

Position Description

Position Title: Vice President – Education Philanthropy
Division: Education Philanthropy
Department: Education Philanthropy
Reports To: President and Chief Executive Officer
Last Updated: December 2022

Who We Are

Ascendium Education Group (Ascendium) has helped millions of learners pursue postsecondary education since 1967, when it was formed to help fulfill the promise of the landmark Higher Education Act of 1965. Over the years, Ascendium has grown to become the nation’s largest federal student loan guarantor, providing information, tools and counseling to help millions of borrowers nationwide avoid default and keep the door to re-enrollment open. We guarantee federal student loans, conceive and develop innovative products and services that support student success and loan repayment, and invest in studying and improving postsecondary education and workforce training practices through our philanthropy.

As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, net proceeds from Ascendium’s guaranty and other operations are used to fund [Ascendium’s philanthropy](#). The philanthropy team is comprised of program, grants management, and learning and impact staff who all have a shared commitment to advancing our mission. As a national funder, our mission is to elevate opportunities for learners from low-income backgrounds so they can achieve postsecondary educational and career success. Our grantmaking focuses on transforming systems of postsecondary education and workforce so they can support low-income populations, especially those in historically underrepresented groups: first-generation students, incarcerated adults, rural community members, students of color and veterans. The philanthropy team currently makes grants in four focus areas: Remove Structural Barriers to Success, Streamline Key Learner Transitions, Expand Postsecondary Education in Prison, Support Rural Postsecondary Education and Workforce Training. Across our four focus areas, our grantmaking supports innovative ideas, the creation of an evidence base, and the expansion and replication of effective practices.

Purpose of Position

The Vice President – Education Philanthropy (Vice President) leads the execution of Ascendium’s national philanthropy strategy. Working closely with a leadership team consisting of the Directors of Education Grantmaking, Grants Management and Learning & Impact, the Vice President oversees the operationalization of an annual grantmaking budget in excess of \$100 million. The Vice President serves as a key strategic advisor and thought partner to the President and Chief Executive Officer.

Essential Functions

1. Oversee the development of all grant recommendations that go to the Board of Directors, ensuring alignment with Ascendium’s strategy and adherence to policies and procedures.
2. Working with the leadership team, develop annual objectives and key results to advance Ascendium’s philanthropic strategy.
3. Oversee the development of grantmaking strategies, embedding diversity, equity and inclusion best practices.
4. Oversee the deployment of learning and impact practices to support Ascendium’s continuous assessment and refinement of its ways of working.
5. Oversee the continuous refinement of grants management systems to ensure efficiency, grantee satisfaction and compliance with policies and procedures.

6. Provide direction, mentoring and support to the leadership team in a way that results in a high-performing team culture.
7. Oversee the recruitment, hiring and training processes for the division.
8. Working with the leadership team, oversee the implementation of employee growth and professional development, including quarterly staff retreats.
9. Develop and manage the division's annual budget.
10. Develop relationships and partnerships with postsecondary education and workforce training providers, intermediaries, researchers, other funders, and governmental and private sector partners.
11. In collaboration with the Vice President – Strategic Communications, oversee communications strategies and initiatives to both position Ascendium as a thought leader in the field and to highlight its grantmaking internally and externally.
12. Identify and develop opportunities to convene grantees, funders and other stakeholders to support learning and field building.
13. Other related duties as assigned.

Education/License/Certification/Experience Requirements

- Knowledge/experience equivalent to a bachelor's degree in philanthropy, social sciences, education, business or a related field.
- 10-15 progressive years of experience in grantmaking and/or experience with best practices to increase postsecondary degree/credential completion leading to increased economic mobility.
- Valid driver's license.

Knowledge and Skills Required for Position

- Using data from previous grantmaking, information from the field, and the annual budget and staffing plan, develop and oversee the operationalization of a strategic plan.
- Excel at both strategic and operational thinking.
- Manage a team of professionals in a way that supports their growth and development.
- Possess excellent written and verbal communication skills that are adaptable to a wide range of audiences.
- Demonstrate a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.
- Understand the landscape of postsecondary education and workforce training providers, including postsecondary institutions, training providers, intermediaries, researchers, policy makers and funders.
- Display interpersonal skills exemplified by initiative, courtesy, flexibility, diplomacy, positive attitude and professionalism.
- Develop tools, practices and processes to promote strategic learning in support of continuous improvement and growth of team capacity for deepening impact as a funder.
- Possess the ability to develop and maintain strong working relationships with and among a diverse group of stakeholders.
- Demonstrate comfort with ambiguity and the ability to adapt to a fast-paced, continually evolving work environment.

Work Location & Travel

- This position will be based in Ascendium's Madison, Wisconsin, headquarters.
- Some travel required. Travel may include going to conferences, stakeholder convenings and site visits to grantees and other partners/potential partners.