

Practitioner Profile
By: Isabella Porbe

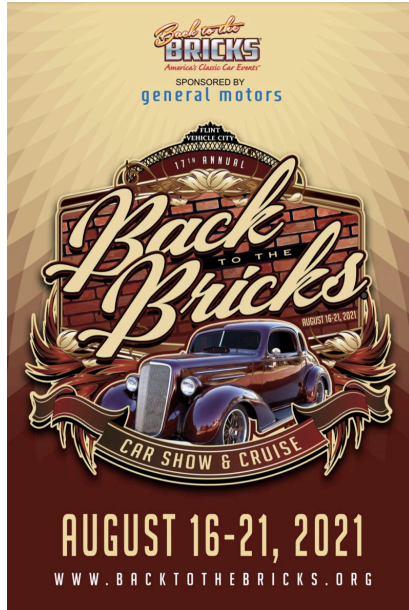
A Public Relations Professional Making a Difference

Have you ever walked around town and wondered who keeps up with maintaining the flowers, the local events, and small businesses? In downtown Flint, Kiara May takes care of it all. Kiara is the executive director of the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) in the city of Flint. She has recently switched PR paths for better opportunities to be involved with the community, putting her skills to use. During an exclusive interview, Kiara explains her PR position and what her duties include at the DDA:



Kiara May pictured above

Q: You recently opted out of a PR position at Bedrock, the real estate company in Detroit, and took up this new position working with the city of Flint. What were your objectives at Bedrock and how do they differ from your current position at the DDA being a non-profit *and* federal entity?



Back to the Bricks 2021 Event Flyer

A: Yes, I worked at Bedrock for about 7 years and sought out more opportunities to grow. Being part of the tenant experience team I collaborated with other businesses to increase the public community's foot traffic around our buildings and proposed such ideas as marketing schemes, but there were limitations. Our company had a budget for everything, certain guidelines were set, and all ideas or events had to be signed off by multiple people, which often took more than 3 weeks just for the proposal to be approved. I felt that I was a champion at my job and I couldn't progress any further than I already had. "I maxed out", so I left and joined the DDA of Flint. I thought of it as "the next layer of Super Mario". Four months later I'm raising money for the city, I've grown, and "here, I'm the boss" working closely with the mayor. "I'm now the champion of champions,".

Q: Since your position doesn't conform to a routine week-to-week schedule, what has your past week looked like?

A: Tuesday through Friday I was networking with my team at a conference and a national Placemakers dinner & happy hour to outreach and collaborate with various PR professionals. Although my work doesn't end on a Friday, I'm constantly working to brainstorm ideas, decks, and writing grants that could raise money and contribute to the city of Flint and the community. The DDA has 4 main pillars that we focus on: city beautification, parking and mobility, community engagement, and economic redevelopment of the city and it's small businesses.

Q: Flint is a niche market, what is your favorite aspect of your occupation within the city?

A: Involvement. I love that I am so involved with an accessible community. I can now plan and put on an event within the matter of days.

Q: On the other hand, what is the most stressful aspect?

A: Gaining trust of other companies, entities, and individuals, especially because of what Flint has gone through with the water crisis. People in the area have become hesitant on trusting others. But "I pick and choose my battles", balancing the best of both worlds.

Q: Has your education prepared you for working in a PR position? How?

A: "Hightschool, no. College was more insightful. I did not have the best education in DPS" (Detroit Public Schools), but it pushed me to deal with a lot of diverse people "which taught me patience and resiliency,". The skills I learned through my hardships made me who I am today and those skills prepared me to interact with various types of people.

Q: How do you keep in touch with the current PR industry? Is the use of social media involved?

A: I strive for more community involvement and networking with individuals, groups, and small businesses. Currently, we're not utilizing much of a social media take on our objectives right now, but "I have plans, and they are very important.".

Q: How important is writing, being the executive director of the DDA?

A: Very important, one of the main responsibilities I'm in charge of is writing grants to raise money for different causes- small businesses, events, local beautification, etc.

Q: What has surprised you the most about generally working in PR? It could be anything.

A: "Sometimes I can't believe I'm doing this! I am the first African American woman to hold this executive director position, which shocks me based on the world we live in today. I'm making history for myself, my family, and my community. Flint also doesn't know how much power they have, I guess I didn't expect such a limited mindset in this area because of what they've gone through as a community, but no one really talks about the water crisis here anymore."

Q: Is there anything you wish you had knowledge of going into and starting a career in PR? What advice would you give your younger self?

A: "Be prepared and learn time management. You're amazing; you're impacting the community. Stand your ground and trust your gut."

Q: If you could change anything about what you do, what would it be?

A: A larger staff or team would be appreciated to accommodate such a big job. I'd like to create more functions and sponsorship opportunities with more national companies as well.

Q: Do you partake in any professional national or international PR organizations like PRSA or IABC? Have you heard of these organizations before?

A: Yes, the DDA has made connections with Gus Maker, Footlocker, the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, Back to the Bricks, and the national Placemakers.

Kiaira May takes care of everything that requires maintenance, funding, or just some extra love in the community and city of Flint. Advising, networking, and planning collaboratively is tedious, time consuming work, but she adores her job and the responsibilities it entails. Being the executive director of the DDA, Kiaira utilizes multiple aspects of public relations skills everyday, making connections with small businesses, her peers, and most importantly, the Flint community.

Interview was conducted by: Isabella Porbe

*This interview was edited for the purposes of length and clarity, answers are not exact unless in quotation marks.