



American Planning Association

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Chief Communications Officer

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A PASSION FOR PURPOSE

About the American Planning Association

The American Planning Association (APA) is a 40,000-member, Chicago-based organization that promotes good urban and community planning. With a mission of “Creating Great Communities for All,” APA fulfills its mission by supporting its members and stakeholders through research, education, advocacy, certification, and convening.

Position Summary

APA seeks a dynamic, strategic, and visionary Chief Communications Officer (CCO) to lead and unify the organization’s internal and external communications, marketing, and public affairs strategy. The incumbent will be responsible for creating a centralized communications function that maintains mutual understanding between the organization and its key stakeholders (members, partners, the built environment community), delivers strategic alignment, consistent brand voice, and audience-centric messaging across all channels. The CCO will oversee enterprise communications, public relations, media relations, brand management, digital strategy, solution marketing including customer insights and marketing analysis, stakeholder identification, input, consensus building and public affairs.

This executive role will work in close partnership with the CEO, executive leadership team, and elected leadership to shape APA’s voice and narrative in alignment with its mission, goals, and evolving landscape so as to proactively convey the story and impact of the planning profession. The ideal candidate brings experience leading integrated communications in a complex, mission-driven environment and a proven track record of building high-performance, data-informed communications teams. The CCO will report to the CEO.

Key Responsibilities

Strategic Leadership

- Lead the development and execution of a comprehensive, integrated communications strategy aligned with APA’s strategic priorities.
- Serve as communications advisor to the CEO and executive team; develop and support executive communications.
- Ensure a unified, consistent brand identity and messaging across all touchpoints, audiences, and programs.
- Drive internal alignment by coordinating communications across departments, chapters, and key stakeholders.

Enterprise Communications & Brand

- Oversee and evolve APA’s brand, narrative, and voice to reflect the mission, values, and value proposition to members, policymakers, partners, and the public.
- Lead media relations, crisis communications, public affairs, and thought leadership efforts.
- Ensure timely, transparent, and effective internal communications that foster culture, engagement, and strategic clarity.

Marketing & Digital Strategy

- Lead the development of data-informed marketing strategies to grow engagement, membership, and program participation.
- Oversee digital communications, including website, email, and social media platforms to ensure compelling content and cohesive messaging.
- Align marketing efforts with business goals and revenue-generating initiatives, emphasizing value delivery and customer experience.

Public Affairs

- Provide strategic leadership to the public affairs team and provide insights to leadership.
- Monitor legislative and regulatory developments to inform an approach to advancing the profession's interests
- Analyze public opinion using research and data to inform decision making.

Team Leadership & Organizational Development

- Build, lead, and mentor a high-performing communications, marketing, and public affairs team.
- Foster a culture of creativity, accountability, service orientation, and continuous improvement.
- Establish metrics and dashboards to evaluate communications effectiveness and guide data-driven decision making.

Qualifications

- 10+ years of progressive leadership in communications roles, ideally within an association or mission-driven organization.
- Demonstrated success developing and executing integrated communications or public involvement strategies.
- Experience building centralized communications functions in complex organizations.
- Strong executive presence and experience advising C-level leaders.
- Exceptional verbal, written, and interpersonal communication skills.
- Deep understanding of branding, media, digital platforms, and member/customer engagement.
- Adept at leading cross-functional teams and managing change.
- Bachelor's degree required; advanced degree in communications, marketing, public relations, urban planning, or related field preferred.

Compensation & Benefits

APA is committed to building a team that represents a variety of backgrounds, perspectives, and skills. The more inclusive we are, the better our impact will be.

Compensation for this role will reflect a range of factors including relevant experience, demonstrated expertise and other considerations. APA's good faith starting salary estimate for this position is \$213,000 to \$243,000.

APA offers a comprehensive benefits package including health insurance, retirement contributions, paid time off, and professional development support.

Digital Presence

Web: <https://www.planning.org/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/AmericanPlanningAssociation/>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/american-planning-association>



Vetted Solutions is a Washington, D.C. based executive search firm specializing in association and nonprofit recruiting and consulting. We focus on CEO and senior staff positions.

For confidential consideration, interested candidates should submit a resume and cover letter outlining their qualifications and vision for the role to James Zaniello, President & CEO, Vetted Solutions, at APACCOsearch@vettedsolutions.com. Telephone: +1.202.544.4749.

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