

Kelly Samantha León

(b)(6)

Summary

Communications and advocacy professional with experience in philanthropic, nonprofit, federal, and postsecondary educational settings. Strategist and writer with an aptitude for communicating complex research and policy proposals simply, accurately, and effectively. Communications specialist with established relationships with reporters at top-tier, local and higher education news outlets.

Professional Experience

The Kresge Foundation

Office of External Relations and Communications

Communications Officer, Education and American Cities Programs

January 2019 – present

Troy, MI

- Identify, research, and write news stories, press releases and other materials for foundation website to promote understanding of Kresge’s mission, grantmaking and social investing.
- Pitch reporters and secure media coverage of Kresge staff, partners, and grantees to elevate equity-driven college success strategies and inclusive community development practices. Earned media hits include WDET (Detroit NPR affiliate), The Chronicle of Higher Education, Higher Ed Dive, Memphis Flyer, Valley Public Radio (Fresno NPR affiliate), and NOLA.com (partner site for several New Orleans news outlets).
- Ghostwrite, pitch and place op-eds and other opinion pieces to amplify Kresge staff, partner and grantee insights about college success strategies and inclusive community development practices. Placements include Next City, Bridge Michigan, Crain’s Detroit Business, Stanford Social Innovation Review, The Chronicle of Philanthropy, and The 74.
- Execute events showcasing the impact of Kresge grantees and build awareness of strategies that boost opportunity for people living with low incomes.
 - Produced the Detroit premiere of “Unlikely,” a Kresge-supported documentary film about college access and success challenges facing under-represented students. The event included a film screening and panel discussion moderated by Stephen Henderson, host of WDET’s “Detroit Today” show and arguably the most popular reporter covering the City of Detroit. The event was attended by 150 city residents and college success advocates.
 - Produced a launch reception to celebrate 20 new Kresge grantee partners participating in the Kresge Innovative Projects: Memphis initiative. The event included a short speaking program and was attended by 200 Memphis community development professionals, grant makers and elected officials.
- Manage third-party contractor development of multimedia deliverables.
- Led production of 12 short videos featuring Kresge staff and partners for social media and website delivery.
- Lead communication activities for the Shared Prosperity Partnership, a cross-institutional initiative including Kresge, the Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, the Urban Institute and the Aspen Institute Center for Urban Innovation. Activities include convening and leading bi-weekly meetings with communications professionals at each organization and stewarding the development of written content to elevate insights informed by the partnership. Deliverables include blogs, reports and white papers.
- Manage content creation and daily engagement for three Twitter handles.
- Liaise with 20+ Kresge grantee organizations to shape and support communication activities including press strategies, research rollouts and event production. Grantees are located throughout the U.S. in cities including Detroit, Memphis, Fresno, Washington D.C and New Orleans, and in South Africa.
- Delivered two communications-focused training sessions for National College Attainment Network members, both attended by approximately 200 participants.

- Led media engagement including story pitching, fielding incoming media inquiries, and on-the-record statement development. Earned media hits include *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times*, *Marketplace*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Politico*.
- Prepared and staffed IHEP experts for media interviews, including practice sessions and talking-point development.
- Ghostwrote, pitched and placed op-eds to amplify IHEP experts and policy insights that advance increased college access and success of under-represented students. Placements include *The Washington Post*, *The Hechinger Report* and *The 74*.
- Led the rollout of *Degrees When Due*, a nationwide initiative to help former college students resume their studies and earn high-quality credentials. Rollout included original website creation, animated video production, social media content creation and targeted media pitching.
- Coordinated the production (print design and web presence) of IHEP deliverables including research reports and policy briefs.
- Partnered with fellow college access and success research and advocacy organizations to advance lawmakers' understanding of equity-driven policy interventions. Engagement included briefings for policy staffers and coordinated advocacy campaigns.
- Managed a \$100,000 budget earmarked for communications and advocacy activities.
- Managed contracts with 10 vendors who developed multimedia products and provided additional technical capacity to the organization.
- Managed the development three short, animated videos to complement IHEP research deliverables and boost awareness of policy insights.
- Recruited, onboarded, and managed one full-time employee (Communication Associate).
- Recruited, onboarded, and managed one part-time employee (Communications Intern).
- Managed content creation and daily engagement for two IHEP Twitter handles and one Facebook profile.

Assistant Press Secretary

- Directed higher education media engagement for the agency and served as primary spokesperson for higher education matters. On-the-record statements were featured in top-tier outlets including *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post*, and higher education outlets including *Inside Higher Ed* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.
- Cultivated and maintained relationship with reporters to ensure sufficient understanding of agency actions.
- Wrote press releases, fact sheets, statements, and press scripts for the agency Secretary and Under Secretary.
- Prepared and staffed the Secretary and Under Secretary for interviews, press calls, and press avails announcing major higher education regulations, enforcement actions and program launches.
- Developed strategic communications agenda alongside senior agency staff including Assistant Secretary for Communications and Outreach, Chief of Staff to the General Counsel, and Senior Policy Advisor in the Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development to conceptualize and develop accurate and effective messaging.
- Liaised with communications staff and analysts in Federal Student Aid to inform and coordinate responses to media inquiries.

U.S. Department of Education

Office of Postsecondary Education

Confidential Assistant to the Acting Assistant Secretary

November 2014 – February 2016

Washington, DC

- Provided comprehensive administrative support to acting assistant secretary, including daily briefing preparation, talking points and speech development.
- Drafted, edited, and finalized all formal correspondence from the Acting Assistant Secretary to internal and external stakeholders, including members of Congress, White House staff, and key officials at partner federal agencies.
- Led and convened monthly group meetings for Confidential Assistants throughout the agency to encourage collaboration, share best practices and build community.
- Served on agency's Human Capital Working Group. Developed and executed a robust professional development workshop calendar featuring weekly sessions designed to increase retention among agency appointees.

George Washington University

Office of the President

Special Assistant to the Chief of Staff

July 2011 – October 2014

Washington, DC

- Managed constituent response protocol on behalf of University President and Chief of Staff. Liaised with representatives in primary university units to coordinate responses, address complaints and achieve resolutions.
- Drafted internal and external communication including briefings, talking points, memoranda, correspondence, and proposals.
- Represented Chief of Staff in cross-departmental initiatives focused on improving student retention including the Taskforce for College Access and Success.
- Managed on-campus activities for the National Civil War Project including robust educational programming in partnership with faculty and students. Served as institutional liaison with project partner Arena Stage: The Mead Center for American Theater.

District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)

Office of the Chancellor

Chancellor's Representative, DCPS Critical Response Team

May 2010 - July 2011

Washington, DC

- Managed constituent service responses for approximately 600 constituent complaints or inquiries regarding district operations. Processed and analyzed aggregate data to inform operational improvements.
- Staffed District Chancellor at "Office Hours with the Chancellor" community listening sessions. Initiated follow-up action items as directed by District Chancellor.
- Effectually communicated major district initiatives – IMPACT teacher evaluation rollout, online School Profiles Tool rollout, and retroactive pay distribution to Washington Teachers Union members – at key community stakeholder meetings, school-based events and listening sessions.
- Conducted three Out-of-Boundary Seat Lottery information sessions to guide participants through the application process. Each session was attended by 200+ parents and students.

Education

George Washington University

Washington, DC

Jan-Oct. 2014 Doctoral Studies, Educational Administration and Policy (15 credit hours earned)

May 2010 Master of Arts, Organizational Management

May 2008 Bachelor of Arts, English and Journalism

Skills

Web Design: Drupal, Wordpress

Social Media and Online Engagement: Constant Contact, Campaign Monitor, Canva, Hootsuite, Sprout Social