

**Founding Executive Director  
Partnership for College Completion**

**Chicago, Illinois**

**Mission Statement:**

*To catalyze and champion policies, systems and practices that ensure all students - particularly low-income, first-generation students - graduate from college and achieve their career aspirations.*

**Vision Statement:**

*The Chicago region graduates significantly more students from college prepared for meaningful careers and civic leadership and is a model of postsecondary degree attainment for the nation.*

**The Search**

The Partnership for College Completion (PCC) seeks a founding Executive Director to launch and lead a new organization aimed at advocating relentlessly to improve 2- and 4-year college access, persistence and graduation rates in the Chicago region. Based in Chicago, the founding Executive Director will report to the PCC Board of Directors, comprised of Chicago-area government, business, education, civic and nonprofit leaders. Preferably, the Executive Director will assume the role in late Summer or early Fall, 2016. This process is highly informed by the recommendations found in a recently released Concept Paper, [\*Prioritizing College Completion In and Around Chicago\*](#), and is supported by an Investors Committee and Advisory Committee. Background materials, including the Concept Paper and a list of members of the Committees can be found at <https://myforefront.org/college-and-career-access-persistence-and-success-ccaps>.

Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm with expertise in higher education, K-12 education and public policy, has been retained to assist in the recruitment of the Executive Director. After extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and drawing heavily on the Concept Paper, this document has been prepared to describe the Partnership, the challenges and opportunities facing the inaugural Executive Director and the personal and professional characteristics that the ideal candidate should possess. All applications, inquiries and nominations, which will remain highly confidential, should be directed to Isaacson, Miller as indicated at the end of this document.

## **The Current Context**

Over the last decade, both high school and college graduation rates for students throughout the Chicago region have increased. According to the University of Chicago's Consortium on School Research (<http://toandthrough.uchicago.edu/>), "Chicago's college-attainment almost doubled between 2006 and 2014, with its degree attainment index increasing from 9 percent to 17 percent in less than a decade. Nationally, only 18 percent of all public high school freshmen take a straightforward path to a four-year college and earn their bachelor's degrees, meaning Chicago now has one of the highest college-attainment rates of any major urban center in the country."

While the region has seen increases in degree attainment, the current attainment levels do not match student aspirations or labor market needs. Based on conversations with over 100 regional and national stakeholders in late 2015, stakeholders believe that *"Now is the time to put in place the leadership and infrastructure needed to champion targeted strategies and approaches to increase college access and completion rates for the Chicago region."*

## **The Role of the Partnership for College Completion**

The Partnership for College Completion will be a leading voice for college success in the Chicago region. It will work to build relationships with 2- and 4- year colleges and universities in and around Chicago and it will partner with other stakeholders to advance strategies that support student success in college and beyond. Based on priorities identified through previous planning phases and information gathered from leaders of similar initiatives nationally, there is consensus that The Partnership for College Completion should:

- Identify priority strategies, key systems and institutional changes needed to increase college access, college completion and successful transition to careers in and around Chicago and advocate for necessary changes.
- Synthesize existing evidence; identify gaps and potential partners to address those gaps; work with K-12, higher education and other stakeholders to conduct necessary research and develop solutions; and ensure that advocacy efforts and policy recommendations are informed by the most current research.
- Proactively engage with employers and business leaders to ensure stakeholders operating in the postsecondary access and success space understand current and future employment needs and promote alignment between college and career pathways.
- Inform local and national media, policymakers, students and families of issues and opportunities related to undergraduate access, persistence and completion and celebrate promising practices and bring attention to successes.

- Optimize resources and help align and support college access and completion initiatives regionally; serve as a thought partner to stakeholders regionally and nationally; and disseminate knowledge and information widely.

As a result of the Partnership for College Completion's efforts, stakeholders anticipate the following outcomes:

- The challenges and barriers that students face as they consider and pursue college are understood and widely communicated, and innovative strategies for addressing those challenges are developed. For example, students, families and mentors should have access to the information and resources they need to help students achieve their college and career aspirations.
- Undergraduate success is prioritized as a regional issue by civic leaders, policy makers, the media and K-12 and higher education administrators. For example, board and senior-level administrative champions for undergraduate success are identified from regional colleges and those colleges commit to adopting new, best-practice strategies to ensure students persist and graduate with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in their chosen profession.
- College enrollment, persistence and graduation rates in two- and four-year colleges and universities in and around Chicago dramatically increase without changes to access (i.e. recruiting higher qualified students).

### **The Founding Executive Director**

The Investors Committee, the Advisory Committee and the Board of Directors seeks a founding Executive Director who has the energy and passion to shape a new organization that will play a leadership role in improving Chicago-area student outcomes through 2- or 4 year degree attainment and fostering an environment where future students will succeed.

Successful candidates will have a demonstrated record of visionary leadership, managerial success and fiscal responsibility in a non-profit, the public sector, or business. The founding Executive Director should be a thought partner with the Board of Directors to define short-, medium-, and long-term goals and outcomes for the organization. In addition, the Executive Director will need to set an agenda for the region and develop measures and metrics to track and report progress.

### **Budget**

The organization aims to have three years of funding at \$900,000/year raised by the time a founding Executive Director starts; \$620,000/year has already been committed (as of

April 1, 2016) with an additional \$200,000-300,000/year expected during the first year of operations. This budget takes into account a small leadership team as well as operating expenses. As the Partnership for College Completion becomes more established and the scope of work is clearly defined, a more accurate budget will need to be developed and additional fundraising may be needed.

### **The Ideal Candidate**

While no one candidate may have all the personal and professional characteristics listed below, the ideal candidate will be a dynamic leader who embodies:

- A demonstrated commitment and passion for the mission of increasing undergraduate access, persistence and completion.
- A relentless focus on student-centered goals and outcomes and an orientation towards data and evidence-based decision making.
- Experience leading, inspiring and supporting change across large, diverse, cross-sector organizations and constituencies.
- An appreciation of the historical context of racial and class disparities in undergraduate access and completion as well as a firmly held belief that all students have the capacity to succeed in college.
- A proclivity towards working with community partners with humility, and an eagerness to spotlight partners' successes, even at the expense of personal recognition.
- Experience developing systems of communication and decision-making that encourage participation, creativity and innovation.
- A well-honed ability to anticipate and analyze challenges, define problems and objectives, recognize options and opportunities and formulate rapid solutions with a clear understanding of inherent risks and implications.
- A deep understanding and aptitude for working on policy issues surrounding college completion.
- A proven orientation to innovation and a willingness to take risks, as well as curiosity and courage to seek out new ideas, approaches and perspectives.
- A track record of taking research findings and developing them into compelling and effective policies in the field.

- An excellent communicator able to be the public face and voice of the organization.
- An ability to interact diplomatically and convincingly with strong sector leaders on highly sensitive and/or politically controversial issues.
- A commitment towards the optimization of existing resources towards advancing the mission.
- An adept manager of people and projects, able to coach and mentor staff while balancing long-term personal development goals with the achievement of near-term, ambitious results.
- An ability to work with a high-powered Board.
- A bachelor's degree is required; an advanced or terminal degree in a relevant field is preferred but not required.

Although fundraising will not be a primary focus for the founding Executive Director during the first few years of her/his tenure, the successful candidate must have the capacity and drive to develop financial resources for the organization.

## **TO APPLY**

Review of nominations and applications will begin immediately and will continue until the position is filled. For optimal consideration, please submit applications by May 16, 2016. All inquiries, nominations/referrals, and applications (including resumes and letters of interest responding to the position challenges and objectives outlined above) should be sent electronically and in confidence to:

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URL: [www.imsearch.com/5768](http://www.imsearch.com/5768)  
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*The Partnership for College Completion is committed to an inclusive work environment and welcomes a diverse pool of candidates in this search.*