

LEE PHENNER

COMMUNICATIONS & NARRATIVE STRATEGY EXECUTIVE

Newburyport, Massachusetts | 339.368.1140 | lee@leephenner.com | leephenner.com | linkedin.com/in/leephenner

EXECUTIVE PROFILE

Senior communications and narrative strategy leader with deep experience shaping public understanding of poverty, housing instability, energy affordability, food insecurity, health inequity, and economic mobility. Trusted adviser to CEOs and executive teams, translating complex policy and human-services issues into clear, credible narratives for communities, media, funders, policymakers, partners, and employees. Combines more than a decade of mission-driven leadership with top-tier agency expertise in positioning, message architecture, audience strategy, brand development, and integrated communications. Builder of high-performing teams and communications infrastructure, with a record of turning strategy into measurable action, philanthropic support, and organizational influence.

CORE LEADERSHIP STRENGTHS

- Narrative Strategy & Message Architecture
- Executive Counsel & Thought Leadership
- Housing, Economic & Racial Justice Communications
- Earned Media, Reputation & Crisis Communications
- Integrated Campaigns & Performance Measurement
- Community-centered Storytelling
- Cross-Sector Partnerships & Philanthropy
- Responsible Generative AI Strategy & Adoption

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Head of Marketing / Director of Communications Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD)

Boston, Massachusetts | 2015–Present

Report to the president and CEO and lead communications, narrative, brand, media, digital, creative, video, and event strategy for one of the nation's largest community action agencies, serving approximately 100,000 people annually.

- Transformed a traditional public relations operation into an integrated strategic marketing communications hub, aligning narrative development, executive communications, earned and paid media, digital and social strategy, design, video, and events around organizational priorities.
- Advise the president and CEO and senior leaders on organizational positioning, speeches, opinion pieces, public statements, media strategy, reputation, and sensitive communications involving poverty, housing instability, energy affordability, hunger, health inequity, workforce opportunity, and public funding.
- Built communications infrastructure for executive visibility and rapid response, including message architecture, talking points, media preparation, client-story alignment, and cross-functional workflows; prepared high-stakes materials for media interviews, partner forums, and press conferences, including a gubernatorial event in under 24 hours.
- Introduced and guide the responsible adoption of generative AI across the department, applying it to research, message development, content creation, analysis, ideation, and workflow improvement while maintaining human oversight, accuracy, and organizational voice.
- Secured and supported sustained executive and organizational visibility across NPR, The Boston Globe, NBC, GBH News, WBUR, Bay State Banner, Dorchester Reporter, and other regional and sector outlets.
- Directed integrated campaigns connecting individual experience to systemic conditions across housing and homelessness prevention, energy assistance, food access, tax assistance, workforce development, health equity, and youth opportunity.
- Increased year-over-year website performance including sessions to Fuel Assistance service pages by 294% and Food Access Center pages by 93%, helping residents find support during policy, benefits, and affordability volatility.

- Initiated targeted earned-media outreach when the holiday toy drive was falling short of community need, helping generate nearly \$100,000 in donations, including major gifts.
- Supported communications for free tax-preparation services that completed 3,521 returns and returned more than \$7 million in federal and state refunds to individuals and families.
- Achieved a 6.42% average social engagement rate versus a 1.76% nonprofit benchmark; increased social visibility 30.8% year over year and social video views 123% through targeted content, partnerships, and impact storytelling.
- Managed a six-month GBH media partnership that delivered 3.74 million impressions against 1.98 million contracted, expanding awareness among donors, civic partners, and regional audiences.
- Lead and develop a multidisciplinary in-house team and manage external creative, media, research, event, and communications partners; use data, digital tools, and generative AI to improve research, content quality, analytics, and workflow.

Associate Creative Director

THD

Lexington, Massachusetts | 2013–2015

- Developed integrated fundraising and donor communications for national and international nonprofit organizations; translated mission, urgency, and human impact into multichannel acquisition, retention, and engagement campaigns.
- Helped Mercy Corps acquire approximately 50,000 new donors annually and grow its active donor file to more than 135,000.
- Delivered more than 72 direct-mail and email campaigns reaching over one million Alzheimer's Association donors; supported Habitat for Humanity, the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada, and the Ms. Foundation for Women.

Principal

Lee Phenner Communications

Newburyport, Massachusetts | 2009–2022

- Advised nonprofit, financial-services, healthcare, and small-business clients on positioning, narrative, identity, content strategy, digital communications, and audience engagement.
- Created and launched the brand strategy, identity, website, and communications platform for the Jaime Leandro Foundation for Therapeutic Cancer Vaccines.
- Co-led the rebranding and market launch of investment consulting firm NEPC; developed marketing and events that contributed to sustained year-over-year growth for an award-winning specialty retail business.

Vice President, Corporate Identity & Design

Hill Holliday

Boston, Massachusetts | 2002–2010

- Led corporate identity, brand strategy, and communications engagements for consumer, healthcare, technology, financial-services, education, and nonprofit organizations; served as a senior adviser to executives navigating change, growth, and reputation.
- Helped reinvent Tyco Healthcare as Covidien through internal and external messaging, digital communications, and launch materials.
- Contributed to integrated work for Partners In Health, Dunkin', CVS, Adidas/Rockport, Bank of America/Fleet, IBM/Cognos, John Hancock, Liberty Mutual, and Boston University.

Director, Brand Strategy / Senior Writer

Fitch (acquired by Landor)

Boston, Massachusetts | 1998–2001

- Directed research-informed positioning, naming, message architecture, identity strategy, and content for national and global organizations launching, repositioning, or integrating brands.
- Named and co-created the Razer gaming brand; co-led international strategy for SES Astra's acquisition of GE Americom; guided Gerber Childrenswear toward a more multicultural brand platform.
- Integral member of business-development teams, developing persuasive strategic narratives and executive presentations.

SELECTED NARRATIVE & CREATIVE WORK

Playwright, lyricist, book writer, and voice talent whose work explores race, identity, memory, family, and social change. *A Pint of Understanding*, a musical about racism in America, was selected for the New York Theatre Barn Choreography Lab and Oregon Shakespeare Festival Black Swan Lab and developed through the Dramatists Guild, Emerson College, Tufts University, and the National Center for Race Amity. Additional work includes the dramatic monologue *Synaptic Fires* (Brave New World Rep) and concept and text of *Circle of the First*, a commissioned choral work honoring First Peoples.

EDUCATION

Emerson College — M.F.A., Creative Writing, with distinction; Duprey Awards in screenwriting and poetry

Western New England University — B.A., English, cum laude; co-winner, Max Y. Litman Prize

HONORS, LEADERSHIP & TECHNOLOGY

Outstanding Achievement Award, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Committee, Arlington, Massachusetts; ABCD Racial Equity Working Group participant; member, GBH Business Council; awards include REBRAND 100, Hatch, NEDMA, and Communication Arts recognition.

Technology: Generative AI platforms (Claude, ChatGPT, Gemini, Jasper); Google Analytics; WordPress, Wix, Webflow, and Squarespace; Monday.com; Muck Rack; Hootsuite; email, and social analytics tools.