchase the required technology for this campaign.
Evaluation

Contents:

Evaluation

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Evaluation

As stated in the previous section, IL USDA Rural Development will need to spend some money to evaluate the effectiveness of the campaign once it is complete. To do this, we suggest they use Qualtrics to send out a survey, which costs $500 annually for a single user license. If they did decide to get a license for the department, they would have to pay $2,500/year and they would be able to have 10 user accounts. The additional user accounts would not be necessary, or worth the cost, as Molly, Joan and Colleen could all share the single user account.

To analyze the data, they can use Microsoft Excel, which they most likely already have. The training to use Qualtrics and Excel would be free as they can learn through research online, YouTube videos, etc.

When evaluating the effectiveness of the campaign, survey questions should be asked to help measure if the following objectives were met.

- An increase in awareness of USDA Rural Development in West Central Illinois rural communities; specifically an increase in their level of understanding of how these programs can create jobs in their rural communities (30% within six months) for [rural community residents in West Central IL]
- An increase in positive attitudes toward IL USDA Rural Development programs (10% within six months) for [rural community residents in West Central IL]
- An increase in the number of applications from West Central IL rural community members for rural development programs provided by IL USDA Rural Development (5% within six months) for [rural community residents in West Central IL]

Various types of questions could be asked on a survey to measure if the campaign objectives were met; however, a survey very similar to the original survey sent out by JLC Communications in the primary research efforts would be best. We feel a similar survey would be best because it would make the results from both surveys much easier to compare (see appendix J).
References

@usdaRD. Web log post. n.d. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/#!/usdaRD


U.S. Department of Agriculture. [Facebook page]. Retrieved from
http://www.facebook.com/USDA


Appendix C: Press Release

IL USDA Rural Development
2118 West Park Court, Suite A
Champaign, IL 61820
(217)-403-6200

**Illinois USDA Rural Development Helps Create Jobs and Builds Communities**

*Illinois USDA Rural Development assists rural communities via loan programs, water services, housing programs and technical services*

**Champaign, Ill. – April 16, 2012** - With the current state of the economy, rural communities have been feeling the financial pinch. Illinois USDA Rural Development and its variety of programs have offered a new route for rural communities in west central Illinois to get back on their feet by creating jobs and building communities.

USDA Rural Development Under Secretary Dallas Tonsager said. “With the loans and grants we are making available, USDA Rural Development will work closely with cooperatives and utilities that in turn help local businesses access capital and technical assistance.”

A number of communities have already benefitted from the programs offered by Illinois USDA Rural Development. One example is the Benton Civic Center, which was renovated and expanded after receiving a loan connected with Illinois USDA Rural Development and Southern Illinois Bank.
Through the renovations and expansions, the Benton Civic center now accommodates an orchestra pit, new stage, as well as lighting and sound equipment. According to Illinois USDA Rural Development, this additions will allow the community of Benton to expand their cultural events and offer a better place for community meetings and events.

Along with bring communities together, Illinois USDA Rural Development creates jobs. The town of Heyworth had its downtown Buchanan Street reconstructed by using Illinois USDA Rural Development’s Rural Business Enterprise Grants program. This allowed the streets sidewalks, curbs, and stormsewers to be improved. Since the completion of the project, two new businesses have opened in the downtown area.

The USDA Rural Development programs assist rural communities via different programs that vary from loans and grants to housing and energy. It is through these programs that Illinois USDA Rural Development helps rural communities create jobs and build communities. For more information, please visit the Illinois USDA Rural Development website at www.rurdev.usda.gov/il.

-end-

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Appendix D: Public Service Announcement

IL USDA Rural Development
2118 West Park Court, Suite A
Champaign, IL 61820
(217)-403-6200

Public Service Announcement
Radio (30 sec.)

With the Illinois unemployment rate on the decline, you might find yourself thinking all is well; but what about your friends, family and neighbors? Just because you have a job, does not mean everyone in your community is as lucky. The programs offered by Illinois USDA Rural Development can bring jobs back and help your community thrive. Illinois USDA Rural Development: Creating Jobs, Building Communities. To learn more visit us at www.rurdev.usda.gov/il.

-end-
Economic Growth, Stronger Community

Members of the Benton, Illinois community cannot help but smile as they drive past their community’s newly renovated civic center.

The Benton Civic Center, located in Johnston City, Illinois, was recently renovated so it could hold a larger capacity of people, leading to bigger and more events. After the recent renovation, the Center can now hold 1,200 people for meetings and theatrical events, and 100 to 800 people for dinners and banquets. The upgraded facility also allowed the hiring of additional staff, better quality, and cultural events.

Johnston City community member, Jane Doe, said, “The renovated civic center has really helped draw people to our community. I can’t believe people have moved here to work and raise their family. It’s unbelievable.”

The renovation was made possible through a loan with Southern Illinois Bank, which is a part of Illinois USDA Rural Development’s Community Facilities Guarantee Loan. The loan helped the rural community of Benton create over 10 more jobs and improve their rural community. As a result, the community now has a better civic center to hold community events.

“I can’t imagine what our rural community would be like without a place like this where we can come together and enjoy events as a community,” Doe said.

To learn more about how Illinois USDA Rural Development can help your community, click here.
Appendix F: Email Advertisement

Do you see more and more real estate signs in your hometown each year? Is the downtown struggling to keep its storefronts filled? You can help.

CREATING JOBS, BUILDING COMMUNITIES

Hometown or Ghost Town?

You make the difference.

How can you help?

Apply today for a USDA Rural Development Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan. Use the loan to start a new business. Save an existing business and the jobs it provides. Expand your business and provide more employment opportunities in your community.

Receive funding for up to $10 million. Negotiate the interest rate for your guaranteed loan. Choose either a fixed or variable rate to suit your business’s unique needs. Pay back the loan over 30 years or the useful life of the machinery purchased with the loan. Pay back working capital in seven years.

Ensure the sustainability of your community. Visit the USDA Rural Development website to learn more.

follow on Twitter | friend on Facebook | check out our blog

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Our state office mailing address is:
2118 W. Park CL, Suite A
Champaign, IL 61821

view email in browser
Appendix G: Email Fact Sheet

GET THE FACTS.

130,700
more jobs
added since
January 2012.

Almost 1 in 10 Illinoisans are JOBLESS.

In 3 years, USDA Rural Development grants and loans helped more than 50,000 small rural businesses.

Those same businesses created and saved 266,000 JOBS.

Thanks to small business owners and community leaders, rural area UNEMPLOYMENT RATES ARE FALLING faster than other areas of the country.

Become a statistic.

You have the power to increase job opportunities in your community through a USDA Rural Development Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan. The loan can be used to start a new business or save an existing business. Either way, you can keep precious jobs in your community.

Up to $10 million is available. The interest rate is negotiable. Choose a fixed or variable rate. Pay back the loan over 30 years or during the useful life of the machinery. Working capital is paid back within seven years.

Expand your business and provide more employment opportunities in your community. Visit the USDA Rural Development website to learn more.

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Thank you for your interest.