Communications Director
Chicago, IL

Advance Illinois is a not-for-profit policy and advocacy organization that works toward a healthy public education system that prepares students to achieve success in college, career and civic life. Founded in 2008, we are committed to an aligned education system that strives for equity, stresses college and career readiness and completion, and supports the whole child from the earliest years through adulthood. We believe every child should have access to a high-quality education regardless of geography, income, language or race.

Advance Illinois’ Communications team works to create a cohesive strategy to raise the visibility of key education issues and the organization as a whole. We maximize e-mail, social media and web assets. We develop timely, compelling materials for multiple audiences, while emphasizing storytelling and inspiring action from public and education stakeholders. We are seeking an exceptional communications leader with expertise in public awareness campaigns to develop communications and public relations strategies and content for the organization across all channels including earned media, paid media, digital media, and print.

Organization
Advance Illinois is an independent, objective voice promoting a public education system that prepares all students to be ready for work, college, and democratic citizenship. Advance Illinois is a nonpartisan non-profit that shapes the debate, brings research and data to bear on critical issues, builds powerful coalitions, and grows the grassroots to achieve meaningful outcomes for students.

To help improve the state’s public education system, Advance Illinois develops and forwards a comprehensive policy agenda that calls for systemic reforms to:

- create rigorous learning environments with high expectations;
- hire, develop, and retain great teachers and leaders;
- give schools the resources they need;
- engage families and provide necessary student supports; and
- promote continuous improvement and innovation.

Position:
The Communications Director sets and guides the strategy for all communications, including messaging, media relations, public relations, and digital media, in order to consistently articulate Advance Illinois’ mission, goals, and brand. The Communications Director will leverage their expertise in communications strategy to ensure that we continue to grow our brand recognition and increase our campaign effectiveness. The Director will be a strategist with robust knowledge of how to craft an effective message that will resonate with our diverse network, coalitions, and constituent base. They will also work closely with Advance leadership to devise communications strategies and provide strategic advice to help meet annual goals.

Responsibilities:
- Develops, implements, and evaluates an annual communications plan in collaboration with senior management that aligns with annual organizational goals and priorities;
Develops and executes a robust marketing and communications strategy in collaboration with colleagues to ensure high-impact communications, earned media, and strong support of all Advance Illinois efforts;

Develops and implements a comprehensive public relations strategy to strengthen and elevate Advance Illinois’ brand, elevate and effectively message our policy campaigns across the state including, Advance Illinois website, Funding Illinois’ Future campaign, We, The Village, and Coalition for Equitable Higher Education Funding and create content and workplans for these coalitions;

Develops and implements communications campaigns that tie to each of the organization’s advocacy goals to create momentum, awareness, and action using earned media, social media, and grassroots communications tactics. Monitor online metrics and analyze results on audience demographic trends, preferred content and to identify opportunities for targeted engagement;

Creates compelling, persuasive, relevant, and accurate communications content that will increase the public’s engagement with the organization and build community support for improving schools across the state;

Drafts presentations, testimonies, op-eds, letters to the editor, media alerts, one-pagers and press releases;

Cultivates and maintains media relationships for disseminating information, positioning Advance as a media source and leveraging public relations opportunities;

Works closely with colleagues, including Development, Policy, Government Affairs, Community Engagement and Project Directors, to produce collateral material to support their work;

Edits a range of campaign-focused written materials to ensure clarity, conciseness, effectiveness, and alignment; and

Supervises the Communications Associate, interns, and other contract staff.

**Required Qualifications and Qualities:**

- Strong commitment to and alignment with Advance Illinois’ mission of improving our state’s public education system;
- Minimum of 8 years’ experience in a communications, public relations, or marketing role (online writing or marketing-related writing experience a plus);
- Outstanding and fast writer and editor;
- Ability to grasp and effectively communicate complex, detailed information in a clear, concise manner for a variety of audiences;
- Comprehensive strategic thinking and rapid problem-solving skills to effectively handle crisis communications;
- Preferably an extensive knowledge of public education issues and/or experience creating high-impact advocacy campaigns;
- Ability and experience preparing clear, accessible, and comprehensive correspondence, reports, studies, and other written materials, as well as demonstrated skills in public relations and public speaking.
- Experience in a fast-paced environment and comfortable working in an ever-shifting political environment; familiarity with state political and legislative environment highly preferred;
- Knowledge of and experience using social media in today’s media landscape, including Twitter, Facebook, and enthusiasm for emerging technologies as tools for social change;
- Experience determining and analyzing metrics to evaluate and improve communications strategies;
- A tremendous drive and strong ability to achieve outcomes. Ability to set and adhere to strict deadlines. Excellent planning and organizational skills as well as an exceptional attention to detail;
• An entrepreneurial, learning orientation and an ability to embrace and incorporate direct feedback;
• Existing press and media relationships within Chicago and Illinois required; particularly political and education reporters covering Springfield and Chicago. Relationships with national media a plus.
• Sincere commitment to work collaboratively with all constituent groups, including staff, board members, and other supporters from all backgrounds and cultures;
• Management experience; Assist Communications Associate to grow and expand their knowledge and expertise of Advance Illinois policy areas as well as communications skills sets;
• Comfort pivoting between high-level, strategic work and smaller tasks. No job is too big or too small;
• Values self and community care and the ability to engage in ongoing DEI conversations and activities.
• BA/BS

Compensation
Competitive salary that is commensurate with experience along with excellent benefits such as: health/dental insurance; short-term/long-term disability plans; 401K with a company match plan; flexible spending account; holidays and vacation accrual.

Commitment to Diversity
Advance Illinois is an equal opportunity employer with a commitment to engaging the skills and leadership of individuals from diverse backgrounds. Individuals from historically marginalized backgrounds and communities are strongly encouraged to apply and to engage actively in ongoing organizational work to strengthen and sustain a diverse team that works effectively and inclusively.

To apply: Submit a resume and cover letter to communications@advanceillinois.org. All submissions will be acknowledged and you will be contacted if you are selected for an interview. No phone calls please.
Senior Policy Advisor, Job Description

Title: Senior Policy Advisor

Full-Time Exempt

Organization Overview
Advance Illinois is a not-for-profit policy and advocacy organization that works toward a healthy public education system that prepares students to achieve success in college, career and civic life. We are committed to an aligned education system across the K-20 continuum that strives for equity, stresses college and career readiness and completion, and supports the whole child from the earliest years through adulthood. We believe every child should have access to high-quality education and care, regardless of geography, income, or race.

Spanning the early childhood through higher education continuum, Advance Illinois analyzes research, data and best practice; engages practitioners, families and partners; and develops and promotes policies designed to strengthen public education, higher education, and early childhood education and care in Illinois. We are seeking a passionate and committed individual who is looking to grow in the not-for-profit space and is able to thrive in a fast-paced and high-energy workplace to work on the Policy Team, supporting initiatives related to K-12 and higher education funding policies in Illinois.

Position Summary
Advance Illinois seeks an experienced Senior Policy Advisor to work on issues related to K-12 education policies (e.g., accountability, assessments, and human capital) and K-12 and higher education funding policies. The ideal candidate is a systems thinker, with strong knowledge of the K-12 or higher education field – including system challenges and opportunities – preferably with knowledge of and experience with Illinois-specific policies, stakeholders, and context.

The Senior Policy Advisor will report to the Director of Policy and will support the policy needs of the organization. We are looking for a strategic thought partner and self-starter who is able to work independently and is comfortable working in a small team environment and partnering not only with staff members but with a diverse network of outside partners and stakeholders.

Competencies

- A systems thinker, with the ability to identify key policy levers, opportunities, challenges, and solutions to Illinois’ K-12 and/or higher education funding models.
- Deep knowledge of K-12 or higher education policy, programs, systems that support students, as well as understanding the context at the state and national level.
- Excellent research, analytic, and problem solving skills, including the ability to quickly synthesize large amounts of information.
- Excellent communication skills, including writing, speaking, listening, and advising.
- Understanding of the systems and structural barriers that lead to inequities in the education system, preferably those related to funding.
- Knowledge of the political, policy, and partner landscape, preferably with existing relationships with stakeholders in the Illinois education landscape.
- Strong facilitation skills, including knowledge and experience supporting inclusive conversations with diverse stakeholders.
- Proficiency in using software such as Microsoft Word, Excel, and Power Point, and willingness to master additional software and systems.
Essential Functions

- Provide leadership and thinking around organization strategy through delivering relevant and timely expertise to Advance Illinois staff.
- Provide policy analysis and technical assistance to partners, the state, coalitions, committees, task forces, and work groups in which Advance Illinois participates.
- Seek out and develop innovative solutions, ideas, and best practices to improve Illinois K-12 and/or higher education funding models.
- Lead and influence meaningful conversations around funding levers, practices, and system structures to promote equity and address barriers to equity within the education system.
- Make connections around the intersection of K-12 and/or higher education and the rest of the B-20 spectrum.
- Independently engage external stakeholders around policy solutions and common goals.
- Create issue briefs, fact sheets, testimony, presentations and slide decks, and memoranda on policy issues and best practices for internal and external stakeholders.
- Organize, participate in, and conduct workshops, conference sessions, and seminars.
- Organize and lead internal and external meetings.
- Promote growth of others by sharing knowledge and experience.
- Actively engage diverse stakeholders and ensure inclusion of diverse viewpoints (both internally and externally).
- Perform other duties as required.

Education and Experience

- Bachelor’s degree required, Master’s degree preferred
- Minimum of 5 years’ experience in a similar role

Working Environment

Due to the current COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak, this position is temporarily remote. This arrangement is expected to be short term, and Advance Illinois will continue to monitor guidance from health officials and the need for remote work arrangements. Staff are expected to be vaccinated, and when staff return to in-office setting, the position is located in Chicago.

Compensation

Competitive salary commensurate with experience, along with excellent benefits such as: health/dental insurance; short-term/long-term disability plans; 401K with a company match plan; flexible spending account; holidays and vacation accrual.

To Apply

Submit a resume and cover letter to: policy@advanceillinois.org. All submissions will be acknowledged. Applicants selected for an interview will be contacted. Please do not call Advance Illinois.

Equal Employment Opportunity Statement

Advance Illinois is an equal opportunity employer with a commitment to engaging the skills and leadership of people of color, low-income persons, LGBT persons, differently abled people, and other people from diverse backgrounds. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, religion, gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, national origin, genetics, political affiliation, mental or physical disability, age, marital status, family status, or veteran status. People from these and other historically marginalized backgrounds and communities are strongly encouraged to apply.