

Vanessa J. Hawthorne

Communications Strategist – Nonprofit, Advocacy & Social Impact

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Professional Summary

Creative and strategic communications professional with experience helping nonprofit organizations strengthen visibility, engagement, and impact through thoughtful storytelling, digital strategy, and community outreach. Skilled in brand development, project management, graphic design, and cross-functional collaboration. Adept at translating complex ideas into compelling narratives that educate and inspire while advancing missions, advocacy initiatives, and fundraising efforts.

Areas of Expertise

Strategic Communications | Advocacy & Public Affairs | Campaign Management | Brand Identity Development | Digital Marketing | Content Strategy | Storytelling & Message Development | Media & Public Relations | Community Engagement | Stakeholder Collaboration | Project Management | Graphic Design | Social Media Strategy | Email Marketing | Web Design & SEO Optimization | Google Analytics | Canva | WordPress | WiX | Mailchimp | Hootsuite | Buffer | Google Workspace

Work Experience

Communications & Special Projects Manager

Hunger Free New Jersey & Center for Food Action | Remote April 2025 – Present

Communications lead for Hunger Free New Jersey and Center for Food Action, guiding messaging, digital strategy, and public engagement efforts that advance food security and strengthen community partnerships statewide.

- **Hunger Free New Jersey:** Led communications strategy for a statewide advocacy program promoting access to nutrition programs. Developed and distributed communications materials to advance the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), Summer EBT, and National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs; oversaw the ongoing website redesign to improve accessibility, structure, and alignment with advocacy goals; and managed social media to strengthen visibility and engagement.
- **Center for Food Action:** Directed communications for regional fundraising and community engagement initiatives, produced event promotions, donor features, and volunteer highlights to build public awareness and strengthen relationships across the community.
- **Statewide Partnerships & Impact:** Collaborated with the New Jersey Department of Agriculture and the Office of the Food Security Advocate to coordinate outreach and messaging. Led a CEP information session with 100+ attendees, directly influencing increased program adoption among New Jersey school districts.

Strategic Communications & Branding Consultant

Freelance, Hawthorne & Blackwell, LLC | Remote

March 2018 – April 2025

Partnered with mission-driven organizations to develop strategic communications, brand identities, and digital content that strengthened engagement and visibility. Notable clients include Black Wildflowers Fund, Advancing with Purpose, Ocean County Library, Cape May County Library, Lancaster County Library, TikTok, Klaviyo, Foundr, and Sprout Social.

- **Client Relations & Project Management:** Cultivated partnerships across diverse organizations; managed timelines, budgets, and deliverables while coordinating vendors and creative teams to ensure seamless execution.
- **Branding & Design:** Created brand kits, visual identities, websites, and marketing collateral that aligned messaging with mission goals. Designed strategic plan layouts for library systems and crafted event materials, signage, and merchandise for nonprofit clients.
- **Digital Marketing & Communications Strategy:** Led content development and campaign execution across social, email, and digital platforms to grow reach and engagement. Achieved measurable impact for Black Wildflowers Fund (500+ new subscribers, 800+ followers in one year) and supported advocacy campaigns for The National Association of Manufacturers, Microsoft, and Speak Now for Kids.

Education

Master of Science, Strategic & Digital Communication

Drexel University, *Expected 2026*

Bachelor of Arts, Communication Studies

Rowan University, *Class of 2016*

Professional Development

Social Media Marketing Certificate – Hootsuite, 2025

Digital Marketing & E-Commerce Certificate – Google Career Certificates, 2024

Content Marketing Certificate – HubSpot Academy, 2024

User Experience Design Certificate – Google Career Certificates, *Expected 2026*