

TERI FIRKINS

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CREATIVE DIRECTOR & TEAM BUILDER WITH HEART

Mission-driven creative leader with 15+ years building teams and brands that make a difference. I bring equal parts bold storytelling and operational discipline; **building the systems, culture, and workflows that let creative teams do their best work in service of causes that matter.** My career spans agency and in-house environments, with a consistent thread of using design, video, and integrated communications to move people to action. I lead with empathy, mentor with intention, and believe the best creative is both beautiful and accountable to results.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

CREATIVE DIRECTOR, ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT

HGA | 2017 – 2025

1,000+ Person National Architecture, Engineering, & Interior Design Firm

- Transformed a reactive 1-person unit into a **strategic 6-person Creative practice**; promoted 4 staff internally, maintained zero turnover, and recruited from BrandLab to bring emerging diverse talent into the team
- Managed the rollout of a **firm-wide brand refresh** by translating agency concepts into practical tools and personally training staff on brand adoption across regional offices
- Modernized brand operations by replacing fax-based procurement with a self-service Company Store and implementing tools and templates for document automation, **reducing ad-hoc design requests by 40%**
- Directed creative strategy for the *Climate Forward?* report; a landmark research collaboration with the University of Minnesota that identified critical gaps in A&E climate adaptation, was **cited by federal agencies**, and helped catalyze an industry shift toward future-projection climate data
- Created *Prickly Prompts* a **proprietary equity provocation card deck** that became a signature tool in HGA's equity and design practice; reprinted three times in its first year, adopted across all 12 offices, and featured at NOMA National Conference and AIA DesignDC
- Oversaw design of three annual Impact Reports; **print and interactive digital editions** tracking firm progress toward AIA 2030 and SE 2050 goals, measuring community engagement, equity, and diversity outcomes
- Reduced annual photography budget from \$1M+ to \$550K** by developing a proprietary 100-point scoring system for objective resource allocation

KEY IMPACT

CHANGED BEHAVIOR AT SCALE

48% reduction in teen traffic fatalities | 74% national Census participation rate | \$1.9B in taxpayer savings—creative work measured in lives and dollars, not just impressions

BUILT TEAMS THAT LAST—TWICE

Grew creative practices from scratch; 1 to 6 at HGA, 4 to 30 at Weber Shandwick

MOVED PEOPLE TO ACTION

6B+ earned media impressions | 17B Census impressions | 56M people reached through peer-to-peer advocacy

RECOGNIZED FOR WORK THAT MATTERS

Flame of Life Award | ARF David Ogilvy Gold | *PRWeek* Public Sector Campaign of the Year | SABRE | Silver Anvil

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

DESIGN IN SERVICE

Burroughs Community School, CloseKnit, Express Bike Shop, Girls Rock n Roll Retreat, Southwest Performing Arts

DEVELOPING THE NEXT GENERATION

AIGA MNtor, Art Buddies, Honors Mentor Connection, The BrandLab

SHOWING UP

Monarca Rapid Response Upstander Training, 2026

GROUP DESIGN DIRECTOR

Fast Horse | 2014 – 2017

30+ Person Integrated Creative Communications Agency

- Managed a tight creative team of 3 designers and 1 developer while collaborating closely with strategy, influencer, and account teams; **staying hands-on as senior designer**, art directing photo and video productions, and presenting creative directly to clients
- Built creative identity for Deluxe's *Small Business Revolution: Main Street*, a documentary storytelling and community grant distribution (\$500K per season) that drove **1M unique visitors in year one, generated 6B+ earned media impressions**; Gold SABRE and *PRWeek* Best Content Marketing
- Designed the brand system, website, and materials for MPR's *Music Makes Us Whole*, a digital storytelling engine that **unified 30+ partner organizations under a single advocacy platform** and facilitated direct constituent-to-school-board communications, helping shift music education from discretionary to protected in districts across Minnesota
- Led brand strategy and creative direction for the Minneapolis Parks Foundation rebrand; shifting MPF from traditional nonprofit aesthetics to a fluid topographical identity; the brand **supported \$18M+ in fundraising** and remains the Foundation's identity today

DESIGN DIRECTOR, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT

Weber Shandwick | 2005 – 2013

4,500+ Person Global Public Relations & Communications Agency

- Built the Creative Strategies practice from scratch; **scaling from 4 to 30 professionals and generating \$1M+ in new annual revenue** through expanded digital and storytelling services
- Served on Senior Leadership and Global Digital Leadership teams, driving agency-wide innovation in integrated digital strategy
- Designed digital experiences for Allstate Foundation's *Keep the Drive* across eight years; **peer-to-peer campaigns across 300+ high schools** that shifted the category from scare tactics to student-led activism; **contributed to a 48% reduction in teen traffic fatalities and 29% drop in aggressive driving behaviors**; *PRWeek* Public Sector Campaign of the Year
- Led creative for the U.S. Army's *Army Strong Stories*; the Pentagon's first unfiltered soldier-blogging platform; **1M+ site visits, 250% year-over-year growth**, exceeded recruitment targets; *PRWeek* Best Use of Social Media/Digital, Gold SABRE for Public Affairs
- Managed creative for the U.S. Treasury's *Go Direct* and *Ready.Save.Grow.* digital initiatives which helped move unbanked populations to electronic payments through **1,800+ grassroots partners, reducing paper check volume 80%, and saving taxpayers \$1B+**
- Produced 15 culturally targeted partner toolkits for the 2010 U.S. Census *It's In Our Hands*; accessible PDFs for faith-based, African American, Latino, and other communities; campaign generated 17 billion impressions, **74% national mail-back rate, \$1.9B in taxpayer savings**; ARF David Ogilvy Gold for best multicultural campaign in the U.S.

SELECT CLIENTS

CONSUMER & LIFESTYLE

Coca-Cola, General Mills, Land O'Lakes, Yoplait

CORPORATE & INDUSTRIAL

Allstate, Cargill, Deluxe, General Motors, Honeywell

EDUCATION & NONPROFIT

CARE, IEEE, Minneapolis Parks Foundation, Minnesota Public Radio, University of Minnesota

GOVERNMENT

U.S. Army, U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Treasury

HEALTHCARE & WELLNESS

American College of Surgeons, Blue Cross Blue Shield, TRIA Orthopaedic

TOOLS & TECHNOLOGY

DESIGN

Adobe Creative Cloud (Illustrator, InDesign, Photoshop, After Effects, Premiere), Canva

AI TOOLS

Claude, Gemini, Midjourney, Topaz

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Asana, Trello, Workfront

Other: Google Suite, Microsoft Office, WordPress, Social Media

HOW I WORK

LEAD BY DOING

Staying hands-on while holding the strategic view

MAKE COMPLEX IDEAS HUMAN

From climate data to equity frameworks to public health

DESIGN SYSTEMS, NOT JUST PIECES

Brand, operations, workflows that actually get used

EDUCATION

University of Minnesota, Twin Cities Bachelor of Arts Design Communication