

A FUTURE IN
PUBLIC RELATIONS





WHAT IS PUBLIC RELATIONS?

Imagine collaborating with social media influencers to boost tourism, teaming up with health experts and community leaders to raise awareness, running a digital campaign for a rising artist, guiding a business through a crisis, or helping a charity win government support.

Public relations professionals plan, develop and manage strategic communication for a wide range of clients – from brands and non-profits to public figures like activists, politicians, and creators.

The goal is to build and maintain strong, meaningful relationships between clients and their audiences – like communities, customers, employees, donors, volunteers, investors and government agencies.

Public relations work includes media outreach, campaign planning, audience research, content creation, social media management, event coordination and crisis response. It's also about reputation management and helping leaders communicate clearly and ethically.

As a public relations professional, you'll need to think strategically, communicate creatively, and act ethically – always with purpose and impact.

Would you like to bring about positive change for organisations, communities and societies? Do you want to create compelling content that is creative and impactful? Are you keen on applying your interpersonal skills for facilitating relationships with key stakeholders? Do you want to be a trusted advisor for leaders? Then public relations is the career you're looking for.

OUTLOOK AND TRENDS

Gen AI: Your future co-worker

Generative AI, like ChatGPT, is changing how we work. It helps with research, planning, writing, and analysing data. Professionals must apply critical thinking, creativity and ethical judgement with AI to ensure communication continues to be authentic and appropriate.

Understanding the world around you

We communicate in an interconnected world. A key to success as a strategic communicator is to understand the social, political, economic, technological, environmental and cultural trends, threats and opportunities around.

Standing up for truth

People are more unsure than ever about who to trust – especially in a world full of fake news and misinformation. Public relations professionals play a key role in sharing accurate, clear and timely information, specifically during big events, emergencies or crises.

Communicating with values

Today's audiences want brands and organisations to stand for something – whether it's diversity and inclusion, climate action or social responsibility. Public relations professionals need to help organisations develop and communicate these values in an authentic, balanced and ethical manner.

Aotearoa's unique voice

Aotearoa New Zealand is a unique multicultural society founded on a bi-cultural partnership based on Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Public relations communicators are expected to be culturally aware and responsive to the needs of the people of Aotearoa. Professionals with diversity of background, culture and experience are needed to ensure a fair representation of our society.

Creating in the digital world

From Instagram reels to podcasts, from influencer collabs to campaign strategies, digital skills are a must. Professional communicators need to be able to plan, create and manage content across platforms that really connects with people.

Sources: AUT public relations academic advisor Dr Deepti Bhargava, PRINZ CEO Susanne Martin, PRINZ Industry Insight Reports, Global Capability Framework and Global Communication Reports.

WORK SETTINGS

As a public relations graduate, you can work in-house (in a company's comms team), join an agency (working with different clients), or as an independent consultant or contractor.

Public relations roles are everywhere – from government, health, education, finance, tech, and construction to farming, tourism, food and drink, and telecommunications.

More people are choosing freelance, contract, or hybrid work, so it's important to be aware of things like data privacy, online security, health and safety, employment rights and work-life balance.

CAREER ROLE EXAMPLES

Most public relations graduates start out as communications co-ordinators (in-house) or junior account executives (consultancies).

While 'communications' is common in PR titles, other PR roles include community relations advisor, digital content manager, social media advisor, corporate relations advisor, events manager, media specialist, or engagement advisor etc.

Public relations isn't just a desk job. It often involves planning and attending events, meetings, client sessions and media briefings. You work with internal teams, external partners and community voices.

Role examples include:

Communications co-ordinator/executive (entry level) – supports communication planning, including content creation for social and digital media, newsletters, in-house publications, websites, media releases, speeches etc. Monitors and compiles reports on public opinion, media coverage and social media engagement. Liaises with journalists, assists with events management and other administration.

Social media and digital specialist (entry to intermediate level) – plans and manages social media campaigns and digital content. Includes identifying and working with influencers, creating digital content (videos, podcasts, digital ads, web content etc.), managing social media channels, tracking online engagement, managing sponsored content opportunities, conducting data, analytics and reporting key metrics.

Marketing and communications advisor (mid level)

– helps shape how people see and engage with a brand. You'll manage content and storytelling across platforms, organise campaigns and events, handle media engagement, and protect the brand's reputation.

Stakeholder engagement/community relations lead

(senior level) – leads communication with key groups like local communities or partners. You'll run research, develop engagement strategies, solve issues, manage teams and budgets, and make sure the organisation stays connected to the people who matter most.

SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

- Strong informative and persuasive writing skills to craft tailored messages for different platforms and diverse audiences.
- Digital, visual and AI literacy to create engaging and appropriate content across multiple platforms.
- Public speaking and presentation skills to act as an organisational spokesperson.
- Interpersonal skills to build strong and lasting relationships with stakeholders, communities, clients, journalists and leadership teams.
- Research and strategic planning skills to design and manage campaigns that make an impact.
- Knowledge of the media landscape, and global and local news and issues.
- Critical thinking and ethical judgement, alongside contextual awareness and problem-solving skills.
- Cultural awareness and sensitivity to be an inclusive, respectful and effective communicator.
- Ability to advise and support organisational leaders with relevant training and ethical guidance.
- Team, budget and time management skills to lead projects and communication teams efficiently.

PERSONAL QUALITIES

- Strategic thinker and problem-solver
- Curious and creative mindset
- Tactful and professional communicator
- Collaborative and adaptable team member
- Has courage, integrity and ethical behaviour
- Good organiser who works well under pressure

PROFESSIONAL REGISTRATION

Although not compulsory, graduates are encouraged to join the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ). After gaining around five years industry experience, you can work towards the Accreditation in Public Relations (APR), which helps open up leadership roles, boosts your credibility, and provides access to global industry recognition.

SALARY GUIDE

Salaries and consultant charge-out rates vary depending on the sector, experience levels, location and size of organisation.

	Salary (per year)
Communication graduate	\$45,000–\$65,000
Intermediate communication roles	\$75,000–\$130,000
Senior communication roles	\$130,000–\$180,000+

This information from PRINZ was accurate at the time of publication (mid 2025) and should only be used as a guideline.

Keep up to date with salary data by visiting websites or signing up to salary guides, including:

Prosple Graduate Salary Guide

nz.prosple.com

Seek

seek.co.nz/career-advice/explore-salaries

Hays Salary Guide

hays.net.nz/salary-guide

THE AUT ADVANTAGE

Students work as account executives in project teams, supervised by AUT lecturers acting as account directors.

Strong industry connections create opportunities for students to connect with working public relations professionals through guest lectures, real-world case studies, mentoring, networking events, paid internships and graduate roles.

As part of the School of Communication Studies, the Public Relations major gives a solid foundation in communication, and a focus on professional growth and personal development.

FURTHER STUDY OPTIONS

The Master of Communication Studies and PhD can be done as a straight research thesis, a thesis by publication or by completing a project-based thesis.

Research topics include public relations strategy and professional practice, crisis communication and reputation, social and digital public relations, culture and public relations; diversity, equity and inclusion; misinformation and trust, AI in public relations, persuasion and power in communication; public interest communication, engagement and dialogue; and stakeholder relations.



AGNES FA'AGUTU

Account Coordinator, Undertow Media

Bachelor of Communication Studies in Public Relations
with a minor in Advertising and Brand Creativity

"My role is a hybrid between PR and social media. I look after the social media community management for four brands. I also create monthly content calendars which involves creating and curating content, writing captions, reaching out to collaborators, getting permission to share content, getting their insights and then putting all that together.

Just recently I started media pitching, which is fun and exciting. Otherwise, I'm mainly doing internal management – spreadsheets and other administration.

I feel I really flourish in this fast-paced environment. It's often all hands-on deck and lots of work, but when it's done, you can say, 'Wow, like, you know, I really was a part of that'.

I was keen to work for Undertow because they are a women-led agency that offers scholarships to Māori and Pasifika students. As a woman of colour, it makes a difference to have other faces of colour around you.

I found out about Undertow Media in my second year of study when I applied for a scholarship with them that included an internship. After doing the internship I was offered a day a week that I did through my third year. When I graduated, I expressed my interest in a full-time graduate role and two months later Undertow offered me this role.

A highlight so far was a small campaign for Logitech Ultimate Ears Miniroll speaker over New Zealand Music Month, collaborating with some influencers about their favourite Kiwi music. This was very cool for me because music is one of my biggest hobbies.

Tips – be prepared to work hard. Utilise your uni connections. I'm often reaching out to alumni I knew. Those connections are unique to you.

Don't be afraid to apply for scholarships, internships, or graduate roles. If you don't apply you don't have a chance. I never expected to get a scholarship but look at me."

EMPLOYER COMMENT

"For an account coordinator we look for organised, interested and interesting people. By that, we mean they are curious to learn, genuinely enjoy seeking information, but also bring something to the table in terms of their interests, skills or experience.

In PR you are constantly learning and acquiring information. Being curious means you won't just take information handed to you, but will read around it to create a better story and overall campaign. PR is also as much about relationships as book smarts, so being an interesting person makes you memorable with all the people you'll meet along the way.

Agnes is super reliable and committed. She's not afraid to get stuck in and pick up new skills. She is professional and personable and her interesting skills/knowledge in the gaming and entertainment space are an asset for clients that align.

With the media landscape changing so much it is very important to keep up with the news, who journalists are, what they cover and the stories that make headlines. AI can be powerful but use it to start, then use your own smarts to enhance the language and tone."

Gina Williams-Folau

Media Head of Communications, Undertow Media

USEFUL WEBSITES

Public Relations Institute of NZ (PRINZ)

prinz.org.nz

Outside the Square AUT

aut.ac.nz/ots

Global Alliance

globalalliancepr.org

PRovoke Media

provokemedia.com

Institute for Public Relations

instituteforpr.org/about

FURTHER INFORMATION

For the most up-to-date information on studying public relations and the Bachelor of Communication Studies, visit aut.ac.nz/publicrelations

For other Future Career Sheets visit:

aut.ac.nz/careersheets

EMPLOYABILITY & CAREERS

For employability and career support, AUT students can book an appointment through elab.aut.ac.nz/

 @AUTEmployabilityandCareers

FUTURE STUDENTS

Contact the Future Student Advisory team for more information: aut.ac.nz/enquire

futurestudents@aut.ac.nz

 @FutureStudentsofAUT

CURRENT AUT STUDENTS

Contact the Student Hub Advisors team for more information: 0800 AUT UNI (0800 288 864)

aut.ac.nz/enquire | studenthub@aut.ac.nz

CITY CAMPUS

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The information contained in this career sheet is correct at time of printing, mid 2025.

