



ACLS Leading Edge Fellowship 2026

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| Position Title | Policy & Research Communications Specialist |
| Organization | College Access: Research & Action |
| Location | New York, NY |
| Stipend | \$72,000 in the first year, \$74,000 in the second year |
| Benefits | Access to employer health insurance. Professional development funds and relocation funds provided by ACLS. |
| Start Date | September 2026 |

ORGANIZATION DESCRIPTION

[College Access: Research & Action](#) (CARA)'s mission is to ensure that first-generation college students, low-income students, and students of color have the knowledge and support necessary to enroll in and persist through post-secondary education. While these students need opportunities to learn about college and career pathways, most public high schools and institutions of higher education are not structured to provide this assistance. CARA's peer-to-peer programs, whole school coaching, and research & policy initiatives work to address these inequities. We work with high schools, community-based organizations, and higher education institutions to shift postsecondary guidance from being an "enrichment for some" to an "entitlement for all."

POSITION DESCRIPTION

Along with our direct-service work with students, schools, and nonprofit partners, CARA creates widespread impact through a range of research, policy, and communications activities. Our goal is to illuminate barriers, share best practices, and bring the voices of those most impacted by local, state, and national policies – practitioners & young people – into conversations that shape policy at all these levels. The Policy & Research Communications Specialist will help amplify CARA's impact by helping develop our strategic communications plan, telling CARA's story across mediums, and translating our research into more accessible formats. Reporting to the Director of Policy Research, the Policy & Research Communications Specialist will work collaboratively across CARA's Research & Policy and Development teams on three main projects:

- **Analyzing policy communications and refining our strategic communications plan:** The Policy & Research Communications Specialist will work collaboratively with CARA's Research & Policy and Development teams to refine our communications strategy across the organization. The Specialist will take a lead in analyzing our current communications and that of peer organizations to identify effective practices and key audiences. They will then help execute the plan that comes out of this research. This could involve activities such as power-mapping the organizations and policymakers we want to be reaching, expanding to a new platform, or working to deepen relationships with journalists across a range of relevant news outlets.
- **Telling CARA's story across mediums:** CARA's communications span multiple programs and audiences, from research for policy makers to program impact stories aimed at educators and funders. In collaboration with the Director of Grants & Strategic Funding, the Policy & Research Communications Specialist will create content to coherently share the story of CARA's varied work across platforms (i.e. our newsletters, reports, & different social media platforms) in a way that can reach more people while being sensitive to distinct audiences.
- **Translating research into actionable tools:** CARA regularly publishes original research reports. For each report CARA produces, the Policy & Research Communications Specialist will create at least one additional product to translate the research findings into a more usable format or widen the research's reach. This could include creating slide decks to share research findings, writing op-eds or blog posts for external publications, or creating practitioner and policy toolkits in collaboration with program staff.

This position is *only* available through the Leading Edge Fellowship program.
You may *not* contact the host institution to inquire about this position.

This role leverages the humanistic skills of interpretive analysis and clear and creative writing, including analyzing narratives, synthesizing complex ideas, and translating evidence for diverse audiences. The role provides an opportunity to work across multiple functions of a nonprofit organization, create a variety of different external-facing communications, and help refine our communications strategy and voice. There will also be opportunities to present at local and national policy conferences, contribute to grant funding reports, and deepen understanding of the postsecondary access and education policy fields. This position will prepare the fellow for communications, policy, and development positions in education and human services-related nonprofits, government organizations, and think tanks. The fellowship tenure is 24 consecutive months, with an expected time commitment of approximately 37.5 hours per week.

Responsibilities and tasks:

- Conduct research on the efficacy of past CARA communications efforts and the approaches of peer organizations. Collaborate with the Research & Policy and Development teams to use this research to develop an organization-wide communications plan.
- Create content to support CARA's organization-wide communications. This may include writing stories for CARA's monthly newsletter (this involves generating ideas, conducting interviews, writing, and securing additional photos or video to complement stories), brainstorming and creating social media content, and contributing to impact reports.
- For each of the 2-4 original research publications CARA produces each year, work with the Director of Policy Research (and program teams, as necessary) to create at least one additional written product, such as a slide deck, op-ed, blog post, or toolkit. As needed, provide additional support on research projects (i.e. conducting interviews & writing).
- Work with the Director of Policy Research to place written pieces in external publications and strategize to reach new audiences.
- Collaborate to present CARA research at local and national policy conferences (ideally 1-2 over the fellowship term).

Qualifications:

- PhD in any field of the humanities or interpretive social sciences. Read more about eligible fields [here](#).
- Outstanding analytical and writing skills, including experience executing writing projects from initial concept stage to final drafting.
- Ability to write for a variety of audiences with sensitivity to voice, context, and representation.
- Ability to read extensively and synthesize information to learn independently about new topics.
- Ability to talk with students and educators about sensitive topics.
- Ability to work collaboratively with different staff & teams (i.e. program, development, research).

Preferred:

- Experience with communications, media strategy, or narrative analysis.
- Lived, professional, or research experience connected to the educational experiences of low-income, first-generation, and BIPOC students.
- Experience with content creation involving photo, video, or infographics is a plus.

APPLICATIONS

- Information on the Leading Edge Fellowship Program: <https://www.acls.org/Competitions-and-Deadlines/Leading-Edge-Fellowships>
- All applications must be submitted through the ACLS Online Fellowship Application System (ofa.acls.org)
- Application deadline: 9 PM EDT, March 11, 2026.

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