



SMITH COLLEGE.

Vice President for Communications and Marketing Northampton, Massachusetts

The promise of education is not just the creation of knowledge, but the model of how to share it for our mutual liberation and the collective good.

President Sarah Willie-LeBreton

THE SEARCH

Smith College, one of the nation's preeminent liberal arts colleges, seeks a collaborative, innovative, and strategic leader to serve as its vice president for communications and marketing (VP). This is an exceptional opportunity to join Smith at a pivotal time in its history.

Reporting directly to Smith's 12th president, [Sarah Willie-LeBreton](#), the VP will provide strategic and operational leadership for an integrated communications and messaging platform. The VP will join Smith at an inflection point as it nears the conclusion of a [strategic planning initiative](#), in a moment of opportunity for Smith to be a leader in shaping the future of higher education.

For 150 years, Smith College has educated women of promise for lives of distinction and purpose. A college of and for the world, Smith links the power of the liberal arts to excellence in research and scholarship and develops leaders to address society's challenges who are globally engaged. Today, the college has 2,500 undergraduate students, 300 graduate students, nearly 300 faculty, and over 53,000 alumnae across the country and around the world.

This is an exciting time for a high-performing, strategic leader to join President Willie-LeBreton early in her presidency, serving on her leadership team and as a trusted partner across the college. In this moment of new vision and priorities, the VP will drive a comprehensive communications and positioning plan that results in a state-of-the-art operation in a rapidly changing field, that amplifies the college's visibility, strengthens its narrative, and inspires both institutional pride and deeper engagement from external audiences. To that end, the VP will develop and implement a robust communications program that clearly defines college-wide priorities and messages and, simultaneously, influences communications efforts across academic and administrative units through collaboration and partnership.

The ideal candidate will be a strategic, collaborative, and creative leader with at least 10 years of success leading communications and reputation programs. The next VP will have experience creating a compelling

overarching message platform for an institution with distinctive messages and channels for a wide variety of audiences; experience in developing ambitious goals, engaging others in conception and refinement, and then implementing successfully; a leadership style that motivates staff and generates enthusiasm and innovation; a track record of leading real-time crisis communications as well as a sophisticated approach to issues management; and high levels of intellectual curiosity, integrity, credibility, and drive. The successful candidate will have a deep passion for the mission of women's education and be committed to active engagement with the campus and local communities. A bachelor's degree is required.

Smith College has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national search firm, to assist in this important search. All inquiries, applications, and nominations for this opportunity should be directed in confidence to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

SMITH COLLEGE

Smith College opened in 1875 following a substantial bequest from Sophia Smith for the "establishment and maintenance of an institution for the higher education of young women, with the design to furnish for my own sex means and facilities for education equal to those which are afforded now in our colleges to young men."

Throughout its history, Smith has maintained an unwavering commitment to an uncompromising defense of academic and intellectual freedom, attention to the relation between college education and the larger public issues of world order and human dignity, and a concern for the rights of women. The college has been a leader in opening doors to opportunities that were once unavailable to women. In 2000, Smith became the first women's college to offer an engineering degree; in 1998, it became the first institution of its kind to guarantee every student access to a funded internship; and in 1892, the first-ever women's basketball program began at Smith.

Smith Today

Smith is ranked 14th by the *US News and World Report*. Enrolling more than [2,500 students from nearly every US state and 68 other countries](#), Smith provides a diverse and dynamic learning environment. The college offers more than 1,200 courses in 83 areas of study through an [open curriculum](#) where students design their own educational paths with no requirements other than an introductory writing course. 296 professors across 50 academic programs and departments create an 8:1 student-faculty ratio.

In order to expand access to a Smith education, the college provides economic support, a broad range of curricular and career development resources, and robust no-loans financial aid packages that meet 100 percent of every undergraduate student's demonstrated need for all four years. Smith also offers seven graduate programs that are open to men as well as women.

Built on a foundation of belonging, the community at Smith is strong, vibrant, and inclusive. There are 140 student organizations available, including those that focus on community service, music, dance, and

foreign language. Smith's commitment to [athletics](#) is reflected in its support of club sports as well as 11 NCAA Division III teams, including the basketball team, which was a finalist in the 2024 NCAA Division III championship game.

Traditions and Houses

Over its 150 years, Smith has developed a rich set of [traditions](#) that define every Smithie's experience. These range from the expected – the President's Welcome Assembly at the start of the year and [Ivy Day](#) just before commencement – to the unique – Friday afternoon tea, with custom tea blends, and [Mountain Day](#) in the Fall.

One of the most fundamental aspects of a Smith student's experience is residence life. Students live in [41 self-governing house communities](#) that accommodate between 10 and 100 students; most houses include students from all four classes. The oldest, Sessions House, has been used by the college as a residence since 1921. Smith students are frequently as attached to their house as to the college itself, and many houses have their own traditions.

Alumnae and Support

Smith has over 53,000 undergraduate alumnae and another 8,000 individuals who have received graduate degrees. Smith graduates can be found in every one of the 50 states and 119 countries. [The Smith Quarterly](#) is produced by the office of college relations in partnership with the [office of alumnae relations and development](#).

Fundraising campaigns, including [Women for the World](#) and [Here for Every Voice](#), have raised a total of \$605 million in recent years. At the time it concluded, *Women for the World* was the largest and most successful campaign ever undertaken by a women's college. In 2020, Smith received a [\\$50 million](#) gift in support of financial aid and career development, and in March 2025, the college received a [\\$51 million](#) planned gift for endowment support of financial aid and two faculty positions in engineering and statistical and data sciences.

President Sarah Willie-LeBreton

Smith College's 12th president, [Sarah Willie-LeBreton](#), has served in this role since 2023. An accomplished scholar, sociologist, and educator who studies social inequality and race and ethnicity, her focus for her presidential tenure is on moving Smith—and, by extension, the world—forward as a community to a more joyful, just place.

Known as “President Sarah” on campus, Willie-LeBreton is keen to engage with all of Smith's communities and constituents. She has begun Conversations with Sarah (in [print](#) and [video](#)), utilizes [letters to the community](#), and continues a long tradition of [Presidential Colloquia](#).

Willie-LeBreton earned a bachelor of arts degree from Haverford College in 1986, and an M.A. (1988) and Ph.D. (1995) from Northwestern University, all in sociology. After having taught at Colby College (1991–1995) and Bard College (1995–1997) in tenure-track appointments, she was tenured at Swarthmore College, where she served as coordinator of the Black Studies Program and chair of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology for a total of 17 years. She was appointed as provost and dean of the faculty at Swarthmore in 2018 and served in that role until 2023.

Strategic Plan Development

In fall 2024, a [Strategic Planning Steering Committee](#)—composed of faculty, staff, students, trustees, and alumnae and assisted by Wellspring Consulting—began the process of developing Smith’s strategic plan. In addition to the committee, the entire Smith community is actively participating in the process and has been invited to provide input and feedback in a variety of ways. A final plan will be shared with the Board of Trustees in the fall of 2025.

VICE PRESIDENT FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING

The vice president for communications and marketing (VP) is a member of the 13-person president’s team and oversees the [office of college relations](#) (CR). Building off the college’s strategic planning effort, the VP will conceive of and implement a strategic plan for CR, ensuring that the president’s priorities, the college’s needs, and its impact on the world are central to all communications and outreach, especially during a time when higher education and the liberal arts face significant criticism. As the chief communications and reputation management professional for Smith, the VP will build a communications and college relations program that highlights Smith’s academic strengths and commitment to an environment in which all students can flourish. Ultimately, the VP will establish a framework for fostering connection between the college and its constituents, both internally (e.g., prospective and current students and families; trustees; faculty and staff; and alumnae, donors, and other college supporters) and externally (e.g., national and international media; peer institutions, associations, and academic influencers; political figures and policymakers; and the city of Northampton and greater Pioneer Valley).

To this end, the VP will partner closely with the president and other members of her team – as well as any communications staff outside of CR – to ensure that messages and communication to all audiences are holistic regardless of channel or audience. Lastly, the VP will oversee CR’s roughly 20-person team and \$4 million budget, which includes media relations, editorial communications, marketing and creative services, digital and social media, photography, and video.

Key Opportunities and Challenges for the Position

- Conceive and implement an overarching strategic communication and marketing plan that is innovative, progressive, and proactive, resulting in cohesive messaging and positioning that extends across all media and vehicles in ways that appropriately support and reflect the goals and objectives of the college.

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- Partner with the president in her role as chief spokesperson for the college, serving as a co-strategist on messaging and ensuring her communications – personal and presidential – are authentic and consistent with her “voice.”
 - Serve as senior counselor to the president, her leadership team, trustees when appropriate, and other key constituents on all communication matters and messaging, internal and external, as well as external forces and actions that impact the college.
 - Provide leadership to anticipate and respond to crises that threaten the college and its community members, including developing crisis communications policies and procedures. Provide real-time crisis management, counsel, and support to college leadership, trustees, and other representatives of the college.
 - Work with staff and key partners to proactively reinforce and protect Smith’s reputation; anticipate and mitigate potentially negative and high-profile issues or crises that may impact the college.
 - Establish strong, collaborative partnerships and ongoing dialogue with administrative and academic leadership across the college as well as any communications staff outside of CR to support their strategic initiatives and ensure alignment in outreach efforts. Provide appropriate levels of support and service to bolster their own communications efforts.
 - Develop a formal planning process that reflects the needs of the college through a strong yet flexible communications and messaging program with key themes that can be adapted to suit various constituencies.
 - Establish a unified digital ecosystem that authentically reflects Smith to all audiences, creates a cohesive strategy across platforms, and emphasizes compliance with accessibility and user-experience standards.
 - Utilize data captured from CRM and other systems to evaluate the effectiveness and success of communications vehicles on an ongoing basis.
 - Develop a forward-looking internal communications program that builds pride in Smith as well as trust and confidence in organizational decision-making.
 - Ensure that CR is a collaborative, responsive partner that can address both opportunities and concerns from diverse constituents and that its staff are sought out as respected thought leaders. Foster excellence with respect to client collaboration and partnership, customer service, and problem-solving.
 - Maintain and refine an organizational structure that ensures ongoing integration and cohesion across CR. Set clear direction and priorities for professional and administrative staff alike. Continually assess staff strengths; recruit and retain a high-quality, diverse team.
 - Maintain and promote a diverse and equitable workplace environment. Similarly, promote a professional workplace culture of mutual respect and collegiality for all members of the college.

- Inspire and motivate staff through transparency and direction, placing staff members' work within the context of the college's strategic priorities and goals. Provide professional development opportunities as appropriate and encourage staff to set and reach personal growth targets.
- Have a leadership style that is open and empowers staff through active communication, delegation, and accountability. Manage expectations and resources to ensure that overall communications and positioning goals and activities are challenging and realistic.
- Foster an environment that rewards new ideas, creativity, and risk-taking; builds confidence; and encourages teamwork and collaboration within the office and across the college. Celebrate achievements and set clear expectations for future success.

Qualifications and Characteristics

Smith College is a leading small liberal arts college during a time when its mission and higher education more broadly are under scrutiny from a wide variety of audiences. Although direct experience in liberal arts education is not required, it will be critical that the next VP have a comprehensive understanding of the higher education ecosystem and the external forces impacting it.

The ideal candidate will bring many of the following qualities and experiences:

- A deep appreciation for the history, achievements, and aspirations of Smith College, and the ability to effectively articulate the president's vision to a diverse audience.
- At least 10 years of experience leading, envisioning, and implementing a strategic communications program that was successfully leveraged across an enterprise with multiple constituencies and a wide variety of audiences – internal and external, local and national.
- Advanced knowledge of the strategies and industry best practices for all aspects of communications, institutional positioning, and messaging, including sophisticated and creative use of brand content, social media, AI, CRM/analytics, and other forms of digital communications (paid, owned, and earned).
- Substantial experience evaluating the strengths of existing communications and marketing programs and identifying opportunities for improvement. An aptitude for using data and metrics in decision-making and evaluating the success of programs and campaigns.
- Broad experience in strategic communications, crisis and issues management, communications planning, media relations, public relations, perception management, and internal communications.
- Proven effectiveness in engaging and working directly with local, national, and international media on background and on the record.
- Experience in institutions that are subject to political and public scrutiny, whether legislative or regulatory.

- The ability to intuit the implicit dimensions of messages and channels, especially during a time of swiftly shifting priorities and needs. Exceptional diplomacy, discretion, and judgment.
- Engaging and persuasive in written and oral communications, clearly able to serve as a professional and trusted representative of the college.
- Keen creative and design sensibilities, with a strong understanding of the communications process from creative concept through production and fulfillment. Ability to increase the efficiency of the communications process without sacrificing quality and impact.
- Collaborative and collegial orientation, eager and skillful in engaging diverse constituents and building strong professional relationships. Demonstrated experience serving as a resource to others and obtaining their input, with the ability to synthesize many ideas and produce work products that address a variety of goals and objectives.
- Experience managing and inspiring teams in a complex organization, leading by influence and unifying the work of communications and marketing professionals across the enterprise. The ability to encourage change and growth in people and programs. Persuasive, persistent, and determined.
- A strong commitment to personal and professional development and the ability to build, lead, mentor, motivate, and retain high-performing, diverse professional teams to create a robust and collaborative communications and marketing ecosystem.
- Outstanding management, operational, and planning skills, including the ability to handle multiple projects simultaneously in a decentralized environment.
- High degree of integrity, character, and emotional intelligence, demonstrating respect for individuals at every level of an organization.
- A desire to engage deeply in the Smith community. Becoming an integral member of a small and close-knit college, as well as the town of Northampton and the wider Five Colleges, will be critical for success.
- Bachelor's degree required.

COMPENSATION

Compensation will be competitive and commensurate with experience. Except for roles with a set rate of pay, the wage/salary of the finalist selected for this role will be set based on a variety of factors, including but not limited to departmental budgets, qualifications, experience, education, licenses, specialty, and training. The stated hiring rate/range represents Smith College's good faith and reasonable estimate of the rate/range of possible compensation at the time of posting.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website: <https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/smith-college/vice-president-communications>.

Jack Gorman, Partner

Elizabeth Neustaedter, Principal

Lisa Clayton, Search Coordinator

Isaacson, Miller

Smith College is an EO/AA/Vet/Disability Employer. Women, underrepresented racial groups, veterans, and individuals with disabilities are encouraged to apply.