



Senior Director of Operations and Campaign Management
The Taft School
Watertown, Connecticut

THE SEARCH

The Taft School (Taft), one of the nation's premier college-preparatory boarding and day schools, seeks a strategic and collaborative advancement professional to serve as senior director of operations and campaign management (senior director). This is a compelling opportunity for a skilled leader to oversee the critical areas of advancement services, donor engagement and stewardship, and constituent relations and special events. The senior director will expertly devise cohesive strategies to elevate these functions as the advancement enterprise raises sights under the new leadership of Kathleen Cleary, who began her tenure as chief advancement officer (CAO) in September 2025 and comes to Taft following a decade of leadership experience at Phillips Academy. The senior director will also play a critical role in devising, implementing, and overseeing campaign strategies as Taft prepares to embark on a historic comprehensive campaign that will further the School's mission, values, and culture: its insistence on excellence, passion for community and belonging, commitment to improvement and to service, and pride in school spirit.

The Taft School was founded in 1890 by Horace D. Taft who believed that character, above all else, determines success in life. Nearly 135 years later, Taft students, or Tafties as they are colloquially known, continue to live out the School's motto of "Not to be served, but to serve" both in and out of the classroom. Taft's appeal is strong, as evidenced by its 1,650 annual applications and 16 percent acceptance rate. The campus attracts a mix of boarding and day students and prioritizes enrolling diverse classes: 42 percent of students identify as students of color; 19 percent are international students, hailing from 54 different countries; and 35 percent of the student body receives financial aid. The School's tradition of alumni giving is notable, with 34 percent of alumni donating annually, ensuring its ability to sustain excellence for the coming generations. Additionally, more than 90 percent of Taft's current parents contribute annually to the Parents' Fund.

Reporting to the CAO, the senior director will serve as a leader within the advancement enterprise and strategically guide the key areas of advancement services, including prospect development and donor records, reporting, and analysis; donor engagement and stewardship; constituent relations, including alumni and parent relations; and advancement-related events. As Taft continues to invest in the growth and sophistication of its advancement enterprise, the senior director is presented with the opportunity to

build out these key functions and make significant hires to the team. The senior director will oversee a team of 10 to 12 professionals.

This individual will also importantly serve as one of the key architects and drivers of Taft's impending comprehensive campaign. In consultation with the CAO, the senior director will provide vision for and serve as a high-level strategist in developing priorities, plans, and tactics to coalesce a complex advancement enterprise through end-to-end campaign planning and execution. As a catalyst for synergy, the senior director will be relied upon to motivate, deploy, and mobilize advancement staff and resources to leverage the strength of Taft's existing advancement programs and infrastructure during a time of evolution and growth. With a strong service orientation and broad institutional perspective, the senior director will forge trusted and solutions-oriented relationships with advancement colleagues and, by extension, Taft's leaders, top benefactors, and esteemed volunteers to create awareness, inspire confidence, and generate support for campaign priorities.

Critical to success will be a collaborative and strategic approach to building trust among a growing advancement enterprise, as well as a results- and systems-oriented approach to contribute to a culture that is dedicated to excellence. With a collegial and accessible leadership style, the senior director will foster a team culture that prioritizes providing the highest level of service to colleagues and supports comprehensive success of Taft's frontline fundraising efforts. This individual will be a critical partner across the School and within the department to analyze, engage, and elevate advancement efforts by contributing to creative and entrepreneurial engagement strategies; implementing industry best practices; and applying data-informed decision-making to achieve ambitious annual and long-range fundraising and engagement benchmarks. Importantly, the incoming senior director must possess a deep appreciation for the mission, history, and values of Taft, along with an authentic and enthusiastic spirit to serve as an external representative of the School.

The Taft School has retained Jack Gorman of the national executive search firm Isaacson, Miller to conduct this important recruitment. Confidential inquiries, nominations, and applications may be directed to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

ABOUT THE TAFT SCHOOL

[The Taft School](#) opened its doors in 1890 with a broad – yet singular – mission that was ahead of its time: to educate the whole student. Originally known as Mr. Taft's School, Taft was established by Mrs. Robert Black near the turn of the century. She fortuitously asked her friend, Horace D. Taft, a Yale-educated teacher, and brother of the future 27th U.S. President, to lead the School. He accepted the job with enthusiasm, and for 46 years, he led Taft as Head of School through several name changes, campus moves, and new waves of students.

Throughout his tenure as the School's leader, Horace Taft remained committed to the holistic education The Taft School provides its students – both through rigorous academics in the classroom and

extracurricular learnings in clubs, sports, hallways, and dormitories. To this day, Taft students graduate with a strong sense of self, a sense of place, and a readiness to take on the world.

Taft's 226-acre [campus](#) features historic buildings with state-of-the-art and sustainable technologies. Notable buildings include: the Lady Ivy Kwok Wu Science and Mathematics Center, measuring at 48,000 square feet and featuring a PCR machine for DNA replication and an aquatic biomes center; the STEM Laboratory, which houses three makerspaces, a laser cutter, CNC machine, 3D printer, and interactive smart tools; and the Hulbert Taft Jr. Library with 58,000 volumes and full text databases with access to more than 12,000 periodical articles. Additionally, the campus features multiple dance and art studios, two theaters, 16 tennis courts, two field houses, two ice rinks, and an 18-hole golf course. Serving as a community connector, Main Hall, through which every student and teacher walks multiple times each day, is a key feature of Taft's architecture and culture.

The Taft community is comprised of 583 students in grades 9-12, including a small group of post-graduate students. With 130 faculty, Taft students benefit from a five-to-one faculty ratio. While most students board (five-sixths of the student body), the remaining one-sixth commute daily from neighboring towns. Taft receives around 1,650 new student applications per year, 61 percent of which are from private schools and 34 percent from public schools.

Academics, Co-Curricular Programs, and Student Life

At the core of Taft's mission to educate the whole person lies an emphasis on high scholarship and intellectual endeavor. Taft translates that mission into a roadmap for learning that is bolstered by a broad, evolving, and innovative curriculum. This is further advanced by a robust Honor Circle, and built on a strong intellectual and academic foundation, all of which is brought to life by a dedicated and caring faculty, made up of highly educated experts in their respective fields.

Courses at Taft are spread out across six [academic departments](#): Arts, English, History and Global Studies, Mathematics, Science, and World Language. Each semester, students choose from more than 200 one-unit courses to fulfill the School's 26-unit graduation requirement. Taft also offers one of the nation's first independent study programs, which, for more than 50 years, has allowed students to pursue their passions through high-level, inquiry-based, self-directed courses of study. Taft students may choose to study away from Taft for a semester or two and/or enroll in [Global Online Academy](#) classes. Students may apply to participate in the two-year [Global Leadership Institute](#), a competitive co-curricular program linking Taft and Waterbury public schools through shared learning and leadership experiences. Students may also pursue a [Global Studies and Service Diploma](#), which pushes its students to engage locally and globally as agents of social change.

Additionally, Taft's experiential and applied learning opportunities prepare students from Grade 9 and onward to not only thrive in the 21st century, but also to lead the way as globally literate, intellectually robust, and ethically principled graduates and citizens of an increasingly interconnected world. A hallmark of Taft's academic approach is the continuous evaluation and modification of its academic program to

reflect the most advanced teaching and learning methodologies, while providing students with unique opportunities to pursue their passions. As previously mentioned, students are also guided by a campus [Honor Code](#) informed by Taft's core tenet of "character, above all else, determines success in life." Every assessment, whether daily homework or a final exam, ends with the student's written pledge: "I have neither given nor received aid on this assignment," a testament and commitment to the importance of honor and integrity.

Academically and co-curricularly, Taft students are surrounded by the [arts](#). They may pursue artistic inquiry in a wide range of disciplines, from ceramics and sculpture to design and drawing, from dance and music to theater and video arts. Academic courses in the arts support the School's mission of educating the whole person and are required to graduate. Opportunities outside of the classroom – from centers and theater to gallery exhibits and travel – not only broaden and enhance learning, but also bring energy, culture, creativity, and balance.

Taft's [athletics](#) program is also an integral component of school life. Students at Taft participate in athletics at all levels – from intramural programs to 27 competitive varsity teams. Through physical health and wellness classes, in addition to the athletic program, all students are taught the value of health and wellness, the importance of a lifelong commitment to fitness, and the enjoyment that participating in all forms of athletics can bring. Taft coaches have built one of the most successful athletic programs in New England and encourage fair play, respect for opponents, a love of the game, competitive spirit, and team loyalty. As a result, students leave Taft with an understanding of hard work and good sportsmanship, a sense of responsibility to one's team and teammates, the ability to set goals, and an overall commitment to healthy living through physical activity.

FINANCIAL AND FUNDRAISING OVERVIEW

The Taft School endowment has a current value of approximately \$370 million. The long-term growth of the School's endowment, net of distributions to support operations, is the result of both strong investment performance and generous donations from its loyal donor base. In Fiscal Year 2025, Taft raised more than \$27 million in philanthropic contributions, of which \$6.2 million constitutes the Taft Fund and \$2.7 million constitutes the Parents' Fund. The School's alumni participation rate typically ranges close to 40 percent and parents have consistently given at or above 90 percent.

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Peter Becker '95, Head of School

On July 1, 2023, [Peter Becker '95](#) began his tenure as Taft's sixth head of school. He received a bachelor of arts degree with distinction in religious studies from the University of Virginia and a master of arts in history from Yale University. He was awarded a Fulbright Grant to study classical history, architecture, and archeology at the American Academy in Rome, Italy. After working briefly as an investment banking analyst, Becker first worked with independent school students while on the staff of FOCUS (the Fellowship

of Christians in Universities and Schools). He began his boarding school career in 2003 at The Lawrenceville School. In 2012, Becker was appointed head of school at The Frederick Gunn School, where he left a legacy of school innovation, improvement, and change. Becker is also a leader in the independent school educational landscape, attending and presenting at professional conferences, and serving or having served on the board of The Association of Board Schools, the Connecticut Association of Independent Schools, The Washington Montessori School, and as a member of the Heads and Principals Association.

Kathleen Cleary, Chief Advancement Officer

On September 10, 2025, [Kathleen Cleary](#) began her tenure as Taft's chief advancement officer, reporting to the head of school and serving as a key member of the senior administrative team. Cleary joined Taft following a decade at Phillips Academy (Andover) where she oversaw the major and principal giving operation. Her work and leadership were integral to Andover's \$400 million *Knowledge & Goodness* campaign, and to the growth and elevation of their advancement operation. Cleary distinguished herself through her work on a women's philanthropic initiative, metric development and implementation, philanthropic mentorship, and strategic programming. She was instrumental in progressively increasing Andover's philanthropic success, and she and her team were responsible for nearly half of Andover's annual fundraising total.

Prior to her arrival at Andover, Cleary served The Nature Conservancy as director of philanthropy. In this role, Kathleen led a robust team across major, annual, and planned giving; operations; and prospect management. She played a key role in recruiting new members to the regional boards of trustees, developing and executing a \$50 million regional fundraising endeavor, and contributing to the planning and strategy of an organization-wide \$4 billion comprehensive campaign. Cleary started her more than 20-year career in advancement at Mayo Clinic in major and principal gift officer roles.

Cleary earned a bachelor of science degree in marketing from the University of South Florida. She has also participated in numerous certificate programs through the Harvard Division of Continuing Education.

Board of Trustees

Taft is governed by a dedicated [Board of Trustees](#), chaired by Sarkis D. Izmirlian II '90, P'20, '22, '24. Nearly all 35 trustees are Taft alumni or parents of Taft graduates. They bring important expertise, insight, and a personal commitment to guiding Taft's future. The Board operates through a committee structure which includes the Committee on Trustees, to ensure a proactive approach to cultivating the next generation of board leadership, and the Institutional Advancement Committee to oversee philanthropic engagement at Taft.

ROLE OF THE SENIOR DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS AND CAMPAIGN MANAGEMENT

Reporting to the CAO, the senior director will expertly lead and elevate the crucial functions of a growing advancement division across advancement services; donor engagement and stewardship; and constituent relations and special events. In close partnership with the CAO and senior leaders across the School, this

individual will also play a leadership role in planning, implementing, and managing all administrative aspects for Taft's impending comprehensive campaign. With oversight for a growing team of 10 to 12 staff members, the senior director will establish a comprehensive strategic vision for these essential divisions, lead with and promote collaboration in engaging across Taft's advancement enterprise, and introduce both best practices and innovative tactics to achieve sustainable success for the School's fundraising and engagement objectives. In leading the team, the senior director will provide clear direction and oversight of all department activities to develop and achieve annual goals including budgeting, planning, and staff development.

MAJOR FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Advancement Services and Data Management

- Oversee the operational support for Taft's fundraising and donor engagement infrastructure. Provide leadership in gift processing, data management, prospect research, and donor reporting to ensure the effectiveness and accountability of the School's advancement efforts.
- Develop and implement best practices for donor recognition, data integrity, and financial reconciliation while working closely with the CAO, frontline fundraising colleagues, finance teams, and senior leaders across the School.
- Oversee donor database management and gift processing efforts, ensuring efficient and timely entry of gifts, pledges, and donor records, as well as precise documentation and acknowledgements of donations. In doing so, develop and enforce data integrity policies for donor and alumni records, ensuring accuracy and compliance with industry best standards.
- In close coordination with the CAO, lead efforts to analyze fundraising trends, campaign performance, and donor giving patterns to support fundraising strategies.
- Provide data-driven insights and reports to support fundraising campaigns, major gift solicitations, and donor pipeline development.
- Maintain and oversee data security, donor confidentiality, and compliance with School policies related to advancement operations.

Donor Engagement and Stewardship

- Oversee and evaluate a comprehensive institutional program for donor recognition and stewardship across giving levels, as well as young alumni and parents.
- Devise strategies for appropriate recognition and stewardship for donors, including but not limited to stewardship letters and reports, gift acknowledgements, donor recognition lists, building signage, donor events, and other forms of donor appreciation.

- Develop and execute processes for ensuring the donor-centric stewardship and engagement activities of advancement colleagues. Collaborate with peers on effective stewardship, engagement, and recognition strategies and systems.
- Remain current on engagement and stewardship trends, strategies, and services offered by peer institutions and inspire a culture of innovation and new ideas.
- Convene regular meetings with frontline fundraising colleagues to develop tailored, highly personalized, and long-range stewardship plans, consistently monitoring the progress of those plans and modifying as required.
- Oversee both broad-based and campaign-specific donor recognition programs for principal gift donors.

Constituent Relations and Special Events

- Provide oversight for alumni and parent relations in support of overall advancement objectives, ensuring that alumni and parent programs and activities are properly integrated and strategically aligned with the School's overarching priorities.
- Direct a comprehensive alumni program for over 10,000 graduates that include volunteer management, alumni weekend, awards programs, class reunions, student-alumni events, regional alumni functions, and other meaningful offerings.
- Direct a comprehensive parent relations program and manage volunteers for current and past parents that include welcome parties, orientation, regional events, and family weekend.
- Coordinate alumni and parent programming with other offices across the School, including academic affairs, admissions, athletics, student life, and college counseling.
- Devise processes and implement metrics to assess engagement success using industry best practices and standards.

Campaign Management

- In close partnership with the CAO, lead the strategic planning process for special projects and initiatives throughout the impending comprehensive campaign.
- Produce high-level campaign timelines and detailed underlying project plans that include benchmarks, milestones, deliverables, goals, and key players. Monitor progress relative to goals and timelines and assume accountability for keeping projects and initiatives on time and on target.

- Provide evaluation to Taft's leadership, campaign volunteers, and staff regarding results, success, lessons learned, opportunities for growth, and forecasting. Produce regular reports and briefing materials, budgets, campaign documents, memos and correspondence, and metrics reports to key constituents.
- Collaborate with the marketing and communications team to develop campaign branding and messaging including the case prospectus, case for support, and other relevant collateral.
- Perform other campaign-related tasks and duties as directed by the CAO.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The senior director will possess many, if not most, of the following qualifications and characteristics:

- A talented and nimble leader who is eager to work collaboratively across Taft to convene, educate, and motivate the community around donor engagement, constituent relations, and campaign planning.
- At least seven to ten years of progressively responsible experience in the areas of advancement operations or constituent engagement, with demonstrable experience with campaign management in a complex, successful advancement program, preferably in an academic institution.
- Proven management skills in establishing a team- and goal-oriented environment that empowers staff through active communication, transparency, and delegation that builds confidence, promotes diversity of thought, and celebrates achievements.
- The intellectual and emotional depth, credibility, maturity, and sound judgment required to effectively engage and leverage Taft's leaders, staff, and volunteers in engagement and campaign activities.
- Ability to navigate a complex and intimate independent school community, and the desire and ability to build strong collaborative relationships with all members of an institution. An interest in serving as a resource to others and obtaining their input.
- A creative approach to problem solving, and strong critical thinking and analytical skills. A high level of energy, self-assuredness, optimism, personal resilience, and the ability to function at peak levels in a fast-paced, high expectation environment.
- A sharp eye for operational efficiency and the best use of resources, including a demonstrated understanding of budgets and the ability to manage them.

- An understanding of and appreciation for the use of technology and tools, and superb proficiency in overseeing, improving, and leveraging the CRM database for a wide range of uses.
- Superior written and oral communication skills. Superlative interpersonal skills, an ability to lead by influence, and demonstrated success working with all individuals.
- Honesty, integrity, enthusiasm, perspective, and a sense of humor. A strong work ethic supported by commitment and follow-through.
- The flexibility to work evenings or weekends, as required.
- A bachelor's degree.

LOCATION

The Taft School is located in Watertown, a historic and rural town in western Connecticut with just over 20,000 residents. Its location allows easy access to the conveniences and cultural attractions of Connecticut's larger cities and towns and the beautiful hills and open spaces of northwest Connecticut and the southern Berkshires. Taft is less than an hour away from Hartford's Bradley International Airport and less than 30 minutes away from both Amtrak and Metro-North train stops. Conveniently, Taft is also located two hours from New York City and two and a half hours from Boston.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website below:

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/taft-school/senior-director-operations-and-campaign>

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This document has been prepared based on the information provided by The Taft School. The material presented in this leadership profile should be relied on for informational purposes only. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information, the original source documents and information provided by Taft would supersede any conflicting information in this document.