

McKNIGHT FOUNDATION

Senior Communications Officer

Executive Search

POSITION PROFILE

On behalf of our client McKnight Foundation, CohenTaylor Executive Search Services is conducting a retained executive search for their next Senior Communications Officer.

McKnight is seeking an experienced and effective communicator across mediums for their next Senior Communications Officer. This role offers a unique opportunity to apply strategy, creativity, skill, and passion to address the complex challenges facing our region and the world. The chosen candidate will develop, implement, and iterate internal and external communications strategies, partner with McKnight’s Vibrant and Equitable Communities program, lead social media strategy and implementation, and be a proactive stakeholder in strengthening McKnight’s brand and partnerships.

The Organization

The McKnight Foundation is a recognized philanthropic leader based in Minnesota, advancing a more just, creative, and abundant future where people and planet thrive. It was established in 1953 by William and Maude McKnight. 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 and are reflected in its core values. The current governing board includes actively engaged fourth-generation members of the McKnight family, with soon-to-be fifth-generation involvement, as well as community members who bring diverse perspectives. The Foundation had approximately \$3 billion in assets at the end of 2021 and on average grants about \$100 million a year. It deploys a diverse set of tools and resources to meet its mission including grantmaking, investments, collaboration, policy reform, research, and strategic communications.

Driven by its mission, the McKnight Foundation works across many disciplines, sectors, and geographic boundaries. The Foundation aspires to make progress on several complex, ambitious challenges facing the world today and live out its commitment to racial equity and to climate sustainability. The board of directors approved a new [Strategic Framework](#) in 2019 that called for expanding its Midwest Climate & Energy program and creating a new Vibrant & Equitable Communities program dedicated to advancing an equitable and inclusive Minnesota.

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.

MISSION

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

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.

Program Areas

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. The goal: Build a vibrant future for all Minnesotans with shared power, prosperity, and participation.

McKnight developed this program because they see equity as a powerful force multiplier that enriches the quality of life for all Minnesotans. They believe we all benefit when equitable opportunity and access is promoted for residents across Minnesota, especially for those who have historically not fully shared in the state’s storied economic, educational, and civic success—such as Black Minnesotans, Indigenous communities, Minnesotans of color, and low-income Minnesotans.

McKnight’s Vibrant & Equitable Communities program fosters shared power, prosperity, and participation through four strategies: **Accelerate Economic Mobility, Build Community Wealth, Cultivate a Fair and Just Housing System, and Strengthen Democratic Participation.** Within these strategies, they seek to achieve systemic improvements in individual, community, and societal outcomes. They look to the ingenuity of people working together across Minnesota to craft solutions that meet community-defined needs, address local context, and shift policies, practices, and institutions in lasting ways.



MIDWEST CLIMATE AND 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.

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 is to 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.

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 Role

Under the leadership of the Communications Director, the Senior Communications Officer helps advance the Foundation's mission and program-specific goals. The Sr. Comms Officer works closely with the communications director and colleagues across departments to design and execute communication strategies across the media landscape to drive impact and build McKnight's brand.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Develop and execute strategic communications plans and campaigns to advance program mission and goals.
- Support the Vibrant and Equitable Communities program area and guide social media strategy for the organization.
- Leverage strategies including media relations, content development, thought leadership, storytelling, and partnerships to achieve results.
- Oversee Foundation social media platforms, including development and implementation of strategy, daily management of platforms, reporting, iteration, and training of staff.
- Support the various communications needs of the entire organization, engaging a wide spectrum of internal and external audiences.
- Manage proactive and reactive media relations strategy and implementation, securing positive coverage of the Foundation and its partners to build public will and support of our programs and to enhance the brand and impact of the Foundation.
- Track coverage and engagement and conduct analysis, identifying trends and opportunities to inform and evolve strategies.
- Respond promptly to external requests from grantees, reporters, and other stakeholders.
- Support Foundation staff, board, and senior leadership on various institutional initiatives, including internal projects and board presentations and written materials.
- Develop internal and external resources to support staff and partners in shared communications goals.
- Attend and actively participate in staff meetings, retreats, and other Foundation-wide meetings.
- Participate in cross-functional work groups as appropriate.

The Ideal Candidate

The ideal Senior Communications Officer will be an adept communicator prepared to oversee, edit, and develop impactful communications for internal and external audiences. Specifically, this Communications Officer will partner with the Vibrant and Equitable Communities program area and will lead social media and digital communications for the organization. This position offers an exciting opportunity to work with a passionate team and to collaborate with diverse communities in partnership with McKnight.

QUALIFICATIONS OF AN IDEAL CANDIDATE

While no one candidate will have all the criteria enumerated below, the following statements provide a general framework of the requirements of the position. Likewise, the chosen candidate may be required to perform other functions not specifically addressed in this description.

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities:

- Excellent writing and editing skills to prepare or oversee a wide variety of communications content, including public announcements, reports, internal memos, speeches, thought leadership pieces, policy memos, infographics, videos, and social media and digital content.
- Experienced and wise discernment handling dynamic, sensitive, high-stakes assignments with multiple stakeholders and diverse viewpoints.
- A commitment to innovation and staying ahead of emerging trends in digital communications, social media and visual storytelling, and an understanding of how to leverage digital platforms to tell powerful stories and inspire action.
- A skilled media relations specialist who can craft and pitch stories, cultivate relationships with reporters, and handle press inquiries in a prompt and thoughtful manner.
- A conscientious, detail-oriented project manager who can move initiatives forward in a collaborative, effective, and timely manner.
- Strong analytical skills to develop thoughtful, impact-oriented communications plans with a firm grasp of audiences and messaging needs.
- Strong collaborator willing to build and nurture relationships internally and externally in order to drive shared impact.
- A sophisticated understanding of regional and global social, economic, and political systems and the role of communications in influencing cultural understandings, market conditions, and public policy outcomes.
- Willingness to take on new opportunities and challenges with a sense of urgency and positive energy.

- High cultural competence to effectively work in partnership with diverse communities, including an appreciation for historical context, discernment of relationship nuances and power dynamics, a keen understanding of social, racial, and ethnic differences, and a commitment to justice, equity, and inclusion in all areas of work.
- Content knowledge in one of our major funding areas and a basic understanding of private philanthropy.
- Knowledgeable about the Vibrant and Equitable Communities program areas statewide would be helpful.

Foundation-wide Competencies:

- Collaborates, Communicates Effectively, Manages Complexity, Builds Networks, Is Resilient, Drives Results, Displays a Strategic Mindset, Instills Trust

Minimum Education and Experience:

- Bachelor's degree
- Seven years in communications, public relations, social media and digital marketing, public affairs, or another related field at a managerial level
- Combination of equivalent education, experience, and training

The expected salary for this role is in the \$115,000 – 121,000 range, commensurate with experience and qualifications.

For more information about the McKnight Foundation's work, impact, and values, visit <http://www.mcknight.org/>.



Apply at [McKnight.org/careers](https://mcknight.org/careers).

For more information please email

McKnight@cohentaylor.com.

All inquiries will remain confidential.

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 contract 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.