

Gelasia Croom, MSPR

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Communication and Marketing Leader

Skillful and dynamic public relations, marketing and communications leader with demonstrated capacity to provide comprehensive, effective media relations, strategy and outreach

— Key Qualifications —

- Proven track record of developing and sustaining solid media relationships to build awareness and visibility around organization agendas and events as well as spearheading cohesive messaging across departments and internal/external communications.
- Thoughtful, loyal and unafraid leader willing to extend reach into the community to ensure work is engaging and diverse.
- Strategic communication led to sustained dialogues with top-tier Illinois news outlets such as *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Chicago Sun-Times*, and national placements in *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, *TMZ*, *The Imprint* and more.
- Experienced project management, comprehensive media relations, and internal/external communication policies, engagements and initiatives development.
- Efficient, yet compassionate leader of leaders with proven negotiation, de-escalation and re-structuring skills.
- Award-winning communications generalist with excellent writing and speaking skills, with an appreciation for creative expression and voice of the people.
- Adept at advising senior officials, serving as a liaison between the leadership team, communications and other staff in public relations strategies, policies, and advocacy spaces.
- Expert in multimedia publication direction with experience in leading staff, focusing content development, and effective distribution.
- Proficient in AP Style writing, Microsoft Office Suite and Cision and Meltwater PR Software.

Professional Experience

Hustler's Collective Marketing Agency

Founder / CEO March 2024 – Present

Hustler's Collective is a marketing agency that blends relentless drive with decades of professional expertise in marketing and communications. In its first two years, the agency has worked with a diverse client base—from industry leaders to independent authors—expanding sales funnels, forging strategic partnerships, and crafting research-driven campaigns that increase visibility and engagement. We specialize

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in helping small, fast-moving teams and ambitious entrepreneurs scale, while also extending national non-profit teams to amplify donor communications and strategy.

Core offerings include:

- Brand amplification, refresh, and design
- Web design and digital strategy
- Social media and digital campaign development
- Strategic messaging and donor communications support
- Research-driven marketing consultation
- Media relations and publicity
- Partnership and business development

Rebuild Foundation – Chicago, IL

Communications Director / Temporary, August 2024 – December 2024

The Rebuild Foundation in 2024, began its transformation into an organization with a deeper, richer focus on individual artists and their practice. My work in this role facilitated the development of messaging around this goal across the opening of Theaster Gates' exhibition at the Stony Island Arts Bank called *When Clouds Roll Away: Reflection and Restoration of the Johnson Archive*, the accompanying programming and artist and archival highlights. Efforts across social media saw an uptick in followers, with more than 25,000 interactions and engagements—with more than 40% as new followers. Newsletter communication and strategy were also developed with an eye towards bringing those rooted in the work along the transition. I also participated in the Wallace Foundation convening in Omaha, Neb. to bring back real-world, collaborative training.

Significant Contributions

- **Secured Major Media Placements:** Strategically landed coverage in key outlets, including the *Chicago Sun-Times* and WBEZ, significantly elevating the exhibition's visibility in the Chicagoland area.
- **Developed Public Messaging and Content:** Crafted compelling narratives and materials to engage diverse audiences, amplifying the exhibition and its accompanying programming.
- **Facilitated VIP Tours and Interviews:** Organized and guided tours for key donors, supporters, and media, providing historical context and insights into the archives. Interviews with other artists and key community leaders provided a moment of celebration and context for the exhibition.
- **On-Site Content Creation and Management:** Produced real-time content, managed social media channels, and executed newsletter strategies to engage audiences programming
- **Leadership and Strategic Oversight:** Led communications meetings, reported directly to the Executive Director, and aligned messaging with broader organizational goals.
- **Collaborated on Artistic Branding:** Worked closely with programming staff to ensure social media posts reflected the style of featured artists while maintaining continuity with the Rebuild Foundation brand.
- **Enhanced Artist and Performer Relationships:** Supported the visibility of individual artists and groups performing at the Stony Island Arts Bank, fostering meaningful connections.

- **Provided Archival Context:** Delivered background on the Johnson Publishing Company archives to writers, videographers, donors, and other guests, enriching their understanding of the exhibition's significance.

Prevent Child Abuse America – Chicago, IL

Chief Communications Officer, April 2022 – April 2024

As an integral part of the PCA America executive team, responsible for the strategic development and management of communications and marketing planning, expanded the role to include valued partnership generation that resulted in enhanced visibility and fundraising. Responsible for the build out and development of a web site and branding refresh in under four months while building a passionate and vital team - on budget- to ensure awareness levels increased and fundraising goals were met. In less than two years, oversaw the creation and deployment of key messaging shifts and the reveal of the organization's new Theory of Change at its national conference. Ideated and created content for all pre- and post-conference design, social media, video, photo, interview/podcast and a host of other assets that helped sell out the conference, build interest and excitement with keynote panels and performances through a strategic influencer building posture. Provided communication and marketing technical assistance and support to the 44 chapter members, providing customizable assets and branding guidelines. Key areas of focus also include the management of a suite of adaptable and co-brandable assets for chapters and the public as the lead organization heading the nationally recognized Child Abuse Prevention Month.

Significant Contributions

- Developed key communication and marketing strategy and content to increase awareness of Chicago-based national organization, meeting two separate donor matches in less than 4 months along with in-kind support of over \$300,000
- Marketing implementation and KPIs created and met in programming/paneling to help sell out and make profitable the organization's first national conference after the pandemic
- The creation and development of new partnerships including a streaming TV network and a corporate software platform to support the work
- Creative evergreen additions to marketing toolbox – created a podcast for the conference, along with engaging recap videos to build excitement and credibility around our next activities
- Unique, diverse and compassionate leadership style that supports the mission of the organization, its DEI efforts and overall north star, engendering loyalty to the team and the work – no turnover of internal or external team

Children's Home & Aid – Chicago, IL

Director, Strategic Communications, May 2020 – April 2022

Oversaw integrated communications, both external and internal in the capacity of the communications lead for the entire state's efforts to promote and advocate for programming designated to support children and families in the child welfare system. Lead change management communications during a complex vision

and branding transition. Key performances include generating detailed communication plans tied to business outcomes, metrics analyses, donor and legislative support via outreach. Successfully guided outreach and planning to secure keynote speakers, develop messaging and provide communications support around major fundraisers to meet goals in excess of \$400,000. Manager of dedicated team members and skilled vendors who provide digital, social, video and logistical support to capture the stories of clients that can illustrate to state and federal funders, the value of our work.

Significant Contributions:

- Secured media placements in the Chicago Tribune, New York Times and a host of local and regional outlets to provide visibility of efforts.
- Served as leading member and contributor to agency Equity, Diversity and Inclusion team.
- Secured keynote speakers to drive interest and awareness to annual meeting with nearly 500 people registered and collaborating with the development team to reach \$400,000 goal.
- Created and optimized internal communications SharePoint page, increasing employee engagement and, during COVID, generated key information that staff needed to address changing safety standards, vaccination pushes and upcoming SOPs around the virus and hybrid working.
- Worked directly with CEO and other board leadership to create visibility around a reimagined vision and blueprint for the future for children and families.
- Piloted a policy podcast to highlight work with young people and advocating for the need for more services for families in the foster care system, i.e. education, driver license access and more.

The Nature Conservancy – Chicago, IL

Associate Director of Communications for Illinois and Central Division, 2012 - 2020

Headed up media relations for Central U.S. and acted as local first point of contact. Worked with national team to localize organizational conservation efforts. Rising from a media relations manager to an associate director, worked to bring national initiatives to the grassroots level. Cultivated programming in tandem with community team, using contacts and relationships to launch a paid internship program for marginalized communities, most impacted by conservation challenges. Ensured the organization's scientific and societal messages were consistent across all mediums including traditional outreach, digital content, and social media. Support donor and government relations, field science teams, and other marketing staff with streamlined messaging to maximize impact in strategic political sectors, key donors, and other stakeholders.

Significant Contributions:

- Collaborated with development and marketing as an editor on a Great Lakes article, which landed TNC an initial \$1.8M donation and a subsequent \$12.5M in funding.
- Negotiated with Ebony.com, FOX 32 (Chicago), and other media partners to become a regular content contributor which enhances the brand and helps reach new audiences.
- Manage budgets, ROI reporting, and media monitoring to ensure events and initiatives are impactful from a budget and reach standpoint.
- Established internal and external communications policies and created media training program for inside staff and outside vendors.

- Piloted a transformation program that addresses both climate and workforce development that resulted in a beneficial relationship with an urban faith community.

American Society for Clinical Pathology, Chicago, IL

Media & External Relations Manager, 2007-2012

Directed external communications staff and vendors to promote ASCP stories and messaging. Counseled senior staff on public relations policies and advocacy issues. Supervised interdepartmental teams in developing cohesive messaging across communications and product development. Analyzed news data using Cision public relations software and reported media reach and brand data to managers and directors.

Selected Contributions:

- Created and managed Young Professionals Ambassador program designed to spread awareness of nationwide healthcare careers among high school and college students.
- Simplified complex scientific discoveries from academic journals and research to generate compelling copy for press releases and other communications tools.
- Acted as main media liaison and developed key relationships with reporters, writers, and other members of the media.

Chicago Housing Authority – Chicago, IL

Senior Media Specialist, 2006-2007

Identified media opportunities and developed media content for agency including press releases, media advisories, talking points, FAQs, and Web communications. Monitored agency media coverage, analyzed reach, and distributed reports on PR initiative effectiveness. Developed and maintaining communication toolkit that included data, stats, bios, fact sheets, and press releases on agency initiatives for spokesperson and other senior officials.

Additional Experience

- **Public Relations Specialist**, American Bar Association, 2004 - 2006
 - **Public Relations Intern**, Golin Harris Public Relations, 2003-2004
 - **General Assignment Reporter/National Editor**, Wilson Daily Times, 2001-2003
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Educational Background

Master of Science, Public Relations
Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY

Bachelor of Arts, Print Journalism/Mass Communications
Hampton University, Hampton, VA

Awards

- 2016 (Entire Marketing Team) – Chicago Association of Direct Marketers Tempo Award, 3rd Place
- 2014 PR Daily Award Winner – Green Campaign “Working with Nature to Manage Floods”
- 2010 Publicity Club of Chicago Silver Trumpet Winner

Values Videos Produced/Scripted

- [Living Our Values](#)
- [The Ahlquist Center for Policy & Innovation](#)
- [Jamilah Lemieux – Chicago/NY/LA author and advocate](#) (I secured her as a speaker for our fundraising event, contributing to reaching goal. Discussing family diversity.

Media Placements/Impact

- [‘The Simpsons’ Praised by Child Abuse Prevention Org](#)” TMZ, November 2023
- [Prevent Child Abuse Georgia Hosts Prevention Partners at State Capitol Georgia State University](#), April 2023
- [“Chicago Community Groups Provide ‘Intensive’ Support Programs to Steer Teens from Crime,”](#) WBBM, CBS Chicago, August 2021.
- [Data Points: Illegal gun carrying in Chicago spiked in 2020 – and deadly violence followed,”](#) Chicago Tribune, April 2021.
- [“Rockford Family Encourages Others to Choose Adoption,”](#) WREX (NBC Rockford, IL) November, 2020
- ["Protecting Endangered Nature in the Prairie State,"](#) WBEZ, January 2020.
- ["Why bringing back bison could help restore America's lost prairies,"](#) CNN, November, 2019.
- [“Setting Fires and Restoring an American Landscape,”](#) *The New York Times*, April 2018.
- [Appearance on NOW.CHICAGO “A Discussion on TNC’s Ongoing Support of CPS Schools Creating and Managing School Gardens,”](#) by Michelle Carr, TNC Illinois State Director, May 18, 2017.
- [“Back in Brown,”](#) CBS Evening News (National), June 25, 2015.
- [“Climate Change: It’s Time to Pay Attention,”](#) *Ebony Magazine* (Ebony.com) Op-Ed, July 2013.