

Director of policy and communications

Employer: Community Rail Network
Salary: £43k-£51.5k pa, full time
Location: Home based / flexible or Huddersfield

We are seeking a dynamic director of policy and communications, to lead and develop our increasingly impactful external affairs activity. You'll be sharing community insights and evidence with policy and decision-makers at national and devolved level, supporting a shift towards more inclusive and sustainable transport and mobility, while overseeing high-quality, inspiring member communications and thought-leadership, drawing on grassroots experiences.

About us

Community Rail Network is a national not-for-profit organisation supporting a growing 'community rail' movement, which helps communities get the most from their railways, promotes sustainable and inclusive travel, coordinates volunteering and place-making, and brings people together.

Community rail is made up of 76 community-based partnership organisations, and c.1,300 station friends volunteer groups and other community-led initiatives around Britain. Their activities range from creative projects for young people, to advising train operators on service improvements, to building travel confidence among marginalised groups, to biodiversity projects at stations, to promoting greener tourism by rail.

Our enthusiastic team of 24 works from home in different locations, but we come together regularly in person and online. We work collaboratively to support our members, provide training, events and resources, run campaigns, and champion community rail and its insights. We believe in developing our team and helping everyone reach their potential while having a good work-life balance.

About this role

This role is crucial for us, our members and their communities, especially at the current time, with our need to seize on the opportunities of rail reform and devolution, promote wider use of sustainable transport, and bring communities together. You will spearhead our external affairs strategy and plans, building political relationships, influencing decision-making and raising awareness of community rail and its insights, while ensuring effective communications with our members and helping them to have a voice locally and regionally. You'll be striving to put community rail at the forefront of a shift towards more inclusive and sustainable mobility.

As a member of our senior leadership team, reporting to and working closely with our chief executive, you will manage a passionate team of four, ensuring collaboration with our other teams, partners and funders, and drawing on members' insights.

Main responsibilities

- Lead the review, development and delivery of our communications, policy and insights strategy, working to position the community rail movement effectively, use its insights to influence policy change, and ensure our members are well-informed and have a voice;

- Further strengthen our advisory and influencing work with national, devolved and regional government, transport bodies, parliamentarians and other decision-makers, especially around rail reform, transport devolution and integrated, inclusive, sustainable transport;
- Ensure we're engaging effectively with policy developments and opportunities, taking forward a programme of relationship-building, and identifying and engaging in relevant consultations, events and speaking opportunities, enabling community rail's insights and experiences to be shared;
- Collaborate with partners in rail, government and the third sector to feed in our expertise on community engagement with rail, amplify our campaigns, and build opportunities for joined-up communications and policy work;
- Continually develop and disseminate our evidence base and insights on the social, environmental and economic value community rail delivers, and opportunities to create greater benefits for communities from rail and transport;
- Oversee high-quality, coherent and inspiring communications with our members and partners, promoting our work, and sharing news, opportunities, and good practice across the movement;
- Manage production of high-quality resources, case studies and reports that our members can use to enhance their impact and which showcase community rail's impact;
- Lead and develop our media relations and awareness-raising PR, championing community rail and its messages on sustainable, inclusive travel and communities at national and regional level, while supporting members on local PR;
- Develop our online presence and reach, making full use of our website, social media, our Scenic Rail Britain campaign, and partners' channels to celebrate and position community rail and grow its reach and impact;
- Oversee a calendar of creative and impactful campaigns that involve and empower our members, creating PR and engagement opportunities, including Community Rail Week;
- Play a key role in collective leadership, strategic focus and organisational development as a member of our senior leadership team, including through internal communications and cross-team working, annual planning, funder liaison and reporting, upholding our strategies and policies, and pursuing opportunities for continuous improvement.

Skills and competencies

1. Strong leadership and management skills, including experience managing, developing and drawing on a multi-faceted team delivering complex campaigns or projects, and budget management;
2. Excellent communication and external leadership skills; articulate, assertive, and with the ability to work diplomatically and persuasively with stakeholders at all levels;
3. An understanding of public affairs, ideally in relation to community development, sustainability and/or transport, and a demonstrable ability to identify influencing opportunities, deliver thought-leadership, and engage with policy-makers, including sharing community insights;

4. Politically astute, with awareness of and commitment to social inclusion, social justice and sustainability, and a good grasp of the importance of public transport sustainable travel, and community-led action, to these agendas;
5. Understanding of political processes and experience of engaging with policy and decision-making, ideally at national, devolved and local levels;
6. Sound knowledge of communication and marketing methods and channels, and ability to oversee messaging and targeting of public and professional audiences, and to align content across multiple channels;
7. A demonstrable ability to think analytically and draw on statistical and qualitative research to construct robust, evidence-based arguments;
8. Experience of working with the media and achieving coverage at national, regional and local level;
9. Experience working collaboratively with partners and ideally funders to deliver communications and policy activity and forming professional networks;
10. Excellent organisational skills, with the ability to work under pressure and meet deadlines while dealing with competing priorities, and to support team members to do so;
11. IT literate with a good working knowledge of Office, the internet and social media;
12. Appropriate qualifications and professional development demonstrating knowledge and skills in line with the above, and a commitment to ongoing learning and development.

To apply

Email jobs@communityrail.org.uk by 8am on Monday 12 January 2026 with two attachments: your CV and a covering letter of up to two sides of A4 summarising why you are the ideal person for this job and relevant experience and competencies. Please include a daytime phone number.

First interviews take place Monday 19 January on Teams. Second interviews will be in person, Monday 26 January, likely in Derby. Candidates invited for interview will be contacted by phone about a week before. Due to limited resources, we are unable to provide feedback to other candidates.

Other information

As you will be home-based, we are flexible about your location. However, you will be expected to travel to in-person full team meetings quarterly (usually in West Yorkshire), and you will need to bring your team together (currently all West Yorkshire based) with similar regularity in between. Attendance at in-person events and meetings is also important. We therefore welcome applications from those with decent public transport links, not too far from a railway station, to enable journeys to be made sustainably.

This is a full-time position, 37 hours per week. We use a flexi-time system with core hours 10am-3pm, and are committed to being a flexible, supportive and understanding employer. This is a permanent position with a probationary period of six months.

Community Rail Network is an equal opportunities employer. We welcome applications from disabled people and Black, Asian and other minoritised groups, who meet with the skills and competencies for this role. We will provide reasonable adjustments for interviews as required.