

NEXTGEN PA

Public Affairs Board

PRCA Public Affairs Board NextGen PA Elections 2020 Candidate statements

Yashshri Soman, Atticus Communications

A politics and gender policy nerd, I have worked in the public and private sector across four global capitals – London, Washington DC, New Delhi and Tallinn. I have conceptualised and implemented policy communications strategies, managed political and corporate risk and advised senior corporate leaders and policy-makers. I am passionate about leadership, advocating for more women in politics and spend 20% of my time every week mentoring girls from low-income backgrounds.

I am currently an Account Manager at Atticus Communications, a boutique public affairs agency. In this role, I lead the account for the firm's largest client and manage a team of two. I have devised and implemented communications and public affairs campaigns for Atticus' UK clients during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the client campaigns – to abolish business rates for 2020/21 for all sectors – was recently covered by the FT. Before joining Atticus Communications, I was a speechwriter for CBI's President, Lord Karan Bilimoria CBE DL, and also for an Indian Minister, Dr Shashi Tharoor MP (was also his media spokesperson). I have also advised the Estonian President's office on EU stakeholder engagement, developed public-private-partnership investment models at the Albright Stonebridge Group in Washington DC and worked with the senior leadership at McKinsey & Company on devising thought leadership strategies.

As a global citizen, I would like to be a part of the NextGen Public Affairs Committee to add value from my varied experiences and to help new entrants in understanding international public affairs. As a team member of a new, boutique consultancy, I also hope to represent the issues faced by start-up public affairs agencies and to help those who would like to venture into such firms.

As one of the few professionals born outside Europe, I had a challenging time entering into the UK public affairs industry. But thanks to an incredible set of mentors from the same industry, networking, and by gradually learning more about it, I managed to break into the UK public affairs agency space. If I am given an opportunity to be a Committee member, I hope to pass on learnings from these experiences to new entrants and to pay it forward as a mentor to those interested, especially from the BAME communities, in becoming public affairs professionals in the UK. I also intend to leverage my existing network to support the Committee in its efforts to increase diversity in UK public affairs.

Riccardo Robertson, Connect

My name is Riccardo Robertson and I am an Account Manager at Connect with nearly three years of experience in public affairs. Originally hailing from Scotland, I moved to London to throw myself into the world of public affairs.

Public affairs is a fast-paced, energetic and intense industry. The NextGen PA Committee is a great and very welcome industry initiative that succeeds in providing support, a network, a voice and an outlet for new practitioners.

I want to stand for the Committee in order to build on the last few years and take the group forward in the spirit of making it more than a series of networking nights. I want to see the Committee build on its success of organising great events by hosting events aimed at aspiring young public affairs practitioners where they can learn about public affairs and what it entails. Not only do I think this would place NextGen right at the heart of industry, I believe we have a duty to make it easy for people to learn about public affairs and access the industry. And if we were to host several of these events virtually, as I propose we do, it would ensure more under-represented people and people outside of London can join.

I want to see NextGen being the champion of inclusivity, diversity and social mobility in the industry by offering CV and application workshops for both new entrants and young professionals already in the industry. I also want to see NextGen become more of an industry leader in providing young practitioners with mentors, with events like mentoring speed-dating as well as creating online documents which provide tips on the best way to secure a mentor. All these initiatives would be in addition to widespread work encouraging ethical practices in the industry – something that should underpin all of the Committee's work.

Complimentary to these important events, I want to ensure the Committee's strong tradition in hosting networking nights and events with special advisers and parliamentarians continues.

Laura Cunliffe-Hall, Copper Consultancy

I'm Laura Cunliffe-Hall, an Account Manager at Copper Consultancy, specialising in public affairs, stakeholder engagement and reputation management for clients across the transport, energy and property sectors. I'm currently working on projects for MHCLG, local government and National Grid.

I'd love to join the NextGen PA Committee as I enjoy meeting new people and I'm a team player that enjoys getting people involved in a group activities. Outside of Copper, I'm a bit of a politics nerd; I'm extremely active in Labour and I'm the Communications Officer for the Young Fabians Environment Network. Joining the Committee would be a great way to fuse my personal and professional interests and use the platform to encourage people in public affairs to learn from each other and work together.

Moreover, I would like to use my role on the Committee to develop outreach initiatives to get more people engaged in Public Affairs and with NextGen PA, the PRCA and the wider industry. This would be particularly targeted at people that don't have existing connections or networks within the sector, and to encourage more diversity in Public Affairs, with more events targeted at women, people from the LGBTQ+ community and people from BAME communities.

Social media is a big part of my life and I'd be really happy working with the Committee to generate content and help run the NextGen PA social accounts. I'd love to support people beginning their Public Affairs careers and stand up for people entering the industry.

Josh Dell, DeHavilland

As Content Specialist at DeHavilland, I lead on creating bespoke material and opportunities to help public affairs professionals, very often those at early stages of their careers, to engage and establish relationships with Parliamentary and other stakeholders.

Whether running sessions with Parliamentary staff on how to make good Select Committee submissions or coordinating Q&A sessions with politicians, a significant proportion of my work is aligned with the NextGen PA Committee's aims of helping early stage professionals develop their skillsets, networks and confidence. To play a part in doing this at a wider-UK level is something I would go about in earnest if a member of the Committee.

An area of particular interest to me is engaging citizens from minority backgrounds in public affairs. My time spent in political engagement working at national democracy charity Bite The Ballot, coordinating nationwide voter engagement campaigns and seeking innovative ways to inspire those that felt politics has no role to play in their life, puts me in the position to actively and insightfully contribute to the Committee. Ensuring that plays a pivotal role in pushing the public affairs sector away from the 'pale, male, stale' label that it is often branded with, would be a core aim of my time spent on the Committee.

Finally, the cross-sectoral perspective that I bring as a public affairs professional working within a political intelligence organisation (a sub-sector within public affairs not represented within the Committee at present), leaves me well placed to bring a unique perspective to its work.

Emily Carter, DevoConnect

I am delighted to hear that NextGen PA are looking for new Committee members, I would like to be considered for the role.

DevoConnect is based in Manchester and I want to bring a Northern perspective to the table, get more involved in the PA world and encourage people 'up north' to engage with NextGenPA, the PRCA and the industry more generally.

I have worked for DevoConnect since 2018 as Campaigns and Business Manager, working across education, housing, transport and net zero through the lens of devolution. I previously worked as a parliamentary assistant in Westminster.

Jack Sansum, GK Strategy

I am currently a senior account executive at GK Strategy – and am keen to take up the Committee baton passed on from my now ex-colleagues Johnny Munro and Caitlin Wilkinson.

I have been at GK for just over two years and during my short time in the industry I have really enjoyed attending the events put on by the Committee. I have been interested in taking a more active role with NextGen for a while now and I see the current vacancies as a great opportunity to learn more about the industry, get a feel for how different agencies run, and meet young people in public affairs.

With being a particularly uncertain time for all sectors of the economy, I feel that it is now even more important for the NextGen Board to think about how best to support and represent young people in the industry. I have enjoyed the sessions the NextGen network have put on over the past couple of months, and am keen to bring my ideas and fresh thinking to the table as the industry adapts to the 'new normal' – whatever that may mean.

Izzy Pugh-Cook, Grayling

My name is Izzy Pugh-Cook and I am a recent addition to the Public Affairs industry, having joined Grayling as an Account Executive in January of this year from a background in FMCG, specifically sales and marketing of healthy snack brands.

With a Bachelors in Politics and International Relations from the University of Bath and a Distinction- level Masters in European Identity and Integration from the University of Amsterdam, politics and current affairs are my passion and I have fully embraced my transition into a Public Affairs environment – including the virtual means of operating that has fast become the new norm!

I am applying for a position on the NextGen PA Committee because I am excited by the opportunity to encourage others to join the Public Affairs world from a diverse range of professional, socio-economic, geographic, and ethnic backgrounds. The opportunity to widen knowledge of the industry, as well as opportunities to join it, to a more diverse range of backgrounds is of personal importance , and one I have already embarked on through involvement in the Diversity Action Group within Grayling.

The work done by NextGen PA regarding Women in Public Affairs is immensely exciting and demonstrates the dynamic and forward thinking Committee and events it offers. I believe there is therefore a natural opportunity to broaden this engagement strategy to encompass an even more diverse range of individuals and backgrounds, thereby promoting increased diversity within the Public Affairs industry, particularly among those just starting or considering starting their careers in this field. Through a position on the NextGen PA Committee, I would like to play a role in enabling this to come to fruition.

In the past few months I have run virtual events both for Grayling and for clients, and am aware of the mass of opportunities that networking in an online environment can offer, despite the obvious differences from the traditional means of doing so. I am excited to use this experience to enable widespread discussion of issues that are pertinent and topical both in the wider current affairs environment, and specifically within PA.

Sam Winter, Grayling

I'm Sam, a Senior Account Executive at Grayling. I joined Grayling in September 2019 as an Account Executive and have worked at Hanover Communications previously. I'd like to join the NextGen PA Committee to expand my network and share ideas and experiences with fellow PA professionals from across the industry. I'd also like to help organise events (when social distancing permits) and increase networking opportunities for people at the beginning of their PA careers.

Charlotte Williams, Grayling

I'd like to put myself forward for one of the five Committee spots that are available. I'm an Account Executive at Grayling, having joined the company 7 months ago. I'd like to join the Committee to meet new people and create a network within the industry. I'm also keen to throw myself at every opportunity at the beginning of my career and really get stuck into life in the PA industry. Having also recently attended a NextGen session on 'managing your anxious brain' and finding it really helpful, I'm eager to be involved in organising events of a similar ilk.

Overall, I believe this would be a great opportunity and a role I could bring enthusiasm to.

Victoria McNish, Interel

To provide a little background on myself, I have been a Consultant at Interel for the past year and before that spent 2 and a half years at Newington Comms as an AE, SAE and then AM. Before that I spent around 6 months interning for an MP in Parliament, and studied politics (no surprise there) at Durham.

Having been in the agency world for 3 and half years working at various levels in 2 agencies, I would be very keen to take part in the NextGen Comm and hope I could add value from my experiences, plus some fresh ideas to support the Group's aims. I have learnt so much from working with many wonderful people in the PA world and would love the opportunity to be move involved with the PRCA to help support others in the industry and spread the word about what we do!

There is much that needs to promote PA as a great career path and even more to diversify a very un-diverse industry and open up barriers to entry. In particular I'm wary of the fact that we work in a relatively unknown, and often misunderstood industry. While the term 'public affairs' is not widespread, the term 'lobbying' is and often invites a negative response. Rather than the perception that businesses only ever lobby to protect their interests, there needs to be a greater understanding that Government engagement with business is a crucial part of policy development and it would be wrong for decision makers not to do so.

I would be delighted to take part in the NextGen Committee and share my views on ways in which the PRCA can support young people in the industry progress through their careers (particularly as the PRCA is a great way to connect with each other), and how it can promote PA as a brilliant career path for all people, no matter what you studied, what opportunities you've had to date, or what your background is.

I can also assure you that I feel I am able to dedicated my time to this and be an active member!

I'll leave it there to save you from having to read much more, but please do get in touch if you want to hear anything further about why I would like to take part or any ideas I have. And thank you for the opportunity.

James Olney, Interel

My name is James – I'm a Public Affairs Executive at Interel UK, and have been in the industry for approximately 6 months. Prior to Public Affairs, I interned at a Digital Marketing Agency specialising in political content (and worked on the 2019 General Election), and in a marketing role at a high-growth Recruitment start-up. At Interel I work across a number of client accounts in the FMCG, Entertainment, Technology and Energy sectors, as well as part of the Marketing function. I hold a BA in History and Politics from Oxford University – where I was involved in a student political association and led it's contribution to the 2017 General Election, as well as managing the finances and organising events.

I want to stand for the Next Gen PA Committee because though I've only been in the industry for a short period, I'm loving my time here and want to help other young people early in their careers make the most of the opportunities open to them. I think it's important to recognise as well that though the best things about Public Affairs are the variety and intensity of the work we do, as well as the strong personalities we work alongside, these same factors can also make it a pressurised and difficult environment to begin your career in. I hear a lot about how things change in time, but I think it's absolutely crucial to have the voices of those at the very start of the journey authentically articulated by someone in that position so that the issues that people in their first year of practise can be identified and addressed from the viewpoint of those still amongst them - who don't have the comfort of knowledge about how things change as you advance.

For many people in the industry, this is an uncertain and anxious time – but for those new to the sector, juggling a public health emergency, commercial uncertainty and learning the fundamentals of the role is a particular challenge. I've got a long history of standing up for and supporting my peers – at University I was the most senior member of aforementioned political society to call out institutional sexism and was successful in a campaign to ban a notorious student dining club from Committee – and I'm keen to carry forward that passion for advocacy and solidarity into my professional career.

Ben Gascoyne, Madano Partnership

To quickly introduce myself, I'm an Account Director at Madano, an integrated communications consultancy that works in public affairs for the tech, healthcare and environment and energy sectors. We pride ourselves in taking on complex, purposeful challenges for our clients, often at the start of a journey themselves, and helping them to tell their story. We work with organisations we believe in – for example, we only work with energy companies pushing towards net zero.

I've worked in a range of roles and sectors in public affairs since 2012. I started my career with a paying internship with an agency in the property and infrastructure sector, then worked in-house for UCL, one of the UK's leading universities where I also helped to set up the UK's first accelerator programme and space for disabled entrepreneurs, before moving to Madano in 2020 to join its Technology team. I've been working for Madano for coming up to six months. Beyond that, I'm a keen runner living in North London, although I'm originally from Derby. Supporting Derby County has given me a healthy perspective on success, failure and personal growth.

I'm standing for a few reasons:

- I want to use my time and energy to make sure that my colleagues at Madano, a growing agency with many professionals in the first decade of their career, can engage in development and industry best practice.
- I also want to make sure I'm giving back my time to a sector that's given me a career. After 8 years in the industry and a number of really interesting and diverse roles in different sectors and settings, I'm really keen to share the best of what I have to offer, and to learn from others in turn.
- I also believe in what our sector does at its best. In my current role, and working previously with academics and innovators at UCL, I've seen communications and PA open doors and create opportunities for life changing ideas that would've been lost otherwise. We live in a busy, noisy world, and great public affairs and communications can help make deserving people heard.

Nick Jessup, Newington Communications

I would like to put my name forward for a position on the NextGen PA Committee. I am an Account Executive at Newington Communications, and have been working here since September 2019.

I would like to join the Committee because I think it would be a great opportunity for me to connect with and learn from people outside my immediate team and my organisation. While I've only been working in public affairs for a few months, I have already discovered that there is a large number of very talented people working in the industry, and I would like the opportunity to build stronger relationships with them. I am keen to build my network as much as possible and learn from the experiences of others who have faced similar career challenges.

I would seek to encourage the committee to be involved in more training activity specifically targeted at new members. I would also seek to encourage the committee to be involved in enhancing the diversity of the profession by using the group's influence to encourage firms to develop more inclusive internship and entry-level positions.

I think that I would bring great enthusiasm and energy to the committee and that I would be a good representative of the views of many who are new to the industry.

Joe Cooper, Newington Communications

As a brief introduction, I work as an Account Executive at Newington Communications, having joined the company early last year. Before Newington, I worked for the housing charity Shelter in a number of frontline roles, and in my spare time I'm heavily involved in campaigning with my local Labour Party in South West London.

I'm standing for the role because I'm passionate about making the industry open and welcoming to young professionals, as well as working to address some of the barriers that prevent others from joining too.

This is something I have already been working towards at Newington, where I have been leading on the creation of an internship scheme aimed at helping those from under-represented backgrounds into the industry. In order to support people from lower-income backgrounds, I was also able to successfully negotiate with senior management for the role to be paid at the London Living Wage along with the covering of travel expenses for those outside of London.

Sabine Tyldesley, Newington Communications

- I am a Senior Account Manager at Newington with over seven years' experience of working in public relations, including over five in public affairs, four of those agency-side.
- Public affairs being one of the toughest industries to get into and arguably be successful in, I am keen to join the Next Gen PA Committee to help create the best environment and support mechanisms for colleagues at all levels.
- I would like to support Next Gen PA do this by:
 - Building networks between hiring managers, education institutions, recruitment consultants and other industries to make recommendations and propose practical schemes to the PAB; such as encouraging formal and informal engagement with Alumni networks and careers services to inform and encourage applications. Having worked with many junior colleagues in particular over the years - mentored, trained and hired them - I think we have much more to do as an industry to be sure talent can be found, feel seen, learn and help make our profession better. This is not just for young new entrants but also people with non-conventional CVs and career switchers.
 - Having more inter-agency/organisational conversations about expectations in the workplace, such as expectations from recruits in a changing world (and think about industry standards for flexible working for example) but also use the network to share knowledge about best practice, training and skills as people rise through the ranks. Sharing this information will not give away trade secrets, instead it will make our profession better and our colleagues more educated to the collective benefit of all. This conversation should be had about mid-level professionals in particular who need more support as they are moving to become line managers themselves.
 - Reaching out more to colleagues about how they can be part of the PRCA and shape their industry, by stepping up outreach or membership referral schemes. Myself, I have not been involved in the PRCA or was much aware of its work until later in my career and can think of many friends in the industry

who might need a nudge understanding how they can take part. I want to help make this happen.

Joe Carton, Red Consultancy

By way of introduction, my name is Joe Carton and I am an Account Manager at the Red Consultancy, a strategic comms company based in Soho (well, in normal times at least). I have been working in their corporate affairs and tech team for the last year, having made the switch from Newington Communications in 2019. I was there for just under three years, and my days were split pretty evenly across corporate comms and public affairs. Before that - stretching back to the days of internships - I worked in the public affairs teams at Cohn and Wolfe and PB Consulting, and had a short stint at Frank PR.

Despite my current role being centred in the world of comms, I consider myself to be politically minded and enjoy keeping up to date with friends and ex-colleagues who work in and around Westminster - as well as reading day to day politics news / briefings (my current colleagues at Red like to poke fun at my love affair with lobbying / politics...).

There are **four** main reasons why I believe I would be an effective member of the NextGen PA team, and could add value to the committee. Broadly, these are:

- **I am a champion of comms and lobbying.** I understand the value of public affairs professionals. We've all heard sneers of 'special interest' groups, but I want to challenge these prejudices. I want to ensure that people recognise that in industry and business, senior decision-makers need timely, well-researched information and advice when making decisions that could affect millions of pounds of expenditure and the jobs of thousands of people. I like to point out to critics that there are public affairs professionals on all sides of important policy debates, so perhaps they only dislike some of us.
- **I am a 'child of consultancy'.** Without sounding too grandiose, agency / consultancy is what I know best. It has been my home for the last five years. This experience serves me well for understanding the challenges that our generation of colleagues face, and the opportunities that we would like to see more of.
- **I can help NextGen to grow.** Using my experience and contacts that I have built at Red (and in PR generally) I believe that I can appeal to a new audience and grow the popularity of NextGen events by tapping into a pool of people who might not have considered attending before. For example, people in PR - like those at Red - who enjoy politics but might not be aware of the full opportunities in public affairs. This could be beneficial to public affairs consultancies who are looking to grow their corporate / comms arm.

- **I believe in the personal and professional development of comms and public affairs practitioners.** Having spent time setting up and working on WebRoots Democracy (a youth-led think tank exploring the intersection of digital and politics) and Future Influencers (a networking group for those in politics, media and communications), I understand the benefits of working with young professionals to support their development and have seen the results first-hand. I would carry this belief and energy into my role on the committee, and would like to work with the team (and other organisations) to promote access to (and the importance of) industry qualifications to help develop young professionals.

Matthew Jackson, Stratagem

I wish to stand for the role of NextGen PA committee member. I'm a political consultant working with Stratagem (part of Connect Communications Group) and based in Belfast. I've been working in public affairs for just over two years having completed a Ph.D. in history and politics previously.

I would like to join the Committee to get to know the public affairs industry better, learn from others and provide a Northern Irish voice (where our divided political system makes for some interesting challenges!). I enjoy supporting others, including colleagues and peers, in their development, and this would be a great opportunity to do this while also developing my own consultancy skills. I think sharing ideas and different ways of working is really important as we try address not only historical challenges in society, but also those that have been presented to us during the current COVID-19 crisis and recovery.

Ollie Potter, Weber Shandwick

I'm Ollie, a PA Associate at Weber Shandwick, where I work mostly on infrastructure and sustainability.

In my free time (which I have a lot of now of course) I follow Arsenal religiously, while I'm also a big foodie, theatre and music fan. In normal times you'll probably find me in charity shops, trying new food across London or exploring new exhibitions and areas.

Politics wise I've always voted Labour, but only recently joined the party early last year when an end to Jeremy Corbyn's leadership seemed to be a possibility.

I would like to stand for the Committee because not only do I love public affairs and socialising, but I love organising and attending events.

I would really enjoy helping new public affairs professionals find their feet in the industry, especially in a time like this. I think especially as someone who is relatively new to the industry, I really appreciate the value of the events that organisations such as NextGen can put on, as they are an excellent way for new joiners to get advice and to expand their networks.

Mita Dhullipala, Weber Shandwick

I'd like to join the committee as I feel the work that you do is really valuable to the development of a new generation of public affairs professionals. I'd like to add some of my healthcare expertise as well as supporting the committee on more general activities. I believe we live in an activist era and public affairs is now more interesting than it has ever been - there is such an opportunity for young professionals. I'd love to be part of a collective journey as a part of NextGen PA.

Anderona Cole, Jisc

By way of an introduction, my name is Anderona Cole and I started working in the industry several months before completing a masters degree in Public Affairs and Lobbying in 2014.

Over the past six years, I worked for industry bodies, trade associations and on behalf of clients in an agency. I have a real passion for the future industry and ensuring that it better reflects society as a whole.

In 2019, the PRCA Public Affairs Census revealed that 79% of public affairs practitioners identify as White British, and 87% identify as British nationals. According to the results of the census, 10% of public affairs professionals are from a black or another minority ethnic background (BAME).

Alongside policy and public affairs work, I have spent the past 18 months or so working to make the video games industry diverse. During my tenure at the UK's games industry trade body, I spearheaded a programme of work which, amongst other initiatives, enabled the launch of the first ever data collection initiative that examined the makeup of the games industry.

If selected to play a role in the committee, I would dedicate my time and energy to ensuring ensure that it embarks upon meaningful initiatives to help evolve the careers of talent as well as attract the brightest and best, regardless of their ethnic background, to this brilliant industry.

Jeanmiguel Uva, Hanover

I look forward to providing support and a strong voice for new practitioners. Since the beginning of my careers two years ago, I've been able to participate in several NextGen events, ranging from the famous Christmas pub quiz (which we almost won...) to different networking events. I believe NextGen's biggest strengths have been the superb networking events it has provided to new practitioners. However, if elected, I would like to support the Committee to focus on three areas where I think we can have an important impact, both within our firms and in the wider industry:

1. **Training:** From a personal experience, the lack of relevant and timely training our firms and industry offers is fairly poor. This is certainly the case in comparison to other industries. As a Committee you have offered great training and coaching programmes, which should definitely continue. However, I think it is important that the Committee also proactively lobbies our respective firms to improve their own training programmes. Investing in our skills is critical for our professional development, and is something it can be done by surveying staff and providing effective and didactic training programmes. If elected, I would like to lead on this workstream.
2. **Diversity:** Being one of the few foreign nationals working in UK Public Affairs, I believe I can bring a fresh perspective to the pressing issues of diversity and inclusion our industry faces.

It is no secret that PA faces key challenges in this area, and despite the welcomed statement from the PRCA's Diversity Chair following BLM protests, I think more must be done on this space. Keeping pressure on industry leaders through time will be key to achieve this. As young professionals, we have the possibility to lobby for structural and cultural changes within our firms. While this will not change overnight, I think it should be at the forefront of the Committee's messaging.

3. **Outreach:** A key challenge I believe our industry faces is the lack of effective outreach our industry does. This creates a twofold problem: Firstly, it creates a misinformation policy, resulting in misconceptions on what Public Affairs entails and the type of work we do; secondly, it also results in failure to recruit talented young people from a wide array of backgrounds. Having done outreach for my former University, I've encountered that our industry is at times inaccessible, and as such face important challenges when recruiting young people. The Committee should lead this effort to help ensure the industry retains the best talent.

I am proud of being a Public Affairs professional. I believe that through our work we can be a force of good for our clients and wider society. I would love to continue this passion as part of the Committee, pushing standards up and ensuring our industry is well-trained, diverse and relevant to the world we live in.