

2022 Industry/Educator Summit Report

**Created by
The Commission of Public Relations Education**

From the CPRE:

CPRE Industry and Educator Summits bring educators and leading professionals together to discuss workplace needs, trends and expectations. The Summits provide educators with insight into what students need to learn to be successful in the profession both today and in the future. The Summits provide leading professionals with a greater understanding of what is being taught in the classroom; how students learn; what today's students are expecting from current and future employers as they enter the marketplace; and how practitioners can support Public Relations education. And, the Summits provide valuable insights to guide the organization's periodic research projects that eventually guide Public Relations programs in the United States and abroad and influence accreditation standards.

During the past few years, three in-person CPRE Summits were held: Washington, DC in August 2018; Columbus, Ohio in May 2019; and San Diego, California in October 2019. In 2021, the Summit was virtual. Reports on all the Summits can be accessed on the CPRE website: www.commissiononpred.org

The 2022 CPRE Research Committee identified the following topics as leading areas of focus in the profession and among educators (in no particular order):

- Public Relations as a Driver of Social Change
- Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
- Ethics
- Technology & Data Analytics
- The Future of the Workplace (Hybrid Workforce, Internships, Onboarding, Mentoring)
- State of Undergraduate Curriculum (convergence, critical thinking and strategy, today's Public Relations educators, delivering the curriculum – hybrid, online teaching, etc.

In alignment with the above topics and with a focus on workplace expectations, the 2022 Summit focused on: The Future of the Workplace: Who, What and Why.

WHO: How is the workplace meeting the needs of new pros? How have new pros changed the workplace? Are expectations of students and new pros aligned with the workplace reality and future needs? In what ways are expectations of in-house departments different than those of agencies? What new ways to work are students expected to embrace? In what ways is the workplace welcoming a more diverse workforce?

WHAT: What skills do students and new pros need to bring to work? What specific data analytics and technology skills must students gain before entering the workplace? What skills and certificates “make a difference” on a resume today and in the future?

WHY: Why does Public Relations matter today and in the future? How is Public Relations driving social change? Why do we do Public Relations? Why does it matter? Why don't we hold the profession more accountable for bad actors/actions as we take credit for great actors and actions? Why are the demographics in the field what they are? Why will Public Relations be better in the future?

The 2022 Summit featured one virtual gathering of leading educators and professionals invited to share their insight and experience. A second virtual session was held with leading Public Relations students and new professionals. The small groups inspired authentic conversation and important insights that are consequential for today and the future.

Regards,

The Commission on Public Relations Education Co-Chairs

Stacey Smith, APR, Fellow PRSA

Senior Counsel and Partner
Jackson, Jackson & Wagner

Maria Russell, APR, Fellow PRSA

Professor Emerita, Public Relations,
Newhouse School of Public Communications,
Syracuse University

Special Thanks:

We offer special thanks to the 2022 Summit moderators who shared their time to lead each session. They expertly engaged participants and drew forth meaningful outcomes. Thank you Kim Sample, President PR Council, and Karla Gower, PhD, Director, Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations, Behringer Distinguished Professor, Dept. of Advertising & Public Relations, The University of Alabama.

In addition, we thank the 2022 CPRE Summit Organizing Committee, which included Kathleen Rennie, LaShonda Eaddy, David Brown, Sandra Duhe, Denise Edwards-Neff, Maria Russell, Douglas Cannon, as well as advisors Judy Phair and Bruce Berger. The team worked together to develop the format, recruit and invite participants, write the theme and questions, and secure approvals for report content.

Finally, we are grateful to our Partner, the Institute for Public Relations (IPR), for designing the report and to Kathleen Rennie for organizing, writing and editing this report.

Key Learnings

Each session generated important outcomes and insight, with the following 10 key learnings and opportunities for more discussion, research and advancement:



1. **Soft skills are in high demand** for new professionals. Curiosity and willingness to learn are essential.



2. **Writing continues to be an essential skill.** While format can be taught, Public Relations excellence demands skillful attention to grammar, structure, and AP Style.



3. **Media literacy is in demand** – and encompasses everything from compelling story-telling, to pitching news with evidence, to correcting misinformation.



4. **Understanding analytics is good.** Being able to pull insights from data that are meaningful to clients and organizations is imperative.



5. **Workplace etiquette needs to be honed** as new professionals engage in in-person and hybrid environments. Mentorships and training sessions are important to helping new professionals engage professionally in the workplace.



6. **Expectations of new pros for flexibility** and rapid advancement are not always easily aligned with the demands of business.



7. **A diverse workforce is essential.** Much has been done to improve DEI and much more needs to be done, particularly at the higher levels of leadership. New professionals seek work in organizations where DEI is a priority.



8. **In the age of misinformation,** Public Relations is essential to the reputations of individuals, organizations and brands.



9. **Public Relations professionals** must hold communicators accountable.



10. **Public Relations are change makers** filling “a broader role and responsibility in society than selling.”

Session I

Moderator:

Kim Sample, President, PR Council

Participants:

Sonny Franks Miller, Sr. Corporate Communications Specialist, Meijer

Jo Ann LeSage Nelson, APR, Fellow PRSA, Vice President of Client Services, Pierce Communications

Carolyn Lok, Communication Strategist, 22Squared, Tampa

Mickey Nall, APR, Fellow PRSA, Professional in Residence, University of Florida

Lori A. Russo, President, Stanton Communications & Co-Founder, Joe Communications GmbH

Kerry Sheehan, Chart.PR, FCIPR

Lisa Seidenberg, Director of Media Relations, Greentarget

Shelley J. Spector, President, Spector & Associates, Inc.

Philip Tate, APR, Fellow PRSA, President, Tate Strategic

Erin Van Zee, APR, RDG Planning & Design, Communications Director

Jene Wheeless, Freelance Media Relations Director, Salt & Ruttner Consulting

Eric M. Winkfield, Vice President, M Booth and M Booth Health

Weiwu Zhang, PhD, Associate Dean in the College of Communication, Information, and Media, Ball State University

WHO

Session I began with a discussion about the expectations for and of new professionals. The conversation uncovered workplace changes presented by a new generation of professionals who arrive with a sense of “ambition and urgency” to advance to the next title and pay level, who “are bold in their assertions” and come with high levels of confidence. Summit participants then discussed ways to balance the expectations of today’s new professionals with the expectations of the workplace.

“There is so much more emphasis on the next step. And this is one area where organizations really will need to shift the way they think about talent development and the way they work out raises and promotions.”

-Sonny Franks Miller, Sr. Corporate Communications Specialist, Meijer

“I think new pros are coming in with the expectation that there is going to be inherent flexibility or that they will be able to disrupt easily. I think many find the wheels of organizations don’t turn as quickly as they would hope.”

-Erin Van Zee, APR, RDG Planning & Design, Communications Director

“I’m hearing from young pros that I mentor that the opportunities for raises, better titles, cooler assignments, will only come by ‘jumping from one job to another.’ Some of that is impatience but some of it is corporate or agency reality.”

-Philip Tate, APR, Fellow PRSA, President, Tate Strategic

“From the point of view of the new professional, they are like ‘I’m in the business of me and I need to treat myself like a business, so I am going to push for as much as I can get.’ So we welcome people to advocate for themselves, but also to back up requests with data and statistics and to understand that they are also operating within a business that is caring for everyone. There has to be some balance. We’re in the business of all of us.”

-Lori A. Russo, President, Stanton Communications & Co-Founder, Joe Communications GmbH

“Many new pros now come into the workforce virtually and that requires a lot more intentionality on the organization’s part around culture – about what it is like to not only be part of the culture and fabric of your agency but also part of the working world. It’s required leaders to be more thoughtful about how we bring people along and welcome them to the workplace.”

-Eric M. Winkfield, Vice President, M Booth and M Booth Health

“At my company, we value training sessions and figuring out ways we can learn from each other. Sessions in which employees at all levels can share their experiences and have two-way conversations are super helpful in terms of acclimating new professionals into the workforce.”

-Carolyn Lok, Communication Strategist, 22Squared, Tampa

“After COVID, there was a real shift to acknowledging people’s passions and allowing time for them to do that. More conversations are focused on trying to better understand what the company needs from new professionals but also what new professionals need from the company.”

-Jene Wheelless, Freelance Media Relations Director, Salt & Ruttner Consulting

“Those of us who have been in the business for a while have to translate what we do in a way that is meaningful for new professionals. Saying that ‘this is the way it was done when I was in your position’ is not what they care about. We need to translate our perspective to one that is meaningful to them.”

-Philip Tate, APR, Fellow PRSA, President, Tate Strategic

Essential expectations of new professionals are workforce diversity and authentic commitments to equity and inclusion. Summit participants addressed how the workplace is welcoming a diverse workforce and ensuring equity and inclusion. While progress was noted, participants discussed the need to advance diversity in leadership positions and a concern that the majority of diversity in the industry is in the junior ranks.

“DE&I is front and center for us, with everyone on the leadership team accountable for driving a specific DE&I initiative. This includes everything from ensuring a diverse contractor pipeline, to relationships with HBCUs, supporting nonprofits that drive diversity efforts, to our DE&I book club and movie series.”

-Lisa Seidenberg, Director of Media Relations, Greentarget

“DE&I is our number one priority. If we, as a profession, even at a very high level, are not representative of the people we serve, whether selling, motivating, or informing, then ultimately we have failed.”

-Kerry Sheehan, Chart.PR, FCIPR

“The profession is at a point where, yes, it is welcoming. But, we also have to be in a space where we are focused on retaining the talent we have in this space as well. It’s one thing to recruit, it’s another to keep and grow. In the retention conversation, we have to begin to explore what we are doing for career mapping and career journeying as well.”

-Eric M. Winkfield, Vice President, M Booth and M Booth Health

WHAT

As Session I turned to a conversation about the skills new pros need to bring to the workplace, participants strongly emphasized traditional must-have skills like ethics, writing, and story-telling, as well as new focus areas like data analytics and capabilities like emotional intelligence and curiosity.

“A very basic skill that is not being emphasized enough in schools is media relations. Too many think a placement is a post. Too few know how to interest an editor in a story.

-Shelley J. Spector, President, Spector & Associates, Inc.

“Writing is an absolute essential. So is curiosity. When we interview young professionals, we ask where they get their news. We want to know they are reading news and are curious about what is going on in the world well beyond their campus. The most successful young professionals are those who are really curious and who can write.”

-Jo Ann LeSage Nelson, APR, Fellow PRSA, Vice President of Client Services, Pierce Communications

“Young professionals need media literacy and too often lack the ability to tell a compelling story to the people who need to hear it on behalf of the organization. As social media programming has been introduced at universities, story-finding and story-telling skills have become less of a focus.”

-Mickey Nall, APR, Fellow PRSA, Professional in Residence, University of Florida

“Adaptability is one of the most important skills for new professionals as the profession and workplace continues to change. Just look at how social media is evolving...becoming less social with short form video and more media and broadcast focused – which require writing and story-telling skills.

-Carolyn Lok, Communication Strategist, 22Squared, Tampa

“It is important to understand data and data analytics, but it is also important to know how to present the data, visualizing and making sense of data in order to present actionable intelligence and make recommendations. At the same time, emotional intelligence is essential...how to relate to others, how to show empathy, how to manage emotions.

-Weiwu Zhang, PhD, Associate Dean in the College of Communication, Information, and Media at Ball State University

“As it becomes more and more difficult to access the media through earned media and newsrooms become more chaotic, more focus will be put on corporate communication and internal communication. Our industry is moving more in the direction of executive communications function and employee engagement.”

-Sonny Franks Miller, Sr. Corporate Communications Specialist, Meijer

“Media outreach is important. Pre-COVID reaching and talking with reporters was a lot easier. You have to know not only who reporters are and what they write about but you have to know what channels they use and be able to reach them where they are – from a DM on Twitter to Tik Tok.”

-Jene Wheeless, Freelance Media Relations Director, Salt & Ruttner Consulting

WHY

The final element of Summit I was a discussion about why public relations matters today and in the future, how it can drive social change and moral entrepreneurship.

“What makes public relations an important industry is the ability to find and tell important stories, demonstrating value and enriching lives. We are the purveyors of information and purveyors of stories. And, without our ability, a lot of important stories would not be told or be made accessible to people beyond the four walls of the company.”

-Erin Van Zee, APR, RDG Planning & Design, Communications Director

“One the most meaningful ways we can impact social change is to support non-profits with pro bono efforts that drive that change. This has been meaningful at my agency and I would encourage other agencies to find organizations they can get involved in.”

-Lisa Seidenberg, Director of Media Relations, Greentarget

“CEOs understand our value. They need someone to have an ear to the ground, to interpret for them, to help with the response. This is essential today when organizations must have a point of view on many topics that is authentic and well communicated.”

-Mickey Nall, APR, Fellow PRSA, Professional in Residence, University of Florida

“In terms of reputation and accountability, if we don’t hold actors accountable, the audience will. Customers are thorough detectives. It’s important for the profession to analyze and reflect on how we can lead the narrative and build trust. We have to lean into transparency to ensure relationships are build and maintained.”

-Carolyn Lok, Communication Strategist, 22Squared, Tampa

“We are gifted communicators. And the best of us are highly ethical and working hard to get important information out there to the people who need to know it. And we’re doing it in a thoughtful, informed, and ethical way.”

-Lori A. Russo, President, Stanton Communications & Co-Founder, Joe Communications GmbH

“Reputation is an individual’s, an organization’s and a client’s most valuable asset. And today the threat to truth can skew conversations and move attention. We need to double down on ethics.”

-Kerry Sheehan, Chart.PR, FCIPR

“We need to continue to protect our industry, to really lean into integrity and ethics. We demonstrate integrity with the community, customers, and the media and clients when we hold ourselves and others accountable.”

-Jo Ann LeSage Nelson, APR, Fellow PRSA, Vice President of Client Services, Pierce Communications

“The only constant in today’s society is change. To continue to make our profession viable, to stay relevant, it is important to teach adaptability, agility and resilience. We need to be life-long learners. Today we are learning, unlearning and relearning every day.”

-Weiwu Zhang, PhD, Associate Dean in the College of Communication, Information, and Media at Ball State University

“Public relations has been used throughout history to create societal change. We’re change makers – just look at the role of public relations in the founding of America, in gay rights, in healthcare concerns like COVID-19. We fulfill a much broader role and responsibility in society than selling.”

-Shelley J. Spector, President, Spector & Associates, Inc.

Session II



Moderator:

Karla Gower, PhD, Director, Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations,

Behringer Distinguished Professor, Dept. of Advertising & Public Relations, The University of Alabama

Participants:

Taylor Blatchford, Graduate Student, University of Alabama

Whitney Bowers, Account Supervisor, Co-Communications

Lara Burhenn, Director of Corporate Communications, Digimarc

Leah Cooper, Associate Account Director of Corporate Strategy, Real Chemistry

Ashley Manz, MPA, APR, Head of Social Media, Panasonic North America

Landis Tindell, APR, Manager of Corporate Communications, Oklahoma City Thunder

John Arcadi, Senior Manager of Talent Acquisition, Real Chemistry

WHO

Session II began with a discussion about the needs and expectations of new professionals and how/if those expectations are aligned with current workplace realities and future needs. Participants noted that the transparency of new professionals to ask for their needs to be met is creating space for flexibility and increased mentorship in the workplace.

“A lot of people in my generation, specifically, don’t know how to go into an office and work. Even if they have the hard skills, they might not have the soft skills. And, they are more expectant of flexibility.”

-Taylor Blatchford, Graduate Student, University of Alabama

“Gen Z new pros are very straight forward about what they need and want – sometimes requesting things that I would have never asked for as a new pro. Some of that is good, but there has to be a balance and boundaries.”

-Ashley Manz, MPA, APR, Head of Social Media, Panasonic North America

“Many new pros have had their education and early career upended by COVID, with the shift to virtual or hybrid. So, we are giving them resources and mentorship and tools they need to succeed. We realize the workplace today is not the workplace of last year or last month.”

-Leah Cooper, Associate Account Director of Corporate Strategy, Real Chemistry

“Something I really admire about the generation coming into the workforce is that they are not afraid to stand up for themselves or say ‘look, I am not feeling well, I am taking the day off.’ Whereas I came into the workforce and was told ‘these are the expectations, take it or leave it.’ I don’t know if it’s indicative of the workforce or of a workplace that has another job waiting for them, but there is no hesitation about saying what they want or need.”

-Lara Burhenn, Director of Corporate Communications, Digimarc

“A lot of people want to know they can work remote and want to have flexibility but then they miss out on what we knew before COVID, which was interoffice culture – which can be very life-giving at times. After COVID a great job candidate is a self-starter who can almost teach themselves the hard skills without much handholding and be mindful of time management. The soft skills suffer because they haven’t seen how to conduct themselves in an office setting... which is interesting.”

-John Arcadi, Senior Manager of Talent Acquisition, Real Chemistry

Summit participants in Session II then provided insight into ways to balance the needs and expectations of students and new professionals with the requirements and pace of the workplace.

“We often think of mentorship for hard skills, but are seeing more of a demand for mentorship for the soft skills around office etiquette and interacting in an virtual environment. Mentorship is needed around how to get meaningful connections when not bumping into people in the hallways is much less likely.

-Lara Burhenn, Director of Corporate Communications, Digimarc

“Remote work makes inter-department messaging critical, but for some organizations it is not easy. A tool like Slack is necessary so that remote workers can quickly ask questions and get feedback all along the way. Also, the workplace should think about how to embrace employees who are working to earn their master’s degree – adult learners who have the passion to study and improve what they do in the workplace by returning for another degree.”

-Whitney Bowers, Account Supervisor, Co-Communications

“I think it’s up to organizations to meet their team members where they are. If employees are struggling to feel engaged then it’s up to the company and the culture teams to keep people engaged. And, that is a tough thing to do in this climate. It’s not easy to make people who are hundreds of miles away from one another feel like they are in an office setting. It’s not an enviable challenge.”

-John Arcadi, Senior Manager of Talent Acquisition, Real Chemistry

“I was definitely shocked by the many different directions I was being pulled in when I entered the workplace. It’s always changing and being nimble is essential. In addition, I always like to say you can teach someone how to write a press release, media list or social media post. But you can’t teach them passion or curiosity or the willingness to learn or to care. When I interview candidates, curiosity and willingness to learn are the first things I am looking for...and that is not going away.”

-Leah Cooper, Associate Account Director of Corporate Strategy, Real Chemistry

Particularly important to the discussion of the workplace was a focus on diversity, with participants noting the enhanced expectation for diversity in the workplace.

“Mentorships are something that would help students in many regards as they go into the professional era of their lives and especially with all the changes to the workplace. Mentors are essential to knowing to interact with others in the workplace, understanding the culture and navigating things that are not so black and white.”

-Taylor Blatchford, Graduate Student, University of Alabama

“Virtual work allows for a more diverse candidate base for both the full- and part-time positions. And, Gen Z is the most diverse generation in history – so inherently we are hiring more diverse candidate.”

-Landis Tindell, APR, Manager of Corporate Communications, Oklahoma City Thunder

“The authenticity of younger pros allows for much better dialogue around diversity. By showing up as who they are and being straightforward, better conversations have resulted. I am happy to see bigger corporations embracing that.”

-Ashley Manz, MPA, APR, Head of Social Media, Panasonic North America

“When you have worked for a company that embraces DEI, it becomes a priority for future jobs. Once you have had that experience, it guides where you want to work – down to asking for DEI reports.”

-Whitney Bowers, Account Supervisor, Co-Communications

WHAT

As Session II turned to a conversation about the skills new pros need to bring to the workplace, participants strongly emphasized the need for soft skills, as well as traditional requirements for the job: writing, editing, speaking and presenting.

“The soft skills are essential. You can be taught virtually any hard skills. It’s more about knowing what’s appropriate to say in front of who and when and things like that. There is a shorthand and cadence that is much more difficult to learn and do through a screen.”

-John Arcadi, Senior Manager of Talent Acquisition, Real Chemistry

“It’s exactly the soft skills. You are going to learn the hard skills in the classroom. But you are not going to learn how to take constructive feedback and apply it the next time.”

-Leah Cooper, Associate Account Director of Corporate Strategy, Real Chemistry

“Knowing how to write is a requirement. You can teach various writing formats, but there is a lack of basic writing skills and lack of writing preparation – like thinking about why the company is doing something and why we are writing about it.”

-Ashley Manz, MPA, APR, Head of Social Media, Panasonic North America

“The shift to hybrid and remote has impacted speaking skills. Going into the office to make a presentation becomes much more uncomfortable.”

-Whitney Bowers, Account Supervisor, Co-Communications

“I can teach you how to write about basketball. I can teach you what the different phrases mean and how to structure things, but if that inherent knowledge of AP and sentence structure is not there, then it’s an automatic ‘no’ on our side.”

-John Arcadi, Senior Manager of Talent Acquisition, Real Chemistry

While there was agreement that new pros need to understand analytics, the emphasis was placed on gaining insight from data and being able to interpret findings to make meaningful decisions for clients. Participants also stressed the need for basic accounting/budgeting skills, design capabilities, and measurement/evaluation.

“I think the big thing is not only gaining data analytics skills but then being able to translate the data into insight. You can save findings all day long, but if you can’t gain insight and then apply it to your client’s business to propel the business forward, it’s just data. At the same time, taking a finance or accounting class is important to understanding how to manage a budget. It’s important to understand the business, billable hours and budgets.”

-John Arcadi, Senior Manager of Talent Acquisition, Real Chemistry

WHY

The final element of Session II was a discussion about why Public Relations matters today and in the future, how it can drive social change and moral entrepreneurship.

“My generation can communicate in Zoom boxes and emails, but feels less comfortable in person. It’s an important soft skill that can be improved through internships and other professional experiences. The other key soft skills is self-motivation. New pros need to demonstrate passion and interest that self-motivates.”

-Taylor Blatchford, Graduate Student, University of Alabama

“I took a class on the measurement and evaluation of public relations in graduate school and I will use those learnings for the rest of my career.”

-Whitney Bowers, Account Supervisor, Co-Communications

“Adobe experience is good to have – young pros don’t have to be masters but should have basic knowledge of graphics, video and InDesign in case we need to put something together quickly.”

-Landis Tindell, APR, Manager of Corporate Communications, Oklahoma City Thunder

“Misinformation makes it essential for companies to speak in a compelling, articulate and honest way. Intended audiences need to be reached in innovative ways. Public Relations is essential to for every brand, business, and individual.”

-John Arcadi, Senior Manager of Talent Acquisition, Real Chemistry

“Public Relations keeps brands relevant, it drives business. It’s about change. We are counseling companies to listen and to take an authentic stand that resonates.”

-Leah Cooper, Associate Account Director of Corporate Strategy, Real Chemistry

“Public Relations listens to everything the world is saying, dissects it and figures out where the brand fits in and how to move forward.”

-Taylor Blatchford, Graduate Student, University of Alabama

“Public Relations reminds people what brands are doing in the community, to make our communities and states and society better.”

-Landis Tindell, APR, Manager of Corporate Communications, Oklahoma City Thunder

“Our profession needs to hold ourselves accountable for putting out true facts. It’s more important now than ever. It needs to call out anyone on the bandwagon of alternative facts. As professionals, when we see something done or said that can impact the profession, we need to call it out immediately.”

-Whitney Bowers, Account Supervisor, Co-Communications