



Executive Director
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

[Research for Action](#) (RFA) is a Philadelphia-based, national nonprofit research organization that conducts research to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for traditionally underserved P20W (preschool through postsecondary education into workforce) students and the policies, practices, institutions, and systems that serve them. For 30 years, RFA’s research has demonstrated a commitment to contributing knowledge to the field to improve programmatic and policy decision-making at local, state, and national levels, that improves access to high-quality education for all and addresses systemic racism through advancing equity in education.

RFA’s approach—spanning qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods, as well as timely, actionable policy research—is tailored to meet the needs of clients, partners, and the field. RFA seeks to equip policy makers, administrators, communities, and partner organizations with the information and recommendations they need to take action and create change. Across all of its core content areas, preschool through postsecondary education, out-of-school time, workforce development, and juvenile justice institutions, among others, RFA conducts rigorous, cutting-edge, responsive research and evaluation studies that employ approaches to ensure careful understanding of context and nuance. RFA also recognizes the importance of reflecting the community through its research. With the recent addition of a full-time Director of Community Engagement position, RFA seeks to use its research to engage the community and intentionally connect those community voices in both its approach and outcomes.

RFA now seeks nominations and applications for an **Executive Director (ED)** to lead a dedicated [staff](#) and partner with a committed volunteer [Board of Directors](#) in the organization’s next phase of growth and achievement. The ED will develop and lead a strategic planning process to position RFA to respond to the evolving and complex needs of students, families, educators, schools, communities, and policymakers. The Executive Director will inspire and lead a diverse team with shared commitment to racial and social justice. S/He/They will shepherd the work to ensure that RFA’s external commitment to using research as a tool to identify and address systemic inequities in education is reflected in its research products and public reports, as well as its internal organizational systems and culture.

This search is being led by [NPAG](#), a national executive search firm. Application instructions can be found at the end of this document.

ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

RFA has a nearly 30-year history of conducting robust research and actionable guidance on the most pressing educational issues of our time. RFA is unique in that our knowledge of the field of education is not purely academic. We take pride in weaving strong methodological and content expertise with real-life experience as parents, teachers, school board members, education policymakers, lawyers, district administrators, educational advocates, faculty members, and teacher trainers. Our knowledge and experience ensure that our work reflects a deep understanding of the educational and systemic contexts that shape student experience. RFA's mixed-methods research is grounded in its mission to make education systems and programs more equitable, effective, and accessible.

RFA was founded in 1992 with a commitment to conducting education research that explored the complexities of education reform initiatives in Philadelphia and provided education stakeholders with common-sense research to inform their initiatives. Over its first 15-plus years, RFA produced seminal research that shaped urban education initiatives locally and nationally. RFA has continued to build on that strong tradition.

Since 2009, RFA has experienced five-fold growth. Over the past 10 years, RFA has added robust quantitative research capacity to complement its qualitative expertise and expanded funding to establish a diverse portfolio of projects to large, multi-year, multi-site projects with funding from major Federal agencies and national foundations.

This period of growth has resulted in creating policy initiatives such as the Pennsylvania Clearinghouse for Education Research (PACER), designed to respond to emerging education debates and discussions with nonpartisan, rigorous policy research and analysis. RFA's PACER has produced more than 30 briefs, yielding dozens of op-eds, in-depth media coverage in newspapers and radio broadcasts, Twitter chats, webinars, conference presentations, and briefings with state and local policymakers and education policy stakeholders.

In 2014, RFA launched the Philadelphia Education Research Consortium (PERC) to provide a collaborative research agenda on some of the city's most pressing education issues. PERC's research has directly informed the School District of Philadelphia's decision-making on a number of pressing topics, such as improving graduation rates by focusing on the 9th grade experience and reducing absenteeism.

Currently, RFA has increased its focus on equity by developing and implementing anti-racist research and organizational practices to directly address structural racism embedded in U.S. education. We are actively increasing RFA's capacity to engage community stakeholders throughout the research process as it makes decisions about how to conduct and disseminate research to bridge the existing divide between researchers and communities.

A sampling of current research and evaluation studies from RFA's extensive P20W portfolio include:

- A federally funded randomized control trial (RCT) measuring the impacts of an early literacy curriculum in Broward County, Florida;
- A foundation-funded RCT measuring the efficacy of a postsecondary completion coaching model in Tennessee's community colleges;
- Multi-state implementation research on K-12 personalized, competency-based learning policies in Arizona, Ohio, North Dakota and South Carolina;

- A multi-year, multi-city evaluation of high quality out-of-school arts programming in Atlanta, Austin, Orlando, and New York City;
- Foundation-funded evaluations of statewide postsecondary policies focused on increasing racial equity in Massachusetts and Virginia and re-skilling/up-skilling adult learners displaced from their jobs by the COVID-19 economic downturn in Colorado, Michigan, Texas, and Virginia.

For more information about Research for Action’s project work and methodological expertise, please visit: <https://www.researchforaction.org/work/overview/>.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FACING THE NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In close partnership with the RFA Board and staff, the new Executive Director will develop and lead RFA’s next strategic planning process to define the next phase of the organization’s future. The new Executive Director will engage the following opportunities and challenges:

Vision and Leadership

The ED will bring a broad field-level perspective on the critical and emerging trends, priorities, and policies in education research and its connections to practice, policy, and communities. The ED will create new opportunities for RFA by identifying and pursuing new projects and funding that build upon RFA’s profile and reputation as a field leader and trusted source of high-quality, actionable research. The new ED will bring strong networks and a public profile as a research thought leader and content expert, speaker, writer, and/or policymaker and a desire to raise RFA’s profile as a leader and field-builder. S/He/They will bring bold vision, capacity for leadership, and profound personal and professional commitment to deepening RFA’s focus on learning and action to support racial equity, diversity, inclusion, and sustained awareness of how dynamics of power and privilege affect educational outcomes, the institutions, and policies that serve students and RFA itself.

Culture and Team Leadership

The ED will support an inclusive and supportive team culture that values transparency and consistent communication. S/He/They will demonstrate a sensitivity to the work environment in which RFA staff is currently operating (a combination of virtual and hybrid), while balancing the realities of fast-paced project- and client-driven work. The ED will lead staff and board through intentional and internally reflective work required to move toward becoming an anti-racist research organization. As a leader and culture contributor, the ED will work proactively to build trust, cohesion, safe/brave space, and opportunities for staff to do their best work individually and collectively while still meeting RFA’s business goals and objectives.

Organizational Management

The new Executive Director will manage a \$5 million annual budget and lead a 30-35 person staff. The ED will partner with senior staff to ensure that organizational structures, processes, and support systems across finance, technology, HR, communications, and other core functions are managed effectively, efficiently, and equitably, and are continuously well-aligned to strategy and vision.

Partnership Building and Business Development

The ED will bring a significant track record in fundraising from a broad array of public and private resources, including major, multi-year grants and contracts from national funders. The ED will continue to build strategic collaborations with complementary organizations to leverage and extend RFA’s portfolio and competitiveness. The ED will also cultivate partnerships with key stakeholders at local, state, and national levels, (including philanthropic foundations, nonprofit partners and other clients, schools, school districts,

postsecondary institutions and systems, researchers, state and Federal agencies, and policymakers) across the field of education research, both in Pennsylvania and nationally. The ED will bring skill in crafting compelling project proposals and approaches that distinguish RFA as a field leader and innovator and will have a creative and discerning talent for assessing potential new opportunities. To support a vision for growth, the ED will both build on existing relationships with key funders and clients and actively identify and cultivate new client partnerships aligned with RFA's mission.

Board Development and Engagement

The ED will thoughtfully engage board members as strategic partners and key advisors in the work of RFA both internally and externally, effectively leveraging their diverse personal and professional backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences to inform the strategic direction and growth of RFA and its continued financial strength and reputation for field leadership and outstanding work.

QUALIFICATIONS OF THE IDEAL CANDIDATE

The new Executive Director will demonstrate a deep commitment to contributing knowledge to the field of education. While no one candidate will embody all the qualifications enumerated below, the ideal candidate will possess many of the following professional and personal abilities, attributes, and experiences:

Connection to Mission

- Deep commitment to the broad field of education research with relevant experience and expertise in early education, K-12 education, postsecondary education, out-of-school time, and/or related fields.
- Personal and professional commitment to advancing racial equity, diversity, inclusion, and sustained awareness of the impact of privilege and power dynamics on educational outcomes.
- Demonstrated experience connecting education research to effective change in policy and practice at local, state, and national levels.
- Fluency in evaluation and research methodologies and high-level understanding of the development of a broad range of sophisticated research studies.

Organizational Leadership

- At least 10-15 years of progressive leadership experience in a research setting, nonprofit organization, policy arena, or other relevant context.
- Organizational management experience in finance, fundraising, and project management for effective development and stewardship of resources.

Partnership & Business Development

- Interpersonal and relational savvy to authentically build external relationships with funders, policy-makers, partners, and communities to collaboratively advance shared goals.
- Strategic and significant fundraising track record to effectively cultivate and sustain relationships with mission-aligned private and public funders at local, state, and national levels.

Cultural Leadership & Management Style

- Deep personal commitment to advancing racial equity, diversity, and inclusion; ability and willingness to self-reflect and lead challenging conversations around racial equity in the field and within the organization.

- Experience creating internal practices that support and advance equity, diversity, and inclusion within an organization.
- A collaborative, collegial, and inclusive style and a proven track record and commitment to mentoring and coaching staff and building internal leadership; a management approach that fosters respect, teamwork, and open communication.
- Strong communication skills with the ability to connect and inspire across stakeholders.
- Proven experience leading an organization or team during a time of transformative change.

Board Engagement & Development

- Demonstrated experience leveraging the strengths and assets of a volunteer board to co-create the organization's strategic and resource development.
- Demonstrated understanding of nonprofit board governance models and communication best practices, and a commitment to building a diverse and effective board that fosters dialogue across perspectives.

COMPENSATION

The expected total compensation range is \$210,000-240,000, commensurate with experience, plus benefits.

TO APPLY

This search is being led by [Allison Kupfer Poteet](#), [Cara Pearsall](#), and [Catherine Seneviratne](#) of [NPAG](#). Due to the pace of this search, candidates are strongly encouraged to apply as soon as possible. Candidates may submit their cover letter, outlining their interest and qualifications, along with their resume via NPAG's [candidate portal](#).

Cultivating a diverse and inclusive team is an essential component of RFA's commitment to advance equity. Candidates of all backgrounds are strongly encouraged to apply.