

Leverage your research experience, evaluation skills, and expertise in the fields of postsecondary education and workforce training to inform and strengthen our grantmaking. We're looking for three Senior Learning and Impact Officers to join our growing philanthropy team.

We're currently engaged in refreshing our grantmaking strategies, which will launch in early 2025. While we'll maintain many of our current grantmaking priorities and goals, these new strategies deepen our ability to learn and build evidence across specific areas of postsecondary education and workforce training reform. As a Senior Learning and Impact Officer, you'll lead strategy-aligned grantmaking in research and evaluation and play a key role in supporting learning and evidence building, working within one of the three following strategies.

- **Expand:** Create more options for learners to engage in postsecondary education or workforce training that provides a path to living-wage employment in high-growth, high-demand fields.
- **Support:** Strengthen systems of academic and non-academic support and redesign structures to help learners navigate and succeed in postsecondary education and workforce training.
- **Connect:** Connect and align systems to ensure all learning counts towards credentials with labor market value and that learners do not experience dead ends.

These positions are based at our state-of-the-art headquarters in Madison, Wisconsin. Relocation support will be considered for individuals outside the Madison area. You'll have a hybrid schedule, generally working in the office three days a week and remotely two days a week. You'll also have opportunities to travel to conferences, convenings, and other events.

The salary range for these positions is \$115,000-\$160,000.

As part of your application, please include a one-page cover letter.

Job Responsibilities

On a day-to-day basis, you may do the following.

Learning-Fueled Strategy Development, Execution, and Continuous Improvement

- Collaborate with strategy team members focused on one of three new grantmaking strategies, which are launching in early 2025.
- In partnership with strategy team members, further develop and execute our approach to learning from our responsive grantmaking and strategic grantmaking portfolios with well-articulated theories of change and explicit learning agendas.
- Further develop and execute the strategic use of research and evaluation grants aligned to our strategies and [exploration, validation, and scaling framework](#).
- Contribute to the learning and evaluation capacity of our grantmaking team and non-research grantees through thought partnership and consultation.

Grantmaking and Stewardship

- Source and review individual grants and initiatives that center evaluation and research, including early hypothesis testing and continuous improvement of newer innovations; mixed-methods impact studies of reform effectiveness and supporting conditions; and research geared toward understanding reform implementation and efficacy in different contexts.
- Scope, secure, and support third-party evaluations and research to advance learning agendas specific to portfolios, potentially including evaluations of grant clusters or grant initiatives.
- Present funding opportunities to leadership and board members for consideration.
- Manage a suite of active grants that center research and evaluation. This includes providing strategic support through the sharing of best practices and connecting grantees to other resources.
- Collaborate with and provide support to fellow program officers to help strengthen strategic learning from non-research investments during both the sourcing of new grants and the stewardship of existing grants.

Field Leadership

- Actively share lessons learned from funded research and evaluations for the benefit of our partners and the broader field. This could include presenting at conferences and engaging in networks, workgroups, and advisories.
- Coordinate with our communications team to ensure findings from research and evaluation embedded within our investments are shared through our media channels.
- Develop relationships and partnerships with national and regional funders of research and evaluation.
- Stay abreast of and contribute to evaluation best practices in the broader philanthropic field.

Qualifications

A highly qualified candidate will possess the following.

Education and Experience

- Knowledge equivalent to a master's degree, Ph.D., or Ed.D. in education, education policy, public policy, sociology, economics, or a relevant social science field.
- Seven or more years of progressive experience in evaluation and applied research in higher education and/or workforce development. Ideally, this experience involves overseeing evaluation or research teams.
- Expertise in mixed-methods research and evaluation, including in designing and conducting studies that appropriately and effectively match research methods to research purpose and questions. The range of studies includes basic research to understand problems and

identify promising responses; formative evaluations to produce initial insights about implementation and outcomes; impact evaluations and other summative evaluations that support causal inferences; and studies that identify conditions that enable and support successful implementation of well-evaluated reforms and innovations in different contexts.

- Experience with evaluations that use qualitative methods to understand and describe phenomena and that use quantitative methods to make causal inferences, including randomized controlled trials, regression discontinuity designs, matching approaches, and other quasi-experimental designs.
- Content knowledge aligned with one of our new strategies launching in 2025. For our expand strategy, this includes new innovative models of postsecondary education, community college non-credit workforce training, public workforce training outside of traditional higher education, sectoral training programs, apprenticeships, and postsecondary education in prison programs. For our support strategy, this includes basic needs support for learners in postsecondary education and workforce training, integrated academic and career advising, structural redesign of postsecondary education, and reentry supports for incarcerated learners. For our connect strategy, this includes dual enrollment, regional planning and alignment especially in rural communities, transfer and credit mobility, and state/system-alignment in support of delivery of postsecondary education in prison.
- Experience conducting research and evaluations that center equity in the research process and outcomes.

General Skills and Orientation

- Willingness to learn and adapt to a fast-paced, continually evolving work environment.
- Comfort with ambiguity and evolution, including in the position's roles and responsibilities.
- Ability to work under pressure to meet critical deadlines yet remain flexible and gracious in responding to changing requirements.
- Excellent oral and written communication skills.
- Effective interpersonal skills exemplified by initiative, courtesy, diplomacy, a positive attitude, and a high bar of professional ethics and integrity.
- A commitment to advancing equity in upward mobility through postsecondary learning and workforce training.

About Ascendium

Ascendium is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that has helped millions of learners pursue postsecondary education since 1967, when we were formed to help fulfill the promise of the landmark Higher Education Act of 1965. Over the years, we've 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 reenrollment open. Using our years of experience in

the student loan industry, we've developed a suite of products and services that support academic achievement, financial wellness, and student loan repayment success.

We use the net proceeds from our business operations to fund our education philanthropy. Our strategic grantmaking provides funding to organizations that increase the number of low-income learners who succeed in postsecondary education and workforce training as critical pathway to upward mobility, regardless of economic background, race, rurality, or history of incarceration. Through that grantmaking and related investments in evidence-building and strategic field engagement, we seek to identify emerging innovations and reforms, validate their effectiveness, and expand proven strategies to promote large-scale, systemic change.

Our philanthropy is focused on addressing systemic barriers to upward mobility, which derive from class disparities in opportunity, as well as from policies and practices of exclusion and discrimination. As we strive to continually strengthen our potential for impact, we take responsibility as a funder for learning and evolving our practice to ensure that our grantmaking reflects the root causes of barriers to opportunity for all low-income learners. To that end, we are committed to ongoing learning to build our internal capacity and strengthen the ability of our grantmaking to advance equitable opportunity.

Other Information

Ascendium offers an [outstanding benefits package](#) designed to provide employees and their families with a high degree of security. These benefits include, but are not limited to:

- Comprehensive medical, dental, and vision insurance.
- Ongoing training and professional development opportunities.
- Retirement savings plan with employer match.

Ascendium provides equal employment opportunity to all individuals regardless of their race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, creed, disability, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by state or federal law.

H-1B sponsorship (initiation or transfer) is not available for this position.

If you would like assistance with the application process, please email [Ascendium Human Resources](#). We invite all applicants to complete the Voluntary Affirmative Action questions when submitting application materials. The questions are found at the end of the online application process. To learn more about our commitment to Equal Employment Opportunity, please visit the [Ascendium Careers webpage](#).

Ascendium requires criminal, employment, and education background investigations before hiring.