

## POSITION PROFILE

On behalf of our client, the McKnight Foundation,  
CohenTaylor Executive Search Services  
is conducting a retained executive search for its next

# Communications Director



MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION

## MISSION

The McKnight Foundation, a family foundation based in Minnesota, advances a more just, creative, and abundant future where people and planet thrive.

## VISION

We envision a world that recognizes the dignity of every human being, a world where we celebrate the creativity of the arts and sciences and come together to protect our one and only Earth.

## VALUES

**Stewardship** – Our deepest responsibility is to use all of our resources for mission impact. We deploy the Foundation’s resources in a transparent manner and seek to maximize our relevance, credibility, and effectiveness.

**Respect** – Authentic and mutually accountable relationships matter deeply to us. We equip ourselves with the intercultural competency mindset and skills to help us bridge differences of all kinds.

**Equity** – We embed an equity approach across the Foundation because we see it as mission critical. We align our policies, practices, and resources so that people have genuine opportunities to thrive locally and globally.

**Curiosity** – We value ongoing learning, and we look outward and reflect internally to discover opportunities for greater impact. It is only when we act with humility, ask big questions, and practice deep listening that we can open ourselves to new ideas and relationships.

For more information about the McKnight Foundation’s work, impact, and values, visit [www.mcknight.org](http://www.mcknight.org).

The McKnight Foundation, an internationally recognized family foundation based in Minnesota, advances a more just, creative, and abundant future where people and planet thrive.

Established in 1953 by William and Maude McKnight, this fourth-generation family foundation is deeply committed to advancing climate solutions in the Midwest; building an equitable and inclusive Minnesota; and supporting the arts and culture bearers in Minnesota, neuroscience, and international crop research. The Foundation had approximately \$2.9 billion in assets at the end of 2019 and on average grants about \$100 million a year.

As an early leader of 3M, Mr. McKnight earned a reputation for spurring innovation and recognizing the creative potential in others—practices that live on at the Foundation. Their daughter, Virginia McKnight Binger, then set the standard for the Foundation’s work with her singular compassion and spirit of generosity. The current governing board includes actively engaged fourth-generation members of the McKnight family as well as community members who bring diverse perspectives.

Today, the McKnight Foundation works across many disciplines, sectors, and geographic boundaries. McKnight’s work supports communities in its home state of Minnesota, the Upper Midwest, and beyond, spanning several continents. Its diverse programs are united in a quest to improve our shared fate. The Foundation envisions a world that recognizes the dignity of every human being, a world where we celebrate the creativity of the arts and sciences and come together to protect our one and only Earth.

The communications director will be joining at a critical moment in the Foundation’s history to contribute to an exciting new strategic direction, grounded in the values and approaches outlined in the [Strategic Framework](#), and several recent undertakings. These include the expansion of its Midwest Climate & Energy program, the creation of a new program dedicated to advancing an equitable and inclusive Minnesota, achieving a net zero endowment by 2050 at the latest, and closing the state’s racial wealth gaps through the GroundBreak Coalition.

McKnight is a valued philanthropy and community leader in Minnesota, the broader Midwest, nationally, and internationally. Leveraging the organization’s track record, its ability to work in partnerships, and its willingness to experiment and explore, the Foundation sees many new impact and leadership opportunities ahead. Recognized for its pragmatism, McKnight aspires to make progress on several complex, ambitious challenges facing us today, in the coming decade, and beyond.

## PROGRAM AREAS

McKnight advances climate solutions in the Midwest; advances an equitable and inclusive Minnesota; and supports the arts, international crop research, and neuroscience. To realize a future where people and planet thrive, McKnight has increased its investments in two areas: advancing climate solutions and a more equitable and inclusive Minnesota.

### VIBRANT & EQUITABLE COMMUNITIES

Equity is one of the four core values in the McKnight Foundation's [Strategic Framework](#). It is a value that McKnight challenges itself to uphold in its internal policies and practices, and it is a value that guides McKnight as it imagines the change it wants to see in our broader society. This deeply held value will now anchor the development of a new program focused on advancing a more equitable and inclusive Minnesota. The goal: Build a vibrant future for all Minnesotans with shared power, prosperity, and participation.

### MIDWEST CLIMATE & ENERGY

The Midwest Climate & Energy program envisions a thriving, carbon-neutral Midwestern economy by transforming the energy system—through clean power, electrification of transportations and buildings, and carbon sequestration. Its work engages the region's public and private leaders, decisionmakers, and residents in building low-carbon communities and economies that are vibrant, equitable, and resilient. In September 2019, McKnight announced an expansion of this program and a new goal to take bold action on the climate crisis by dramatically cutting carbon pollution in the Midwest by 2030. The goal: Take bold action on the climate crisis by dramatically cutting carbon pollution in the Midwest by 2030.

### ARTS & CULTURE

The McKnight Arts & Culture program believes that Minnesota thrives when its artists and culture bearers thrive. We recognize the myriad forms through which artists and culture bearers illuminate experiences, inspire joy, express the cultural diversity of communities, and advance justice—enriching the vitality and vibrancy of our state. The program funds organizations and individuals across many artistic disciplines and cultural practices. The goal: Catalyze the creativity, power, and leadership of Minnesota working artists and culture bearers.

### INTERNATIONAL

The Collaborative Crop Research Program works on two continents to improve access to local, sustainable, nutritious food using collaborative research, adaptive learning, and knowledge-sharing with smallholder farmers, research institutions, government, and development organizations. The goal: Improve access to local, sustainable, nutritious food using collaborative research and knowledge-sharing with smallholder farmers, research institutions, and development organizations.

### NEUROSCIENCE

The McKnight Endowment Fund for Neuroscience is an independent charitable organization established by the McKnight Foundation that works to bring science closer to the day when diseases of the brain and behavior can be accurately diagnosed, prevented, and treated. The goal: Bring science closer to the day when diseases of the brain and behavior can be accurately diagnosed, prevented, and treated.

## THE ROLE

The communications director will leverage the power of strategic communications to advance the mission of the Foundation and its program goals. As a sophisticated navigator of the digital ecosystem, an astute and caring steward of trusting relationships, and a perpetual solutions-finder, this person will have an opportunity to guide the communications team and collaborate with senior leadership to enhance the department's work for maximum social impact. This person will further the Foundation's commitments to changemaking, transparency, knowledge sharing, thought leadership, and good governance by amplifying McKnight's identity and influence internally and externally with key audiences.

The communications team is involved at almost every level of the Foundation's work, from aiding the president's office in strategic communications—both internal and external—to elevating the Foundation's leadership through earned media, providing strategic counsel to program areas and investment teams, authoring important written pieces, producing videos, sharing updates via the website, newsletters, and social media, and more.

## REPORTING RELATIONSHIPS

The communications director will report to the chief of staff and will be a critical partner to the president and executive leadership team. This leader will attend some of the executive leadership team meetings.

This leader will have four direct reports—two senior communications officers, a communications officer, and an additional communications role (to be hired)—as well as outside firms and freelancers.

## KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

### Internal and External Communications Strategy and Implementation

- Develop and execute comprehensive internal and external communications strategies to support the Foundation's overall strategy and objectives.
- Serve as a strategic owner or advisor on foundation initiatives and announcements, delegating where needed, and providing or arranging for training and counsel.
- Develop a foundation-wide content strategy and oversee the development of official internal and external communications, including written pieces, websites, social media, and videos.
- Help translate strategy into action, supporting program teams in telling their stories, shifting narratives, and amplifying the ideas and innovations of grantees.
- Advance the Foundation's transition from grantmaker to changemaker by helping deepen the practice of strategic communication foundation-wide, elevating the foundation's voice and thought leadership at key strategic moments.

### Team and Culture

- Build, strengthen, develop, and support a high-performing communications team.
- Lead and provide work direction for the communications team.
- A proven collaborator capable of building and maintaining robust relationships with the director cohort and senior leadership across the Foundation.
- Advance the Foundation's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion and foster a culture aligned with the organizational values of curiosity, respect, equity, and stewardship.
- Demonstrate cultural competency and emotional intelligence and communicate with candor and openness.

## Building Relationships

- Build and maintain robust relationships with director cohort and senior leadership across the Foundation.
- Develop and maintain strategic external relationships to ensure successful communications strategy.

## THE IDEAL CANDIDATE

The McKnight Foundation seeks an experienced communications leader with passion and experience leading internal and external communications efforts across a complex organization. The ideal candidate will be energized by spearheading strategic communications in a dynamic, changing environment, adept at inspiring teams through change, and willing to dig in and “roll up their sleeves.”

## QUALIFICATIONS OF AN IDEAL CANDIDATE

### Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

- Experience contributing on a strategic, managerial, and operational level as a leader and a strong individual contributor.
- Experience developing a proactive narrative around complex issues.
- Possess stellar communication skills in writing; ability to prepare clearly written articles, summaries, and analysis and edit and curate communications generated by others.
- Able to quickly grasp complex issues and experience distilling and conveying key elements to multiple audiences.
- An innovative and thorough understanding of digital media and how it is used to promote programs, amplify key voices, and advance foundation goals.
- A proven ability to think proactively and creatively, and to develop impactful, data-informed communications strategies and campaigns.
- Track record of success moving the needle on important issues through targeted communications strategies and tactics.
- Well-versed in pitching media, writing compelling statements, and executing winning digital strategies.
- Experience with various social media platforms and how digital is changing the media landscape.
- Able to quickly pivot as urgent issues arise, display calm under pressure, consistently meet deadlines.
- Experience working effectively and collaboratively across organizational functions.
- Able to analyze, question, and identify key issues and use data to support conclusions.
- Able to view issues and challenges from multiple dimensions and apply intellectual energy and creativity.

## CORE COMPETENCIES

### Foundation-wide Competencies

- Collaborates, Communicates Effectively, Manages Complexity, Builds Networks, Being Resilient, Drives Results, Strategic Mindset, and Instills Trust.

### Function-specific Competencies

- Communicates Effectively, Strategic Mindset, Ensures Accountability, and Decision Quality.

**Minimum Education and Experience**

- A degree in communications or a related field
- Ten years related full-time professional work experience in nonprofit, foundation, public relations, or other for-profit business
- Five or more years of managerial level experience
- Combination of equivalent education and experience as previously listed

*This opportunity is a full-time, exempt position based in Minneapolis.  
The position salary range is \$205,200 - \$216,600.*

**APPLY AT [MCKNIGHT.ORG/CAREERS](https://mcknight.org/careers)**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION EMAIL  
[MCKNIGHT@COHENTAYLOR.COM](mailto:MCKNIGHT@COHENTAYLOR.COM)**

**ALL INQUIRIES WILL REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL**

*The McKnight Foundation is an equal opportunity employer and proudly values diversity.*

*We encourage candidates of all backgrounds to apply.*

*Equal Opportunity Employer/Protected Veterans/Individuals with Disabilities: The contractor will not discharge or in any other manner discriminate against employees or applicants because they have inquired about, discussed, or disclosed their own pay or the pay of another employee or applicant. However, employees who have access to the compensation information of other employees or applicants as a part of their essential job functions cannot disclose the pay of other employees or applicants to individuals who do not otherwise have access to compensation information, unless the disclosure is (a) in response to a formal complaint or charge, (b) in furtherance of an investigation, proceeding, hearing, or action, including an investigation conducted by the employer, or (c) consistent with the contractor's legal duty to furnish information.*