



PennState

ASSISTANT VICE PRESIDENT, STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY

University Park, Pennsylvania

THE SEARCH

The Pennsylvania State University ([Penn State](#)) and its Office of Strategic Communications ([Strat Comm](#)) seek an experienced, proactive, and innovative leader to serve as its assistant vice president, strategic communications (AVP).

Strat Comm is the University's central public relations and marketing division. The AVP will report directly to the vice president for strategic communications, [Rachel Pell](#), and collaborate with academic, administrative, and communications and marketing leaders and staff on campuses across the state. The AVP will help protect and advance the University's reputation for integrity; nurture pride and attachment among faculty, staff, and students; enhance understanding of and drive support for major leadership priorities; strengthen the institution's commitment to its employees; and advance Penn State's position as an exceptional employer.

Specifically, this forward-thinking and collaborative communications executive will provide overall vision and strategic leadership to an integrated team of 11 who are responsible for reputation management and tracking; internal communications, including human resources and change management communications; Penn State News and other news vehicles; and partnership with communicators outside Strat Comm. The AVP will also partner closely with the issues and crisis team to support and work in critical areas facing the University. This individual must be a proactive and engaged member of the office who works toward solutions, directly contributes to the work of the office, and provides perspective on a variety of issues and forces shaping Penn State, as well as higher education, during a time of evolution in the University's structure and priorities.

The successful candidate will have spent 10 or more years leading strategy and communications initiatives for complex organizations or institutions with multiple internal and external audiences. Key requirements

include a track record of success in developing and executing communications strategies that articulate an institution's contributions, evolution, and strategic direction to broad constituencies as well as the ability to foster a collaborative work environment that empowers teams to deliver high-impact communication solutions. Prior experience in higher education is not required. A bachelor's degree is required.

Penn State has retained Isaacson, Miller, the national executive search firm, to assist in this recruitment. Confidential inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

PENN STATE

Founded in 1855 as the Farmers' High School of Pennsylvania, today Penn State is one of the largest public land-grant research universities in the nation and is composed of a primary campus, [University Park](#), as well as [Commonwealth Campuses](#) around the state. In addition to a [medical campus](#) in Hershey, Pennsylvania, Penn State has one law school named [Penn State Dickinson Law](#) that is geographically split between two campuses, one in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and the other on the University Park campus.

The University enrolls more than 89,000 students, of whom more than 74,000 are undergraduates and more than 14,000 are postgraduates. In addition to its land-grant designation, the University is a [sea-grant](#), [space-grant](#), and one of only six [sun-grant](#) universities. Designated as an R1 institution, Penn State is a member of the Association of American Universities. Penn State also has a substantial online program, known as [Penn State World Campus](#), serving over 19,000 students through 200 academic programs.

The Penn State Nittany Lions compete in the Big Ten Conference for most athletic teams. Since its founding, Penn State has won 82 national collegiate team championships, including 54 NCAA titles across all sports, and Penn State students, alumni, faculty, and coaches have won a total of 74 Olympic medals, including 20 gold medals.

Office of Strategic Communications

As Penn State's central public relations and marketing division, [Strategic Communications](#) is a fully integrated, award-winning, best-in-class marketing and public relations team defined by innovative strategy and breakthrough creative driven by measurable goals. Strat Comm advances the University by strengthening and protecting the institution's reputation in regional, national, and international spheres of influence in ways that serve recruitment, resource, and leadership goals.

Spanning Penn State's large-scale enterprise – campus locations across Pennsylvania, nearly 90,000 students, and more than 750,000 alumni – Strat Comm's work encompasses all forms of communications and engagement, ranging from [branding and marketing](#), [trademark and licensing](#), and [event management](#) to [internal communications](#), [proactive and social media](#), [research communications](#), and [crisis and issues](#)

[management](#). The division consists of over 60 talented and diverse team members from private and public sectors at all levels, giving Strat Comm the ability to build a [strategic program](#) of excellence recognized throughout the University.

ASSISTANT VICE PRESIDENT, STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

The assistant vice president, strategic communications, is a reconfigured role that brings together internal communications, change management communications, HR communications, and Commonwealth Campus communications, while also working hand-in-hand with crisis and issues management. The AVP will provide vision and leadership for crucial areas of University communications, as well as [Penn State News](#). This role will also collaborate with leadership in the Office of the Vice President for Commonwealth Campuses to provide strategic communication counsel and support that advances [Penn State's Commonwealth campuses](#). Ultimately, the AVP will continue to build and implement a clear, unified vision for strategic communication aimed at strengthening the University's culture, supporting its employees, protecting its reputation, and managing institutional change.

The AVP will lead a centralized team of 11 talented professionals and be responsible for the following key areas:

Internal and Change Management Communications

- Lead enterprise change communications and stakeholder engagement; serve as a trusted advisor to senior leaders to anticipate, evaluate, and clearly communicate the impacts of organizational, operational, financial, and strategic decisions.
- Strengthen institutional capacity for change management by developing frameworks, processes, and communication strategies that enable leaders to navigate complexity, uncertainty, and competing stakeholder expectations with clarity, consistency, and confidence.
- Lead stakeholder analysis and engagement planning to shape communications around constituent needs and perspectives. Help leaders frame complex decisions, so they promote clarity, alignment, and constructive engagement among University and external audiences.
- Advance proactive change communications and drive forward-looking strategies that clearly explain decision rationale, stakeholder impacts, and emerging opportunities—shifting the University from reactive messaging to strategic, anticipatory engagement.
- Equip leaders across the University to lead during this time of ambiguity and increased expectations. Ensure that communications surrounding major initiatives are thoughtful, coordinated, and strategically aligned, positioning University leadership as informed, decisive, and prepared in the face of continual change.
- Provide support for and collaborate with Commonwealth Campus communicators to maintain a cohesive brand identity while addressing campus-specific needs.

Human Resources and Employee Relations Communications

- Oversee the team responsible for the creation and oversight of University-wide employee communications strategies, programs, and messaging regarding key University initiatives.
- Develop creative strategies that foster internal brand relevance and cultivate a distinctive employee value proposition, ultimately driving employee satisfaction and engagement across the University.
- Design and implement a comprehensive employee brand strategy that reflects the University's values, culture, and strategic objectives; aligns with overall internal communication efforts; and supports the University's brand positioning.
- Conduct thorough data analysis, leveraging insights from employee feedback to craft targeted engagement initiatives that promote belonging, employee satisfaction, and well-being across the University.
- Partner closely with the VP of Human Resources and their team for implementation and measurement.

Crisis and Issues Management

- Coordinate closely with the director of Penn State's issues management team on key priorities to develop and support the execution of comprehensive, proactive, and reactive communication strategies that address crises and emerging issues that may adversely impact the University's reputation or operations.
- As needed, work closely with the vice president of Strat Comm and her leadership team, Penn State's executive leadership, and cross-functional teams across the University to create cohesive and effective messaging that supports the institution's mission and strategic objectives.

Additional Duties

- Provide thought leadership and strengthen the University's internal expertise and capabilities in outreach and engagement by leveraging emerging technologies and platforms, including AI.
- Provide leadership support of robust and timely content aimed at informing internal and external stakeholders about news, events, and initiatives across Penn State.

QUALIFICATIONS

This is an exceptional opportunity for a proven leader to make a lasting impact at one of the nation's preeminent public research universities by shaping communication strategies at the highest level while engaging, informing, and connecting internal and external stakeholders with the institution's mission and strategic goals, particularly during periods of institutional change. Qualified candidates will have ten or

more years of relevant communications experience, including leading communications related to significant organizational change; the demonstrated ability to extrapolate and be valuable to supporting areas such as structural realignment, budget and resource planning, operational transformation, and student success initiatives; and at least eight years of experience in a supervisory or senior management role. Prior experience in higher education is not required.

The assistant vice president, strategic communications, will bring many of the following professional qualities and experiences:

- Exceptional judgment and the ability to anticipate stakeholder perspectives, frame complex issues thoughtfully, and build understanding and confidence during periods of change.
- An inclusive and facilitative leadership style that inspires and empowers staff, fosters innovation, and encourages open communication and collaboration.
- Proven experience in a senior communication role within a complex organization serving multiple, broad constituencies.
- Demonstrated strong leadership skills and the ability to collaborate effectively across diverse teams and distributed partners.
- Exceptional written and verbal communication skills, with an eye for strategic thinking and innovative problem-solving.
- Expertise in employee communications, engagement, and internal brand development, with a deep understanding of data-driven decision-making.
- Sophisticated understanding of communications channels and technology, from social media to CRMs to AI.
- Experience working in an environment serving many internal clients and external constituents.
- The ability and desire to thrive in a fast-paced, high-impact environment, managing multiple priorities while maintaining a focus on long-term objectives.
- A commitment to Penn State's land-grant mission and sensitive to the diverse needs of regional campuses.
- The ability to communicate, relate, and work effectively with and demonstrate respect for people at all levels of the organization and a wide variety of diverse backgrounds and cultures.
- A high degree of integrity, character, and emotional maturity; humility, a sense of humor, and life balance; and an optimistic personality.
- A bachelor's degree in public relations, marketing, communications, advertising, journalism, business administration, or related discipline (or an equivalent combination of relevant education and experience).

Compensation will be competitive and commensurate with experience.

TO APPLY

Interested candidates must submit a letter of interest and a current resume to be considered for the position. Confidential inquiries, nominations, and application materials should be directed to the Isaacson, Miller website:

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/pennsylvania-state-university/assistant-vice-president-strategic-communications>

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The Pennsylvania State University is committed to and accountable for advancing equity, respect, and belonging in all its forms. We embrace individual uniqueness, as well as a culture of belonging that supports both broad and specific equity initiatives, leverages the educational and institutional benefits of inclusion in society, and provides opportunities for engagement intended to help all members of the community thrive. We value belonging as a core strength and an essential element of the university's teaching, research, and service mission.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by the Pennsylvania State University. The material presented in this leadership profile should be relied on for informational purposes only. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information, the original source documents and information provided by the Pennsylvania State University would supersede any conflicting information in this document.