

City Brand

Reality Check Worksheet



How strong is your city's brand?

Before anyone invests, relocates, or accepts a job, they've already formed an impression of your city. A strong city brand helps ensure that impression reflects the best of what your city offers. This worksheet will help you evaluate whether your city's brand is clear, credible, and aligned with your economic development goals.

Who is your target audience?

Branding without a defined audience is a crapshoot.

List the top 1-3 audiences your city is actively trying to attract right now.

EXAMPLES

- Small manufacturers
- Remote workers
- Healthcare professionals
- Regional headquarters
- Young families

Narrow it down. Select the single-most important audience for your city messaging.

Reality Check

- Are these audiences realistic given your city's size, infrastructure, and workforce?
- Are different departments aligned on these priorities?

What do you want to be known for?

Most cities struggle here because they try to list everything. Strong city brands have one major area of focus as their brand promise.

Our city is best positioned to be known for _____? (List top 3-5 attributes)

EXAMPLES

- Ease of doing business
- Workforce stability
- Cost of living
- Proximity to larger markets
- Strong local industry culture

Narrow it down. If you could only choose one primary strength to lead with, what would it be?

Reality Check

- Would an outsider recognize this strength within their first 90 days?
- Is this meaningfully different from nearby cities?



What makes you desirable and credible?

A city's brand promise without proof creates skepticism.

List 3 tangible proof points that support your city's primary strength.

EXAMPLES

- Recent business expansions
- Workforce training programs
- Infrastructure investments
- Downtown revitalization efforts
- Housing availability

Narrow it down. Which proof point would appeal most to your primary target audience?

Reality Check

- Are your target audiences aware of these proof points?
- Do they show up consistently in economic development conversations or public messaging?

Where do reality and messaging conflict?

Your brand doesn't need to describe a perfect city. It needs to express a believable direction.

List all areas where experience might contradict desired messaging.

EXAMPLES

- Business onboarding
- Housing availability
- Workforce readiness
- Downtown experience
- Transportation or access
- Interdepartmental communication

Which gap, if addressed, would most improve your city's credibility?

Reality Check

- Are city leaders and stakeholders likely to support/disagree with your strengths?
- If someone experienced this gap firsthand, what would they tell others about your city?

Do other stakeholders agree?

If internal voices are inconsistent, external messaging will be too. Ask three different people in key leadership positions: "Why should a business or family choose our city?"

List all differences in their answers.

Reality Check

- If leadership cannot articulate your main strengths, it's unlikely others will understand them.
- Alignment isn't about consensus. It's whether your city speaks with clarity or contradiction.

How much of your city's brand is intentional?

Cities that don't control their own message are allowing others to shape how they are seen.

List elements of your city's brand that has been documented and shared.

EXAMPLES

- Logo in multiple formats
- Official city motto
- Branding style guide
- Community narrative including strengths and goals

Reality Check

- If you don't define and actively promote your city's story, others will.
- Who in your community has the loudest voice in determining how your city is viewed?

What's at stake?

A city with a strong brand is actively shaping its future and attracting new opportunities.

If nothing changed about our city's brand in the next three years, what opportunities would we miss?

