

Communications Strategist or Senior Communications Strategist

ABOUT THE INNOCENCE PROJECT

The Innocence Project was founded in 1992 by Barry C. Scheck and Peter J. Neufeld at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law at Yeshiva University to assist the wrongly convicted who could be proven innocent through DNA testing. The Innocence Project's groundbreaking use of DNA technology to free innocent people has provided irrefutable proof that wrongful convictions are not isolated or rare events but instead arise from systemic defects. Now an independent nonprofit organization closely affiliated with Cardozo School of Law at Yeshiva University, the Innocence Project's mission is to free the staggering numbers of innocent people who remain incarcerated and to bring substantive reform to the system responsible for their unjust imprisonment.

ABOUT THE POSITION

The Innocence Project recognises the immense power of strategic communications to advance legal and policy reform and, more specifically, the importance of exoneration stories to further the work of preventing wrongful convictions and transforming the criminal legal system. Reporting to the Chief Communications Officer (CCO), the **Communications Strategist** will be a big picture communications strategist who understands how to use communications to drive change.

The **Communications Strategist** will join a talented and creative team and will play a key role in developing smart proactive and reactive media strategies that advance the Innocence Project's (IP) mission. They will work closely with IP's program teams - the Post-Conviction Litigation, Policy and Strategic Litigation departments - as well as IP's leadership to create and implement strategic communications plans to enhance the impact of the work with a particular emphasis on policy reform. As such, they will have experience developing and implementing smart communications plans for advancing policy campaigns and reforms along with activating new and existing audiences to achieve results. They will have experience engaging with consultants on this type of work.

The **Communications Strategist** will support the CCO and the Media Relations Manager in elevating the profiles of IP leadership and expert staff - helping to develop comprehensive positioning strategies across a range of platforms and outlets. They will help cultivate media partnerships to amplify and advance the institutional and programmatic work of the organization in powerful ways. They will provide support and counsel to leadership, staff and clients across the organization. Together with the Media Relations Manager they will strengthen relationships with key journalists and influencers in a range of local and national outlets in the print, broadcast and online sectors. They will also play a role in crisis communications.

The **Communications Strategist** will work with communications colleagues to support the daily operations of the department - working on both quick turnaround and long term projects in areas of public affairs, media relations and executive positioning. They will draft and place op-eds and other written works for staff and clients particularly as it relates to policy reform. Working with the Media Relations Manager, they will develop a suite of messages around key issues.

THE IDEAL CANDIDATE

The Ideal candidate will be a smart strategic thinker and an excellent writer, who is quick to grasp and distill complicated concepts into easily accessible language, a confident speaker, and a collaborative colleague and team player. This candidate will also bring enthusiasm and energy to the role and will have a high level of

emotional intelligence. This role requires a highly organized individual who pays close attention to detail. They will have a passion for the work of the Innocence Project and will be well connected in the racial justice and criminal justice fields.

ESSENTIAL JOB FUNCTIONS

- Works closely with the CCO to craft smart strategic communications to advance institutional goals and programmatic goals - with particular emphasis on policy reform
- Develops strong working relationships with programmatic teams and IP leadership along with a deep understanding of their work and communications ambitions.
- Drives the development of communications plans for program teams.
- Works with communications colleagues to develop thoughtful media relations strategies and related plans that include proactive and reactive goals and tactics.
- Helps maintain a suite of messaging documents for the organization's work across departments and in particular relating to policy initiatives.
- May serve as an organizational spokesperson.
- Pitches and places stories in regional and national print, broadcast and online outlets.
- Cultivates relationships with key journalists and influencers and supports outreach to the editorial boards of major media outlets.
- Helps to identify and create opportunities to build partnerships with an array of print, digital and broadcast platforms to grow the reach and impact of IP's work.
- Serves as an evangelist for communications in the organization, building and strengthening relationships across departments, leading workshops and strategy sessions to ensure strong impact and outcomes from the work.
- Has particular responsibility together with the CCO for executive positioning - ensuring that the executive leadership team has a clear voice and profile in key outlets and platforms, and a steady drumbeat of associated content.

REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS

- 7+ years of communications experience, preferably working with a nonprofit with involvement in political or advocacy campaigns. Candidates who bring an additional 5+ years of relevant experience may be hired at a "Senior" Communication Strategist level and title.
- Graduate degree in Communications, Journalism, Media or related field involving significant writing, or Bachelor's degree plus equivalent specialized training or experience.
- Experience developing communications strategies and campaigns to support policy reforms as well as institutional goals.
- Experience drafting succinct and incisive op-eds, backgrounders, and releases and other materials.
- Experience developing and maintaining professional relationships with journalists and in particular journalists of influence and profile.
- Experience in media relations, a successful track record pitching and placing stories across all media platforms along with skills in shaping the story and controlling the message.
- Attention to detail and superior writing, communication, and interpersonal skills.

PREFERRED QUALIFICATIONS

- Experience authoring articles or white papers on criminal law reform and/or public policy.

- Experience developing materials for policy initiatives or campaigns.

KEY COMPETENCIES

- Strong interpersonal, diplomacy, and communication (verbal & written) skills: the ability to interact effectively and sensitively with a wide variety of people of diverse professional and cultural backgrounds. (Interpersonal Skills; Communication Skills; Embraces Pluralism and Diversity of Perspectives)
- Strong organizational and planning skills along with attention to detail. (Quality Focused)
- Flexible and collaborative work style, ability to function effectively in a demanding environment and to juggle multiple tasks under pressure and deadlines. (Flexibility/Adaptability; Project Management)
- Ability to grasp legal and criminal justice issues and translate them into persuasive and easy-to-understand language. (Analytical Skills)
- Demonstrated initiative and reliability. (Initiative/Self Motivated; Accountability)
- A passion for the organization's work. (Organizational Awareness)

COMPENSATION, BENEFITS & PERKS

The salary for this position is highly competitive and the Innocence Project offers an excellent benefits package, including health, dental and vision insurance, Flexible Spending Account, 401k plan with company-match. While the office is currently remote in consideration of the ongoing pandemic, once commuting into the office (located in downtown Manhattan, New York) becomes again viable we will also offer company-paid transportation benefits.

WORKFORCE DIVERSITY AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

The Innocence Project considers the diversity of its workforce to be vital to our organization's success in meeting its mission. We strongly encourage applicants from all cultures, races, educational backgrounds, life experiences, socio-economic classes, sexual orientations, age, gender, and physical abilities to apply. Individuals with personal connections to the criminal legal system are strongly encouraged to apply.

As an Equal Opportunity Employer, it is our policy not to discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, age, disability, familial status, marital status, predisposing genetic characteristics, actual or perceived domestic violence victim status, unemployment status, caregiver status, or any other category protected by law.

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

To apply, please visit [Paycom](https://www.innocenceproject.org/careers). Upload a cover letter expressing your interest in the role and the organization's work, and a resume titled with your name (last name. first name. cover letter/resume). Only applications with cover letters will be considered complete applications. Information submitted through this secure site is kept confidential. Due to the large volume of applications, we are unable to give applicant updates by phone or direct email.

*****Applications for the Strategic Communications Director position will be considered on a rolling basis until the post is filled.*****

Salary Range

\$95,625 - \$112,500 per year commensurate with experience