

An aerial night photograph of a city. In the foreground, a large, white, classical-style building with many windows is illuminated from within. The building is surrounded by streets, trees, and other smaller buildings. The sky is dark blue, and the city lights create a warm glow. The overall scene is a mix of modern and traditional architecture.

Reputation Reset, Public Infrastructure Build, and *Brand Repositioning* Under Scrutiny

Case Study

October 1, 2024 to
September 30, 2025

Content

Intro

Executive
Context

Section 1

Reputation Prior To
Engagement

Section 2

Reputation Strategy and
Control Mechanisms

Section 3

Reputation Outcomes and
Transferable Value

Appendix

Materials and Infrastructure
Created During the Engagement



Engagement Lead
LCG Brands Consulting



Interim Chief Marketing Officer
Jodi-Tatiana Charles



Sector
Place-based philanthropy



Institutional Scale
Nearly \$1.3B at inception
growing to nearly \$1.6B by
end of engagement

Executive Context

INTRO

By October 2024

The New Hanover Community Endowment was operating with a measurable reputation deficit. Despite its scale and grantmaking power, **the organization was widely known but not widely trusted.** Media narratives between 2020 and September 2024 emphasized governance concerns; leadership turnover; and limited transparency. Public communications were inconsistent; digital infrastructure was underdeveloped; and external voices were shaping the public narrative.

This engagement was not initiated to improve visibility. It was initiated to **stabilize credibility, reduce reputational risk, and install systems capable of sustaining trust through leadership change.**

By October 2024, the New Hanover Community Endowment was stewarding nearly \$1.3 billion in assets, established from the sale of the county-owned New Hanover Regional Medical Center (NHRMC) hospital system. The Endowment operates as a permanent institution. Its corpus is never touched. Only investment returns are deployed for grant making, ensuring the fund is designed to serve New Hanover County in perpetuity.

By September 2025

The Endowment's assets had grown to nearly \$1.6 billion further elevating its scale, visibility, and reputational stakes.

Reputation Prior To Engagement

SECTION 1

The risk environment inherited on October 1, 2024

At the start of the engagement, the Endowment faced cumulative reputational challenges that constrained its effectiveness regardless of financial strength.

Public perception was shaped by:

- Leadership instability and short executive tenures
- Reactive and inconsistent communications
- Limited transparency mechanisms
- Low digital engagement and public education
- Media scrutiny filling information gaps



These issues were structural, not cosmetic.

The absence of durable communication systems meant that each leadership transition reset public understanding rather than reinforcing continuity. As a result, **skepticism compounded over time**, even when organizational decisions were sound.

Reputational weakness translated directly into **operational risk**. Without a baseline level of trust, routine decisions carried disproportionate exposure. Leadership and staff were forced into reactive postures, expending time and credibility managing perception rather than advancing mission-critical work. Narrative control remained external, shaped by speculation rather than by reliable institutional signals.

This risk was amplified by the Endowment's permanence. The organization is not a time-bound initiative or a finite pool of capital. **Its corpus is protected by design, ensuring the institution will exist indefinitely.**





NED CHESTNUT
NORTH CAROLINA
MY GMC
WORLD WAR I
MARCH 31 1889
JULY 31 1949

LEON McNEIL
NORTH CAROLINA
ST3C
WORLD WAR I
FEB 10
JAN 2

375
1-1000

DALLIE JACOBS
NORTH CAROLINA
EVT CO B
107 PIONEER INF
WORLD WAR I
JUL 7 1896
AUG 20 1944

LEON BROWN
NORTH CAROLINA
EVT
1ST INFANTRY
OCTOBER 31 1911

ISAAC I SMITH
NORTH CAROLINA
EVT INFANTRY
WORLD WAR I
OCTOBER 17 1882
MARCH 24 1949

FRED BERNARD NIXON
NORTH CAROLINA
PFC
3428 AF STUDENT SQ
FEBRUARY 6, 1931

JAMES CHAMBERS
NORTH CAROLINA
EVT 1ST INFANTRY
OCTOBER 17 1882
MARCH 24 1949

EDWARD McFARLAND

HERMAN WILLIAMS

JANNIE

CLIFTON NIXON

ISSAC MEYER

MAJOLIE GRIFFIN

JUSTIN TIM HUTTEN

JAM THOM

BEAUF MITCHELL

WILLIAM

EDWARD McFARLAND



Reputation Strategy and Control Mechanisms

SECTION 2

How reputational risk was stabilized and narrative control was rebuilt

Reputation recovery for The Endowment was approached as a systems problem reinforced by human credibility. The objective was not to persuade skeptics through messaging, but to **remove the conditions that produced skepticism while rebuilding trust from the ground level.**

This work required structure, discipline, and presence. The reputation strategy was designed for a permanent institution, not a leadership cycle. Every system installed had to function not just for the current executive team, but for future boards, staff, and community stakeholders stewarding a fund intended to last forever.

“ Reputation would improve only if the organization behaved in a way that made **speculation unnecessary and engagement possible.** That principle governed both infrastructure decisions and day-to-day leadership behavior. ”

Core operating principle:



1. Narrative ownership shifted from reactive to structural

Prior to Oct. 2024:

The Endowment's narrative was shaped largely by external actors responding to incomplete or inconsistent information. Media coverage filled gaps left by silence or irregular communication. The first intervention centralized narrative ownership by establishing a single, coherent narrative spine rooted in purpose, process, and impact.

Key actions:

- Replaced episodic responses with predictable information flow
- Defined what the organization would explain publicly and when
- Aligned leadership, board, and communications staff on narrative discipline

As the organization became a reliable primary source, coverage shifted from speculative framing toward contextual reporting.

Final decision authority for brand, communications, and narrative strategy sat with the Interim Chief Marketing Officer, in direct alignment with executive leadership and the board.

2. Transparency was operationalized, not promised

Public trust did not improve because transparency was claimed. It improved because transparency became visible and repeatable.

Grantmaking logic, timelines, and decision-making were made legible to the public.

Control mechanisms installed:

- Structured public meetings with advance context, live Q&A, and documented follow-up
- Educational communications explaining how decisions were made
- Searchable grant data that reduced ambiguity

- Clear grantmaking roadmaps outlining cycles, criteria, and timing

This reduced speculation and reframed community engagement from **suspicion to informed participation.**

3. Media engagement became disciplined and intentional

Media strategy shifted from reactive damage control to steady, intentional visibility.

Rules were clear. No communication without substance. No response without alignment.

Mechanisms included:

- Press activity tied directly to operational milestones
- Consistent spokesperson discipline
- Internal review protocols to prevent mixed messaging
- A regular cadence that trained media expectations

Tone stabilized because reporters were no longer forced to **infer intent or fill information gaps.**

4. Owned channels were rebuilt as credibility infrastructure

Owned media channels were repositioned as public education tools rather than promotional outlets.

Key shifts:

- Newsletter content prioritized explanation over announcement
- Website architecture emphasized clarity of institutional logic
- Social channels supported transparency rather than sentiment

These channels allowed the organization to communicate directly, **reducing reliance on third-party framing.**

5. Grassroots engagement anchored institutional credibility

Structural changes alone do not move reputation. Trust is built through presence.

The Interim CMO adopted a deliberate grassroots operating posture, working inside the community rather than above it.

Mechanisms included:

- Informal conversations designed to listen rather than persuade
- Direct engagement with staff during and after leadership transitions
- Presence at community meetings and events without media framing

- Sustained time spent in New Hanover County engaging directly with residents, nonprofit leaders, grantees, and civic stakeholders

These interactions surfaced concerns not visible in formal channels and allowed **institutional language to be corrected** before it hardened into narrative.

6. Internal trust building reduced external noise

External reputation could not stabilize without internal confidence.

The Interim CMO worked alongside staff to:

- Rebuild trust after periods of leadership churn
- Clarify communications roles and decision ownership
- Normalize transparency as a shared responsibility

- Reinforce consistency without suppressing dissent

As internal alignment improved, external communications became **steadier and more credible.**

7. Process clarity strengthened staff across the organization

A critical dimension of this engagement was its impact on staff across the organization, including staff operating beyond the executive tier. Reputation stabilization did not rely solely on leadership or board alignment. It required staff at every level to understand how decisions were made, trust the systems being installed, and contribute without being pulled into reactionary activity.

The Interim CMO:

Intentionally centered the work on process rather than personality. Decision logic was made visible. Roles and decision authority were clarified. Communication norms were standardized. This enabled staff throughout the institution to operate with confidence and consistency, contributing to credibility through their daily work rather than through escalation or informal workarounds.

As a result, internal noise decreased while execution strength increased. Staff became active stabilizers during periods of scrutiny and transition. Alignment across levels improved consistency, reduced friction, and strengthened the organization's ability to operate calmly under pressure.

8. Board alignment reframed brand as governance

The board's understanding of brand shifted from marketing optics to institutional risk management.

Through direct engagement and ongoing advisement, brand was reframed as:

- A governance tool
- A mechanism for consistency during leadership change
- A trust asset

This alignment reduced friction, improved decision speed, and **ensured leadership actions** reinforced reputational objectives.

9. Crisis readiness protected credibility gains

Operating under scrutiny without a crisis framework creates unnecessary risk.

A formal crisis communications plan was developed to:

- Define decision authority under pressure
- Establish response timelines
- Ensure consistency across leadership and legal
- Prevent improvisation during high-risk moments

Reputation became resilient rather than fragile.

10. Structural shift achieved

By mid-2025, the Endowment no longer relied on individual leaders to carry its reputation.

Instead, it operated with:

- Predictable public communication systems
- Ground-level trust reinforced by presence
- Disciplined media engagement
- Clear internal and board alignment
- Documented crisis protocols

Reputation was no longer fragile. It was reinforced by structure and relationships.

Importantly, credibility was reinforced not only through leadership and board alignment, but through staff at every level operating with shared process clarity and confidence.



Reputation Outcomes and Transferable Value

SECTION 3

What changed, how fast it changed, and why it matters

By the end of the engagement, the Endowment had stabilized its public reputation. During this same period, its asset base grew from nearly **\$1.3 billion to nearly \$1.6 billion**, driven by investment performance and market conditions, not marketing activity.

That externally driven growth increased the institution's visibility and the reputational responsibility associated with stewarding a permanent public trust.

Within nine months, the organization demonstrated **observable behavioral change** that stabilized credibility and reduced reputational risk.



Media

- **Consistent coverage** across ten to eleven outlets
- **Fifteen to twenty** mentions per month
- Tone shifted from critical and investigative to **neutral or cautiously positive**, reducing volatility in public perception and media framing.

Public engagement

- Newsletter relaunched as an education channel, reaching more than **1,700 subscribers**
- Open rates exceeding **60%** during major engagement moments
- Increased **attendance and more informed participation** at public meetings

Digital credibility

- **Rapid traffic growth** following website relaunch
- Long session durations signaling **deep engagement**
- Sustained **audience growth** across platforms

Greater Wilmington Business Journal

FROM THE

The New Hanover Community Endowment, formed from the sale of New Hanover Regional Medical Center to Novant Health in 2021, continues to grow and increase the number of awards it grants. The following is a snapshot of some of the endowment's statistics:

\$1.6 billion

Value of the endowment as of July

\$54.8 million

Endowment's 2025 grant budget

\$8.7 million

Awarded by endowment to New Hanover County Schools in Q2 2024

\$7.5 million

Awarded in Q1 2025 to the N.C. Aquarium at Fort Fisher for expansion and renovation

SOURCE: NEW HANOVER COMMUNITY ENDOWMENT

FROM ENDOWMENT | P. 1

directors includes six positions directed by Novant Health, five assigned by the New Hanover County Board of Commissioners and two appointed collectively by the board.

One board member, former New Hanover County Commissioner Woody White, has weighed in publicly about who he thinks should be in charge, and his post on the social media platform X conveyed that some board members weren't hang with the previous CEO picks.

White, a Republican and an attorney in Wilmington, wrote on X in July, "If (sic) I have anything to do with it, there aren't going to be any more nationwide searches to all the sole of NH COMMUNITY ENDOWMENT CEO."

"No one in this nation – not dietatte philanthropists, the most acclaimed 'community organizer' of the most motivated empathetic individual – could possibly know what our local needs are better than what we know ourselves." White's may continued. "This is a point that many of us on the board have been making for quite some time."

New Hanover County Commissioner and Democrat Rob

Zapple, en una publicación en X, declaró: t whether the Endowment CEO is local ... it's whether they have the independence to do their job. Two CEO's (sic) didn't. The problem is interference and overreach by board members. Choosing a local CEO is just a way to fighten board control and make modeling peries."

LeAnn Pierce, vice cetric of the New Hanover County Board of Commissioners and a Republican, said while a local person would likely tarro and understand the community best, she wants to see the role go to the most qualified person.

"Just because a person is local doesn't make them the most qualified," she said.

New Hanover County Commissiones Stephanie Walker, a Democrat, wrote in a recent ogred that the endowment's next leader doesn't necessarily need to be a local.

"We need someone bold enough to challenge the status quo and skilled enough to bring people together," Walker wrote. "And just as opportunity, poce that person is bired, the board needs to support their leadership – not stert it."

More importantly,

Reputation stopped being personality-dependent

Systems replaced improvisation.



Timeline of change

1 Oct–Dec 2024
reputational triage and stabilization

3 Apr–Jun 2025
engagement growth and tone normalization

2 Jan–Mar 2025
structural visibility and narrative reset

4 Jul–Sep 2025
reinforcement, training, and future-proofing

Speed mattered. This engagement demonstrates how to move quickly **without sacrificing credibility.**

Applicability beyond philanthropy

This work reflects operating under scrutiny, not sector. These dynamics apply across:

- Founder-led companies scaling rapidly
- Organizations whose scale has outpaced infrastructure
- Public-facing institutions navigating leadership change
- Organizations emerging from controversy or misalignment
- Boards navigating risk during transition

Reputation fails not because of a single mistake, but because **systems do not exist** to support credibility at scale.



This approach is replicable

Transferable model:

- Reputation understood as a behavioral system
- Transparency established prior to promotion
- Consistent source material to control narrative drift
- Trust built through presence, not announcements
- Alignment across board, staff, and leadership around brand as governance
- Crisis readiness treated as essential infrastructure

At the conclusion of the engagement, the Endowment was operating with documented communications systems, trained internal leadership, and board-aligned governance practices that allowed the organization to sustain **credibility and discipline without reliance on interim leadership.**

This model reflects **leadership discipline** rather than budget size or industry.

Executive Summary

LCG Brands Consulting led a full reputation reset for a permanent, public-facing institution stewarding nearly **\$1.3 billion in assets at the start of the engagement.**

Asset growth during this period was market-driven and independent of marketing activity.

Serving as Interim CMO, Jodi-Tatiana Charles stabilized narrative control, rebuilt trust through transparency and community engagement, and installed systems that made credibility durable across leadership change.

The engagement strengthened institutional credibility by aligning **leadership, board, and staff** across the organization around clear processes that reduced reactivity and improved execution under scrutiny.

This was not a cosmetic rebrand. It was a **structural reset** that protected a permanent public trust and positioned the institution to operate with sustained credibility under scrutiny.



DOWNTOWN WILMINGTON

N Front St
200

Grace St
100



Materials and Infrastructure Created During the Engagement

APPENDIX

Oct. 1, 2024 to Sep. 30, 2025

During the course of the engagement, LCG Brands Consulting and the Interim CMO developed and implemented a comprehensive set of strategic, operational, and public-facing materials to support the Endowment's **reputation reset, transparency goals, and long-term sustainability as a permanent institution.**

Brand and Identity Assets

- New organizational name adoption and positioning framework
- Complete visual identity system, including logo, color palette, and usage standards
- Grantee-facing brand and logo usage guidelines
- Brand messaging framework aligned to mission, grantmaking process, and community impact
- Internal brand guidance for staff, board, and leadership

Digital and Web Infrastructure

- Full website redesign and launch
- Information architecture and content hierarchy
- Grantmaking content structure and public education pages
- Analytics setup and performance benchmarks
- Community events calendar structure
- Phase two digital framework for grantee portfolios and storytelling modules

Media and Communications Materials

- Press releases tied to organizational milestones, leadership updates, grant cycles, and public meetings
- Media response protocols and internal review workflows
- Media messaging guidance and spokesperson alignment
- Talking points and briefing materials for leadership and board members

Owned Media Channels

- Relaunched monthly newsletter with editorial strategy and content templates
- Social media content strategy and platform-specific messaging approach
- YouTube channel launch framework for long-form storytelling and updates

Grantee Support and Capacity-Building Resources

- Support materials to improve consistency between the Endowment and grantee communications
- Comprehensive grantee brand and publicity toolkit
- Media and communications guidance for funded organizations
- Early-stage grantee lookbook framework to showcase funded impact

Crisis and Risk Management

- Formal crisis communications plan
- Defined roles and decision authority during high-risk moments
- Alignment guidance between leadership, legal, and communications functions
- Scenario planning and response protocols

Strategic Storytelling and Legacy Assets

- Mini-documentary concept and production framework
- 2022–2025 Retrospective Report structure and narrative framework
- Development of Marketing 101/102 and Communications 101/102 training programs for staff and grantees
- Long-form storytelling strategy to establish institutional origin and evolution

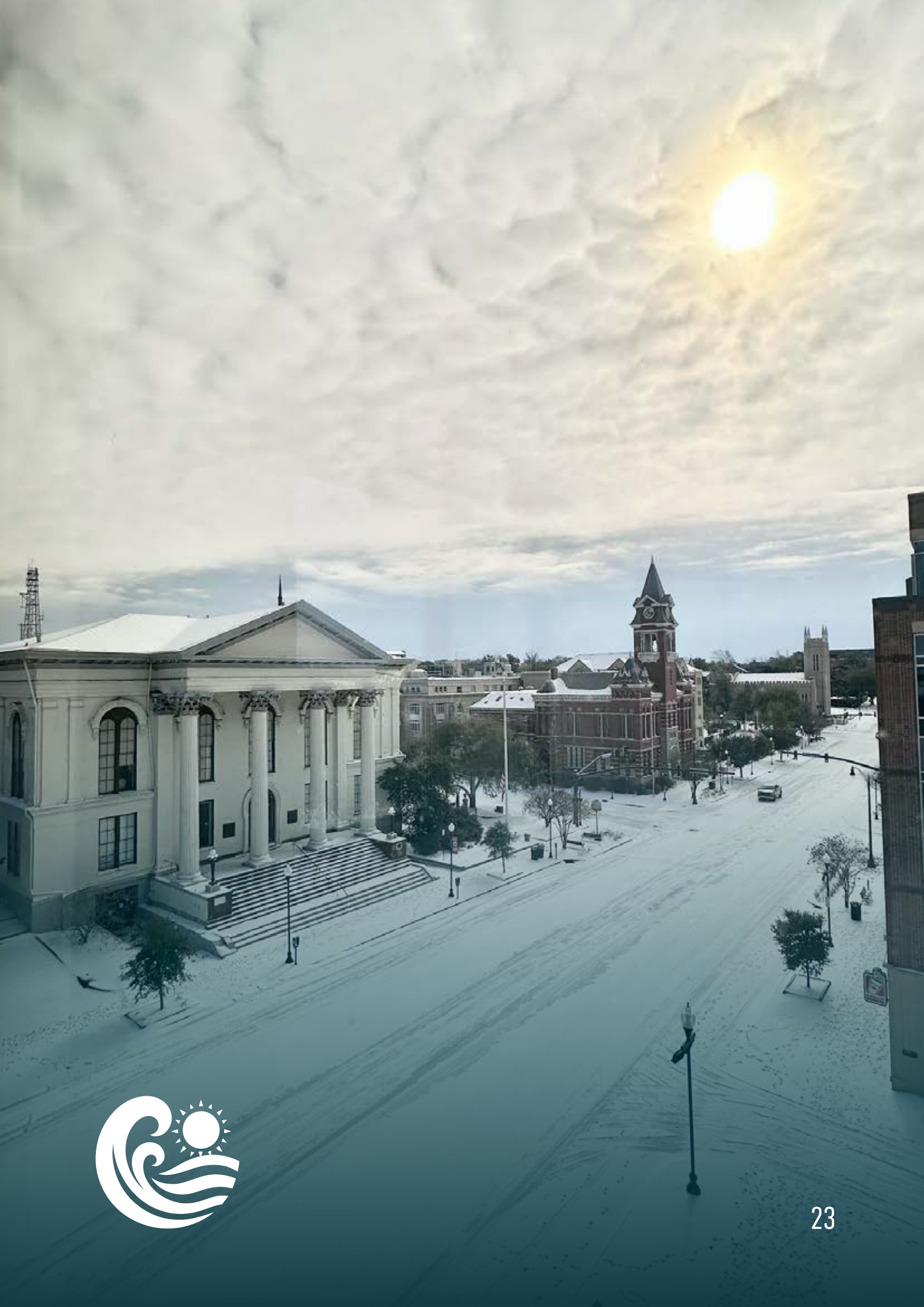
Internal Systems and Leadership Support

- Communications role clarification and workflows
- Internal messaging discipline and alignment practices
- Board education materials reframing brand as governance and risk management
- Vendor selection, sequencing, and governance to ensure quality, speed, and cost discipline
- Leadership advisement on reputation, visibility, and institutional trust

Summary

These materials collectively transformed the Endowment’s communications **from ad hoc outputs into a durable institutional system**, capable of supporting a permanent fund stewarding nearly \$1.6 billion in assets.

Each asset was designed not for a single campaign or leadership tenure, but to **reinforce credibility, transparency, and trust over time**.





THE ENDOWMENT

NEW HANOVER COMMUNITY ENDOWMENT



LCG Brands