



# Chief Marketing & Communications Officer

POSITION SPECIFICATION





# The Opportunity

[Rhode Island School of Design](#) (RISD) seeks a strategic, proactive and innovative chief marketing & communications officer (CMCO) to serve as a member of the President's Cabinet charged with working to further bolster the institution's standing as the premier college for art and design and advancing organizational vision and priorities by fostering engagement with the institution.

[By cultivating expansive and elastic thinking, RISD equips artists, designers and scholars to generate and challenge the ideas that shape our world.](#)

The institution has set an ambitious vision for bringing creative practices to bear on today's most urgent social, political and environmental issues. Further, RISD is deeply committed to being proactively anti-racist, to advancing broad social equity and inclusion goals in principle and practice and to making consequential, strategic and scaled changes throughout the institution. Indeed, RISD recognizes diversity and inclusivity as fundamental to its learning community and integral to an art and design education and RISD's story. Therefore, the institution especially welcomes candidates whose professional expertise has prepared them to successfully advance the institution's social equity, inclusion and diversity goals, and those candidates from groups whose underrepresentation in higher education has been severe and long standing, including Black, Indigenous, Latinx and other People of Color; people who identify as LGBTQIA+; veterans; people with disabilities; and first-generation college students. Consequently, this is an exceptional opportunity for a talented marketing and communications professional to build on existing strengths and successes, further elevating the institution's reputation and advancing its mission.

Reporting to the president and working closely with cabinet colleagues, the chief marketing & communications officer will oversee efforts to strengthen an already best-in-class institution, utilizing the perspectives of multiple stakeholders and audiences, engaging constituencies both on and off campus. The CMCO will spearhead the development and implementation of marketing and communications endeavors across the organization, building on existing partnerships, forming new collaborations, and stewarding resources with an eye toward the future to inspire and inform RISD's key audiences, including current and prospective community members, supporters and influencers across sectors.

The Marketing & Communications team articulates, stewards and promotes RISD's brand to create connections with the institution through storytelling, brand development, and communications direction and support. The Marketing & Communications Department is a dynamic team of 17 professionals, including the CMCO's direct reports: an administrative assistant, an executive communications writer, a creative director, a public relations senior director and a digital experience senior director, the latter of whom dual reports to the chief information officer. This team works as a holistic group of creators to develop and champion the institution's brand identity internally and externally to engage and inform RISD's key audiences. Central to this is the execution of RISD's public relations strategy to further elevate the institution's standing as the leading college for art and design in the United States and beyond. They additionally oversee RISD's digital media ecosystem strategy, building and advocating for a more intentional, consistent and audience-focused digital campus. The CMCO will also help advance the president's vision for the institution as she spotlights RISD's global impact and expansive creative reach.

An ideal role for a strategist with a comprehensive understanding of how best to deploy marketing and communication channels to reach vast and diverse audiences, the CMCO will be capable of elevating an already strong, creative and well-respected department that is sought out as a resource and welcomed as a partner. Following a successful incumbent, the right candidate will be passionate about RISD's mission and will amplify that mission through the planning and execution of world-class communications, content and marketing initiatives. RISD's next CMCO will also possess a deep understanding of the role of current technology in marketing and communications and will passionately encourage and nurture innovation and creativity within the team. This is a highly visible role within the institution and the broader community and candidates must, among other characteristics, be persuasive and effective communicators, both written and verbal; present a strong professional presence; possess a strategic mindset; have unwavering integrity; and embrace collaboration as an essential practice. The CMCO must be able to work with a broad and diverse array of stakeholders and groups, seek to understand their concerns and perspectives and craft strategies and initiatives that address multiple, often conflicting interests. Further, in service of RISD's social equity and inclusion goals, the successful candidate will have a high level of fluency in this area, a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the ways in which narrative and image can help to advance mission-centric strategies and structures as well as constituents feelings of belonging, value and capacities. Also important is the ability to exhibit diplomacy and the confidence and understanding of how best to navigate a complex, matrixed and highly creative academic community.

Near-term priorities include the continued rollout of the [RISD brand](#), building on the [identity framework](#); the advancement of an improved digital ecosystem; and the crisp execution of the institution's public relations and communications strategies in partnership with the President's Office. There is opportunity to further strengthen and align campus communications. Efforts to uplift RISD on the global stage will also be necessary as the institution continues to evolve and impact the world through creative discourse and a commitment to the next generation of leaders.





# Overview: Rhode Island School of Design



RISD (pronounced “RIZ-dee”) is a creative community founded in 1877 in Providence, Rhode Island by a group of vanguard women before women could vote. Today, the institution enrolls 2,567 students hailing from 60 countries. Led by a committed faculty, they are engaged in 44 full-time bachelor’s and master’s degree programs and supported by a worldwide network of over 31,000 alumni who demonstrate the vital role artists and designers play in today’s society.

Beyond facts and figures, what is the spirit of this community? Through a cross-disciplinary curriculum of studio-based learning and rigorous study in the liberal arts, RISD students are encouraged to develop their own personal creative processes, but they are united by one guiding principle: in order to create, one must question. In cultivating expansive and elastic thinking, RISD seeks to activate a critical exchange that empowers artists, designers and scholars to generate and challenge the ideas that shape our world.

RISD’s mission, at both the college and museum, is not only to educate students and the public in the creation and appreciation of works of art and design, but to transmit that knowledge and make global contributions.



# RISD Values

We value the material practices of artists and designers as principal modes of engagement with the wider world.

We value the necessary and crucial contribution of deep disciplinary understanding to effective interdisciplinary practice.

We value collaborative interplay across design, fine arts and the liberal arts to cultivate deep literacies, to shape cumulative understanding, to transform thought and to expand making practices.

We value experimental, contextual and culturally diverse methods of creative practice and rigorous scholarship as essential ways of creating knowledge and engaging with complexity and uncertainty.

We value enlightened engagement with emerging and evolving technologies, along with critical reflection on the interests those technologies serve and the impact they have on diverse peoples, communities and the planet.

We value a classroom, studio and campus environment that advances principles of social equity and inclusion, environmental and climate justice, and equal access to resources and opportunities.

We value the development of lifelong skills that integrate the physical, emotional and mental well-being of our entire community.

We value the careful stewardship of our human, financial and physical resources.

We value our role as a place-based institution with a commitment to furthering progress in Providence and Rhode Island through mutually beneficial engagement with the community.



# President Crystal Williams

An accomplished leader, teacher and community builder, [Crystal Williams](#) became president of RISD in the spring of 2022, bringing more than two decades of higher education experience to the institution. Williams began her career teaching at Reed College, where she became a faculty activist collaborating with colleagues to envision and help build a more inclusive and diverse institution, resulting in her appointment as the college's inaugural dean for institutional diversity. She moved on to similarly catalytic roles first at Bates College, where Williams was the college's first associate vice president for strategic initiatives, and then at Boston University, where she also served in inaugural roles, initially as associate provost for diversity and inclusion and finally as vice president and associate provost for community and inclusion. An award-winning poet and essayist, Williams has published four collections of poems and her work is part of MoMA's Poetry Project, a tour of poems responding to pieces in the museum's permanent collection. The daughter of an educator and a musician, Williams was raised in Detroit, Michigan, and Madrid, Spain, and holds a BA from New York University and an MFA from Cornell University.



## Strategic Planning

Looking ahead to RISD's 150th anniversary, the [strategic plan, NEXT: RISD 2020-2027](#), posits that RISD will contribute to the creation of just societies, a sustainable planet and new ways of making and knowing that equip humans to live in mutually enhancing ways with each other and with the Earth. In addition, President Williams' emerging strategic priorities signal her goals, which include deepening and bolstering the current strategic plan with data-informed decision-making and, where necessary, new initiatives; renewing the institution's focus on holistic student wellness and outcomes; increasing student financial aid; ensuring that RISD's on- and off-campus communities are thriving; and advancing RISD's global engagements.

RISD is also guided by its 2012 [Master Plan](#), which seeks to address deferred maintenance, enhance academic facilities and equipment and expand RISD's technology infrastructure. Capital improvements are further guided by the strategic plan, which outlines the necessity of building and renovating facilities in line with sustainable principles. Rather than taking a 20th century approach and drafting a static list of projects, RISD chose to develop a set of dynamic and responsive tools calibrated to sustain long-term core values, principles and policies. The master plan was designed to persist through future changes in leadership, economic variability and pedagogical and technological advances.





# Social Equity & Inclusion

RISD is deeply committed to the principles of social equity, inclusion and diversity as fundamental to its mission. The institution defines diversity broadly as differences in the demographic characteristics and cultural identities within the RISD community of people, and is specifically focused on representation from groups that are historically and/or currently underrepresented, excluded, minoritized and/or marginalized at RISD, in higher education or in the world of art and design more broadly. Through their inclusion work, RISD is focused on the creation of a campus environment that fosters acceptance, involvement, sense of belonging and celebration of people from a wide variety of backgrounds and identities. The institution carries out social equity by ensuring equal opportunity for access and success in the context of unbalanced conditions and circumstances. Art and design have far-reaching capacities for generating shared language and connecting people and communities. The creative forms studied at RISD offer powerful means for conveying ideas and shaping experiences across habituated boundaries. Today those forms resonate more than ever before in the multilingual, culturally heterogeneous, digitally interconnected spaces around the globe. This work is led by the division of [Social Equity & Inclusion](#) through collaboration with all units across campus, including the Marketing & Communications team.



## Faculty, Programs & Students

The approximately 200 full-time and 400 part-time faculty members at RISD are accomplished artists, designers, architects, scholars and educators who show exceptional dedication to teaching and mentoring students. Beyond the studio and classroom, RISD's faculty are leaders in their respective fields, pursuing a fascinating array of projects and producing a tremendous range of cutting-edge work. Central to the implementation of RISD's evolving SEI initiatives, a "Race in Art & Design" cluster hire initiative was completed to grow the college's cross-institutional expertise and breadth of course offerings through the hiring of ten new faculty with discipline-specific expertise in areas of race and/or decoloniality.

The faculty are organized into 21 departments, which are distributed among four academic divisions, each of which is led by a dean. [The Division of Experimental and Foundation Studies](#) oversees the studio curriculum for all first-year undergraduate students at RISD and is comprised of three programs of study: Drawing, Design and Spatial Dynamics. The [Division of Architecture + Design](#) is comprised of seven departments: [Apparel Design](#), [Architecture](#), [Furniture Design](#), [Graphic Design](#), [Industrial Design](#), [Interior Architecture](#) and [Landscape Architecture](#). The [Division of Fine Arts](#) is comprised of ten departments: [Ceramics](#), [Film/Animation/Video](#), [Glass](#), [Illustration](#), [Jewelry + Metalsmithing](#), [Painting](#), [Photography](#), [Printmaking](#), [Sculpture](#) and [Textiles](#). The [Division of Liberal Arts](#) is comprised of four departments: [History, Philosophy and the Social Sciences](#) (HPSS), [Literary Arts and Studies](#) (LAS), [Teaching + Learning in Art + Design](#) (TLAD) and [Theory and History of Art and Design](#) (THAD). The deans work closely with department heads and graduate program directors to oversee faculty, degree programs and curriculum.



In addition to programs whereby students earn a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in a wide variety of studio-based disciplines, RISD also offers a five-year professional baccalaureate degree, the Bachelor of Architecture, which is a qualifying degree for a license in the field of architecture, as well as a dual-degree program with Brown University. Approximately 450 students are enrolled annually in RISD's broad array of [graduate programs](#), including the [master's program in design engineering](#) created in partnership with Brown University. In addition to MA/MDes, MFA, MID and MLA programs, RISD offers a master-level [Digital + Media](#) program and has added two interdisciplinary Liberal Arts MA programs: [Global Arts and Culture](#) (GAC) and [Nature - Culture - Sustainability Studies](#) (NCSS).

The department of [Continuing Education](#) serves an additional 4,600 individual students per year, with approximately 3,600 individual students enrolled in adult, teen and young artist RISD Continuing Education courses; 600 in RISD's Advanced Program Online; and 500 in RISD's Pre-College Program. More than 1,700 students are enrolled in adult certificate programs and over 300 are enrolled in RISD's Advanced Program Online certificate track.

To understand RISD students, and to recognize and celebrate their differences, you must grasp the nature of the art and design student. RISD students come to the institution from 60 countries across the globe but share certain values and characteristics. While impossible to generalize, they tend to be highly intelligent, fluid, non-conformist, idiosyncratic and skeptical of authority that's not backed up by skill. Each of the roughly 2,100 undergraduate students at RISD completes a rigorous and critical exploration of making through the first-year curriculum in experimental and foundation studies and varied coursework in the liberal arts.





# Governance & Finance

Including ex-officio trustees and the president, RISD is governed by a 33-member [Board of Trustees](#). The board includes local members, those with both national and international prominence and a diverse group of RISD alumni/ae, including more recent graduates. Currently, RISD has an operating budget of \$170 million. About 73% of net operating revenue comes from tuition and fees and 16% from auxiliary revenue (primarily student housing and dining). In recent years, close to 100% of students who exhibited financial need received aid. Meeting full need is among RISD's ambitious goals. More information about RISD's finances can be found in the most recent [consolidated financial statements](#).



## Location

Between the thriving arts community, incredible history, gorgeous parks and delicious eats, [Providence, Rhode Island](#), is a compelling place to live. Capital of the Ocean State, Providence combines the accessibility and charm of a small town with the diverse culture of a hip and vibrant city. The abundance of locally owned stores, low-stress lifestyle and beautiful architecture easily puts Providence on the list of America's top ten coziest cities.





# Essential Functions

The chief marketing & communications officer plays a critical role in strengthening the institution's reputation and fostering engagement by sharing stories about the RISD community; developing, managing and consulting on all visual and verbal expressions of the institution; spearheading risk mitigation and crisis management; and providing direction and support to campus communicators.

Accordingly, the chief marketing & communications officer will:

- Devise and implement creative, compelling and effective means of communicating the breadth and depth of RISD's impact. This includes the student experience, alumni achievements, academic excellence and the essential nature of the organization and its components to further strengthen the standing and reputation of the institution, its leadership and its accomplished creative community.
- Support school leadership, providing guidance, tools and expertise to the larger campus community and external vendors to bring the RISD brand and vision to life across all communication platforms.
- Set clear direction and priorities for a high-performing and trusted team of professionals who comprise RISD Marketing & Communications. Cultivate a department that employs the right people in the right functions supported by optimal systems to facilitate continued success. Ensure that plans are both innovative and future focused, resulting in consistent and cohesive messaging and brand identity. Promote a culture of collaboration that implements best practices across all disciplines.
- Manage a departmental budget of \$3.2 million, ensuring responsible stewardship and maximizing return on RISD's resources.
- Oversee the senior director, digital experience, building and stewarding a strategically consistent, intentional and audience-focused digital campus that reflects and advances the institution's vision and priorities.
- Working with direct reports and other key stakeholders, assess how best to leverage all external support including consultants and agencies.
- Guide executive communications, amplifying President Williams' vision for RISD and institutional priorities, eliciting connections and mobilizing support.
- Specific objectives for the near-term include, but are not limited to, further elevating RISD's global profile as well as amplifying executive communications to build on institutional priorities in ways that promote connection and guidance to the RISD community as key contributors in the creation of a more just, fair and sustainable society.

- Expand the new branding work to finalize the implementation of the physical brand and to also include consistent, narrative storytelling that all constituents can use, including leadership, faculty, staff and alums around the globe.
- Guide the efforts of the creative director to develop and champion RISD's visual and verbal brand identity and enable community members who communicate on the institution's behalf to do so with shared purpose, clarity and consistency.
- Oversee the measurement of efficacy and resonance of all communications and marketing efforts and the development of reports for diverse audiences.
- Broadly oversee all primary communication vehicles to include the [RISD website](#), the [student hub](#) and institutional social media presence on [Instagram](#), [X \(Twitter\)](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#) and any other emerging social media platforms.
- Working with the senior director, public relations, lead the development, execution and assessment of RISD's public relations strategy to further bolster the institution's standing as the premier college and museum for art and design and to support the president's vision, further establishing RISD as the leader in art and design education. Ensure the strategy, which includes traditional media, social media, speaking engagements, advertising and other brand awareness opportunities, engages key audiences including prospective students and their parents/guardians/appropriate support system, donors and potential donors, alumni, the international art and design community, the higher education community and the RISD community.
- Lead risk mitigation and emergency communications. Work with staff and key stakeholders to proactively reinforce and protect RISD's reputation, anticipating and mitigating potentially negative and high-profile situations that may impact the community. Manage crisis situations, developing strategies and messaging and providing counsel to institutional leadership. Develop and oversee the communications aspects of the institution's crisis plan and serve on the Emergency Operations Command Team (EOCT).
- Lead the RISD Communicators Network, which connects 75+ campus community members who speak for the college and museum.
- Catalyze and strengthen the relationship between Marketing & Communications and Institutional Advancement, identifying new and effective ways for the departments to achieve shared institutional goals.
- Lead by example, serving as a trailblazer and subject matter expert whose opinion is sought by others and who continually looks for ways to elevate messages and increase engagement and creativity. The CMCO will stay abreast of current and emerging trends in this rapidly changing sector.





# Professional Qualifications & Personal Traits

The chief marketing & communications officer will be an accomplished professional with unquestioned integrity, sound judgment and considerable energy who demonstrates a commitment to collaborative work, a passion for higher education and the arts and a belief in the power of creative individuals to help envision and build just societies and a sustainable future for humanity and the planet. The CMCO must be able to conceive and enact marketing and communications strategies that advance RISD's reputation globally and inspire audiences to engage across many platforms.

The successful candidate will be an innovative and confident leader with a minimum of 10 years of progressively responsible experience guiding a successful strategic communications program for a prominent, complex, large, mission-driven organization.

An undisputed track record will be leveraged across an enterprise with multiple constituencies and a wide array of audiences. Candidates from a variety of backgrounds will be considered; tenure in higher education or the arts with prior experience in government affairs, political affairs or advocacy work would be of high interest.

While no one candidate will meet all the desired criteria, the successful candidate will bring most of the following qualifications and attributes:



- A demonstrated, proven skill in leading teams of talented, highly capable professionals to outstanding performance while creating a departmental ethos that is creative, mission-focused, collaborative, inclusive and empowering. This leader will inherently understand the interplay between the digital experience, the creative mindset and experience and public relations, and that each vital function works best in simpatico.
- A history of success elevating an organization that uses best practices in all aspects of communications, marketing and messaging, including the sophisticated and creative use of storytelling and brand development as well as social media, analytics and other forms of digital communications. The CMCO will have demonstrated experience serving as a resource to others and obtaining their input, and thereby be able to synthesize many ideas and produce work products that address a variety of goals and objectives.
- A history of creating a genuinely welcoming environment that supports and promotes diversity, equity, accessibility, inclusion and belonging.
- Possess keen creative and design sensibilities combined with knowledge of how best to convey information in ways that engage and excite constituents, thereby inspiring innovative solutions to scale across the institution.
- A passion for telling RISD's story and expertise in new approaches to sharing impactful messages that connect with key audiences. Accordingly, the right candidate will be compelled to fully learn, understand and wholly embrace the work of the institution and the people who make up its creative community.



- Understanding of the need for proactive communication and task delegation that encourages accountability, promotes creativity and diversity of thought and celebrates achievement. The CMCO must lead by example and embrace their role as the steward of information and communications that enhances the RISD culture both internally and externally.
- A steady hand who intuitively understands that the interests of the institution must be at the forefront of all communication.
- An ability to work effectively in a resource constrained environment, employing creative solutions to accomplish goals.
- The proven ability to develop positive and productive relationships and mobilize all possible resources to get the job done.
- A strong commitment to personal and professional development and the ability to build, lead, mentor, motivate and retain high-performing, diverse professional teams. Utilizing industry best practices and a holistic understanding of marketing, communication and digital ecosystems, the CMCO will encourage change and growth in both people and programs.
- A persuasive communicator with the ability to craft substantive and cohesive messages based on RISD's strategic goals, communicate them successfully to key audiences and, as needed, adapt the messages over time.
- A demonstrated ability to intuit the implicit dimensions of messages and messaging. This includes proven effectiveness working directly with local, national and international media on background and on the record on behalf of institutions that are subject to public scrutiny.
- Excellent organizational, administrative and project management skills, including creating and implementing clear goals and priorities. Of equal importance is the ability to be analytical, agile and a creative self-starter who can work with a sense of urgency and purpose and be able to both enact and manage change, refining as needed.
- A sharp eye for evaluating operational efficiency and the optimal use of resources, including consultants; a clear understanding of budgets and proven success managing them.
- An aptitude for using data and metrics in decision-making and evaluating success and ROI.
- Some experience in advancement communication is a plus as RISD is approaching its sesquicentennial and the requisite potential fundraising efforts in 2027.



# Education

The successful candidate will hold a bachelor's degree; a graduate degree in communications, marketing, nonprofit management or a related field or equivalent, specialized training and experience is preferred.

# Process

RISD is an Equal Opportunity Employer. Employment decisions are made without regard to race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, genetics or any other protected characteristic as established by law.

RISD has retained Shelli Herman and Associates, Inc., an executive search firm, to assist in this search. Inquiries, nominations and applications should be directed to the search firm; all contact will be held in the strictest confidence.

A review of applications will commence immediately. Applications received before March 11, 2024, will be given priority. Interested individuals should submit their credentials as soon as possible for full consideration. Complete applications may be submitted electronically via email and should include: a cover letter that articulates a commitment to the mission, outlining relevant experience tied to the job description, and a current resume reflecting all work experience. Expedient application is encouraged.

Prior to submitting your resume for this position, please read it over for accuracy. Shelli Herman and Associates, Inc. verifies academic credentials for candidates, and our clients frequently conduct background checks prior to finalizing an offer.

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