



April 14, 2021

Edward Woods III  
Communications and Outreach Director  
Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission

We are excited to submit a proposal to assist the Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission (MICRC) with communication and outreach services to inform Southeast Michigan residents about the state's redistricting process and to educate the public about how they can be involved in the effort. MICRC has already launched an extensive community engagement and media outreach process; we would like to help continue the proactive dialogue with residents. I believe we're a perfect fit to lead this effort.

While our core service is generating media attention, we've been part of several much larger efforts for cities, including designing and administering community surveys, leading community outreach and meetings, and helping to restore trust. These efforts were sometimes in the most challenging circumstances, ranging from cities near bankruptcy to a place bankrupt of any trust in government.

Our results are exceptional; recent examples include former Ecorse Manager Joyce Parker being named [newsmaker of the year](#) by Crain's Detroit Business; the [coverage](#) of the Fight for a \$15 hourly wage (which helped spur a wage hike in Michigan), and the successful 2016 primary and [general election victory](#) by Kenyetta Stanford Jones (now a 36<sup>th</sup> District Court judge). We also recently served as the PR firm of record for [Arcadis](#), and in that role we helped to keep Flint residents updated about a water distribution optimization study. The work was praised by city leaders and residents for its approach and transparency.

McConnell Communications' principal, who was [recognized in 2016](#) as media professional of the year, earlier worked for many years as a newspaper reporter covering government, a good quality to have when you're shaping stories and figuring ways to share information about governance.

Additionally, we believe that our team's longstanding relationships with the press corps – as well as the community - make us a good fit. Because we come from a media background, we know how to think like a reporter or news director to get the desired coverage and to help our clients prepare for successful interviews.

Thanks for considering us. I hope we get the chance to help you tell your story.

/s/ Darci E. McConnell, President  
McConnell Communications, Inc.

---

400 Monroe, Suite 610  
Detroit, MI 48226  
PH: 313.237.0103/313.686.8094/Fax: 313.237.0104 [darci@dmcconnell.com](mailto:darci@dmcconnell.com)

## **Statement of Need**

As the MICRC implements redistricting on the heels of the 2018 successful ballot initiative, it seeks to educate residents in Southeast Michigan about the impact of this effort and to encourage their participation. A strategy is being sought to inform residents both through earned media and community outreach efforts over the next four months. Residents are being encouraged to offer public comment, assist with mapping and take part in upcoming hearings slated during the month of June.

The goal of this outreach is to:

- ✓ Educate Southeast Michigan residents about redistricting.
- ✓ Deliver information to residents who may not be reached through so-called traditional media.
- ✓ Bolster existing MICRC outreach and media placement efforts.
- ✓ Drive Southeast Michigan residents' participation in mapping, public comment and public hearings.

## **Approach/deliverables**

Assist in developing and implementing a communication strategy.

Devise and implement a community outreach strategy, including targets and timeline.

Devise and implement an earned media strategy.

This proposed campaign will utilize the best practices in earned, proactive media management, and community engagement services. We will utilize these tools to create a credible conversation that provides sustained outreach, awareness, education and transparency to build trust and community buy-in/awareness. We will agree to measurement that could include:

- Number of media mentions
- Number of community meetings/church visits
- Website/activity
- Number of resident/stakeholder touches/contacts
- Public comment/participation
- Surveys before, during and after the campaign (if economically feasible)

## **Community Outreach**

### **Grassroots advocacy/relationship building.**

Key to minimizing strife is ensuring that the community is engaged and informed and included. This must be done in part through direct communication that allows stakeholders to hear your story, such as through:

- Visits to neighborhood meetings, churches, labor, business and other organizations to provide updates.
- Distribution of collaterals (kicker cards) in a targeted fashion
- Attendance of policy and other community meetings (largely virtual)

- Integrating into elected officials and other grass tops leadership's existing meetings
- Visits to senior events and organizations, such as DAAA, AARP

We will assist with devising an approach, creating collaterals and preparing messaging for community meetings, create a list of target organizations and events; train our team and any additional surrogates and work to educate the public. The format will be to speak as needed via phone or in person with the organization's leadership, and in front of the group or congregation itself if permitted. **A detailed list of groups and accompanying timeline will be provided at contract signing, but we will mutually agree to the number of meetings/contacts per week.**

The targets of this outreach will include, but not be limited to:

- The Council of Baptist Pastors, AME and COGIC congregations along with dozens of other ministers in Detroit (Such as Rev. Anthony, Rev. Winans, Bishop Elliott, Rev. Kinloch, Rev. Vann)
- Organized labor leaders (such as SEIU Healthcare Michigan, Laborers' Local 1191, UAW, Carpenters, IBEW)
- Social justice organizations, (such as the NAACP, Good Jobs Now, NAAN, MOSES, Transportation Riders United)
- Precinct delegates (such as 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> Congressional Districts, Wayne County Black Democrats)
- Business leaders/organizations (such as Michigan Hispanic Chamber/MMSDC)
- Block Club meetings (Ideally targeting larger meetings; but we will establish targets in higher density/voter turnout/active areas, such as Sherwood Forest, East English Village, Palmer Park, etc.)
- Police/Community precinct meetings

Where permitted via strategic partners, we will create 1-pagers that can be inserted into existing materials for distribution to members and through any door-to-door outreach efforts.

### **Communication**

To keep the community informed, McConnell Communications will:

- ✓ Assist with framing the issue/message training in each circumstance. We will help build on the overview already created by MICRC to succinctly explain redistricting and next steps.
- ✓ McConnell Communications will review MICRC's current communication vehicles and offer any feedback for customizing collaterals for the target audience.

In addition to developing a communications strategy to generate sustained positive publicity, McConnell Communications will:

- Secure and/or prepare spokespeople who can participate in media interviews.
- Create essential fact sheets and press releases for the media.
- Develop media opportunities and help come up with story ideas/approaches.
- Schedule radio, print, podcast and television interviews.
- If needed, assist with crisis management to navigate any challenges, via traditional and new media. We are also experienced in putting together a proactive crisis management plan.

- Draft and distribute news releases, opinion articles and other related content to traditional and nontraditional outlets, including but not limited to:

Detroit Free Press

Detroit News

Crain's Detroit Business

Oakland Press

C&G Newspapers

D Business magazine

Michigan Chronicle

Deadline Detroit

Tellusdetroit.com

Native Detroiter

Hour Magazine

B.L.A.C Detroit

Bridget Detroit

The Neighborhoods

Model D Media

WDET-FM 101.9 (Detroit Today)

American Black Journal (PBS)

WMGC 105.1 Bounce

WDIV Channel 4 (Flashpoint)

WXYZ Channel 7 (Spotlight on the News)

Michigan Matters

Street Beat

Mason in the Morning

Mildred Gaddis Show

910-AM (Rev. Horace Sheffield/Adolph Mongo)

Fox-2 Detroit (Let it Rip/morning show) +

WADL TV 38

Metro Times

Curbed Detroit

Various blogs, talk shows, podcasts (Darren Nichols, M.L Elrick, Craig Fahle, East Detroit), online and trade publications.

Community newsletters (put out by neighborhood organizations)

(Note: The RFP specified nontraditional, but we would certainly be able to reach out to the two dailies, the NBC and ABC affiliates as well as the top-rated radio stations WWJ/WJR)

**Other recommendations**

We strongly recommend utilizing a paid advertising campaign that would combine cable, radio, social and email marketing via online publications to Southeast Michigan. A more detailed media buy can be proposed/shaped once we establish a budget.

**Timeline**

April 19-23

Draft detailed list of community targets; overarching communication strategy and deliverables, review collateral MICRC's collateral materials and draft content as needed.

April 26-30 Schedule speaking engagements, draft op-eds as needed, draft and distribute news releases, prep speakers as needed, schedule media interviews.

May 3-Forward: Work to arrange 1-2 media interviews per week; arrange, as needed, visits with editorial boards, draft, secure and place op-eds/letters to the editor. Work to present to 2-3 community organizations per week; drive participation for upcoming public meetings.

NOTE: As aforementioned, specific targets and timeline will be provided at contract signing.

## **EXPERIENCE, SERVICES AND PROJECT TEAM**

### **What we do**

We help individuals and companies tell their stories in a manner that gets others to act.

McConnell Communications has established itself as a [leading agency](#) in Southeast Michigan that provides solid media/public relations, media training, advertising, media buying, marketing, new media, relationship building and crisis management services. Since its inception in 2004, the company, under the leadership of President and CEO Darci E. McConnell, has provided publicity and marketing for the City of Grand Blanc, the Michigan Department of Transportation, Arcadis, SEIU Healthcare Michigan, the National Association of Black Journalists, Wayne County Airport and more than 200 other public and private organizations as well as many more individuals.



Darci E. McConnell has 31 years of experience in communications strategy, crisis management, media relations, marketing, advertising and political consulting. In 2016, she was [recognized](#) by the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) as Media Professional of the Year. She spent 14 years as a reporter for newspaper outlets across the state as well as in Washington, DC. She holds a bachelor's degree in English and Communication from the University of Michigan and has served as an adjunct journalism professor at Wayne State University. She is a member of the Public Relations Society of America and past president of the Detroit Chapter of NABJ. Her executive education includes completion of the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses program, Dartmouth's Tuck School of Business, Harvard's Program on Negotiation, and a New Media Boot Camp put on by the National Organizing Institute for community organizers. Her personal passion is making a difference in the lives of young people, through mentoring programs and opportunities. McConnell will be the authorized contact and lead point person for this contract. Email: [darci@dmcconnell.com](mailto:darci@dmcconnell.com). Telephone: 313.237.0100. Mobile phone: 313.686.8094.

Alex Cruden assists the company with editing, writing, crisis management and media training. A Detroit Free Press journalist for more than 35 years, Cruden has worked as an editor and manager in features and in local, state, national and international news. A charter member of ACES, the Society for Editing, Cruden has led more than 170 seminar and training sessions for editors, writers and managers across the country. Cruden will assist McConnell with the editing of all materials related to this contract.

Morgan Koetje will assist with writing and social media management for this contract.

## **CASE STUDIES**

Here we provide, in some detail, what McConnell Communications accomplished recently for three clients.

**Client:** (Michigan) Department of Insurance and Financial Services

**Overview:** In 2019, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed auto insurance reform legislation. The measure provided ways for residents to reduce their auto insurance costs and to also hold insurance companies more accountable. To ensure that Detroiters were able to tap into those savings, McConnell Communications won an RFP in 2020 to help build awareness.

### **What McConnell Communications did:**

Created and implemented a communication plan.

Developed collateral materials (Power Point + 1-pager) to simplify messaging.

Arranged and presented to more than 30 community organizations.

Secured surrogates to help distribute informational materials via email and social media platforms.

Enlisted community groups to distribute information at food banks.

Secured media interviews.

Assisted with the drafting of scripts that could be used for television and radio advertising

**Outcome:** State officials considered the outreach and media relations efforts very successful in helping to significantly raise visibility and awareness of the new insurance laws.



**Client:** Joyce Parker, City of Ecorse/City of Allen Park

**Overview:** Joyce Parker was named in 2009 to serve as Emergency Manager for the City of Ecorse to address the city's fiscal woes. In 2012, Allen Park was added to her duties. The two cities went from democratically elected leadership to being run by an emergency manager, so it was critical that she find a way to inform constituents and community stakeholders about her work and to generate community buy-in.

### **What McConnell Communications did regarding each city:**

- Created and implemented a full communications plan, including media, public relations and crisis management.
- Developed community surveys and assisted with survey analysis.
- Developed a plan for and assisted with town hall meetings and smaller community meetings.

- Arranged ongoing news coverage in print, online and broadcast outlets across the region, creating sustained positive publicity for Parker’s work.

**Results:** This approach resulted in a structured revitalization plan that included community input and achieved:

- Passage of legislation for the sale of public bonds that allowed the reduction of municipal debt obligations (a move supported through editorials both in the Detroit News and the Detroit Free Press).
- Creation of a partnership with the Michigan Municipal League to allow for community visioning.
- Ongoing public support along with news media coverage touting the strides under Parker’s leadership in a transition out of emergency management. (As one resident put it: “She’s communicating with us more in a few months than they have in all my years in Allen Park.”)
- Parker receiving a national award as well as recognition in [2013 as Crain’s Newsmaker of the Year](#). **Reference:** Joyce Parker, 734-730-9526



**Client:** Arcadis/City of Flint  
September, 2016-2018

**Issue:** Due to the ongoing water crisis in Flint, the city was asked to comply with an EPA administrative order to assess ways to optimize the water distribution system. McConnell Communications, a subcontractor to Arcadis, was asked to help with communication outreach and crisis management to help inform residents of the work being done by the city. To that end, beginning in September 2016, we have surveyed residents about perceptions; helped put together FAQ sheets and work updates (in English and Spanish); arranged a series of town hall meetings; engaged in one-on-one conversations with key stakeholders and continue to present updates to residents via community group meetings.

**Results:** While the work to restore residents’ trust is ongoing, the feedback has been generally positive about Arcadis’ direct outreach to residents and their efforts to keep the community informed and simply taking the time to listen to their concerns.

**Reference:** Christopher Hill, Vice President/Regional Value Proposition Leader  
813.347.3047



**Client:** Fair Food Network’s Double Up Food Bucks program

**Issue:** During 2009-2013, 2020 the Fair Food Network needed to help brand, grow and generate participation in its Double Up Food Bucks program, which provides healthier food access to low-income families by doubling the amount of money they can spend in farmers markets. McConnell

Communications came up with an approach to help bolster the agency's outreach efforts, assisted with the development of earned media (publicity) and created the radio advertisements and placed the media buy (ads), both locally as well as across the state.

**Outcome:** The program that began in five locations in Detroit now operates in 150 across the state. Michigan SNAP participants have spent more than \$7 million in combined SNAP and Double Up Food Bucks in participating markets and farm-direct retail since 2010 and have bought more than 4 million pounds of healthy fresh produce.

**Reference:** Oran Hesterman, president/CEO  
Fair Food Network, 734.213.3999

### **Budget**

\*These services would be provided at a rate of \$175 per hour, with an estimated 20-25 hours per month (not to exceed \$4,500 per month). The cost will be dictated both by the metrics we establish as well as whether any funds from the total contract value must be used for paid advertising.

### **PICK US!**

We believe that McConnell Communications, through its work on media relations, issue, policy, government and other community outreach efforts, is best suited to accomplish what is necessary to help MICRC educate residents in Southeast Michigan about the redistricting process and inspire them to get involved. We have a track record of successful local and statewide initiatives, exceptional media relationships and event implementation, and creative approaches to moving a target audience.