

Inaugural Executive Vice President & Chief Operating Officer New Educational Institution (NEI)

THE OPPORTUNITY

NEI, a private, not-for-profit educational institution, in collaboration with MIT, seeks an exceptional and entrepreneurial EVP/COO. The inaugural Executive Vice President & Chief Operating Officer (EVP & COO) should bring experience as an agile administrator, familiar with starting new ventures and with disciplined strategic, financial, and administrative experience at scale. The EVP & COO will join the founding leadership team and will work collaboratively to recruit, welcome, and support a rapidly expanding executive team. They will, in turn, create an entirely new university system, with multiple campuses, that focuses on a high-quality, affordable, technologically-infused education. MIT content will be delivered on NEI's residential campuses across the United States and taught by NEI faculty trained in the latest pedagogy. NEI's holistic curricula, with substantive classes in the humanities as well as professional experiences, will provide graduates with the skills needed to effectively work and thrive in society. An experienced and entrepreneurial founding EVP & COO will help build an agile NEI from the ground up.

NEI will build at scale and is designed to meet the shortage of graduates in engineering and computer science in America. NEI will operate as a collaboration with MIT but will develop its own board, leadership, faculty, and staff. To offer a more accessible and affordable education model, NEI will establish a network of campuses in different parts of the US that will combine both in-person learning and digital content, centrally produced and curated in collaboration with MIT. The EVP & COO's role is critical in NEI's early stages of development and growth.

The EVP & COO will report directly to NEI's inaugural president, Dr. Sanjay Sarma, and will serve as the chief architect of NEI's operations, leading the design, launch, and scaling of core administrative and physical infrastructure. As a key founding member of the executive leadership team, they will work closely with the inaugural president and members of the Board of Trustees to provide short- and long-term financial decision-making. They will serve as the principal administrative officer of NEI, responsible for financial functions, as well as the planning, organizing, evaluating, and monitoring of all administrative and facilities functions. The successful candidate will bring significant fiscal, operational, and administrative experience in complex settings, strong financial management skills, and collaborative problem-solving abilities.

NEI has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in conducting this important search and to help identify outstanding candidates. All inquiries, applications, and nominations for this opportunity should be directed to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

ABOUT NEI

America's competitiveness depends on a skilled and technically capable workforce to support economic development and growth. Educational institutions have adapted their offerings, but the pace of change, the need for talent, the agility required of the workforce, and the cost structures of traditional higher educational institutions have resulted in mismatches with current and future industrial needs in the U.S. NEI will launch with a bold educational aspiration to improve America's competitiveness by graduating an additional 100,000 students in the BCSE fields over the next decade.

The vision for NEI is inspired [by this whitepaper](#). Fundamentally, the model aims to create an education system that is more effective, affordable, and career relevant. NEI will prioritize student learning by rebalancing education and research, ensuring that faculty focus primarily on teaching. Research will be broadly interpreted as traditional research, either in learning science or in domains essential to the curriculum, creating thought leadership and new practice, with sabbaticals encouraged at partner institutions.

Pedagogy will be centered on a flipped classroom model, utilizing online content from MIT and other possible collaborators. Continuous improvement will be a fundamental theme to ensure that the outcomes are maximized. NEI will ensure holistic education by integrating humanities, arts, and social sciences alongside technical subjects, fostering a well-rounded perspective. Degrees will be structured as stackable micro-credentials rather than traditional majors and minors, providing greater flexibility and alignment with students' interests and career goals.

Courses will be taught through interdisciplinary team teaching, ensuring a richer and more integrated learning experience. Faculty will receive training in modern pedagogy and instructional tools. NEI will be based on a trimester model, and a typical 4-year degree will consist of 11 trimesters, each slightly shorter in duration than a regular semester. Cooperative education (co-ops) will be central, with students spending at least four of their eleven trimesters in structured co-op programs at external organizations such as companies, labs, and universities.

Strong partnerships with external organizations will provide opportunities for student mentorship, faculty sabbaticals, and real-world exposure. Industry professionals will be encouraged to participate in teaching through visiting faculty and fellowship programs. A lean approach will be central to the physical infrastructure, with partnerships with external entities, such as libraries and recreational facilities, emphasized over capital-intensive investments. Extracurricular activities will be carefully designed to balance structured opportunities with student autonomy. New and innovative models of admissions, such as the MicroBachelors, will ensure that NEI provides access to a wide range of students, from students finishing high school to those in the workforce, and across demographics.

Leadership

Dr. Sanjay Sarma became NEI's inaugural president on June 18, 2025. Sarma is a distinguished leader in academia and business and is a professor of mechanical engineering at MIT. Until May 2025, he was CEO, President, and Dean of the Asia School of Business. He co-founded the Auto-ID Center at MIT, pioneering the technical concepts and standards of modern RFID. Today, the suite of standards developed by the Auto-ID Center, called EPC, has become a global standard utilized by over a thousand companies. Sarma also previously chaired the Auto-ID Research Council, establishing six labs worldwide. He co-founded OATSystems, later acquired by Checkpoint Systems, and serves on the boards of several companies, including Aclara Resources (TSX:ARA) and Rekor Systems (NASDAQ:REKR).

Sarma received his PhD from the University of California at Berkeley, his master's from Carnegie Mellon University, and his bachelor's from the Indian Institute of Technology. His expertise includes RFID, sensors, manufacturing, autonomy, AI, sustainability, and innovation. He has authored over 150 publications and played a key role in India's Aadhaar unique ID system. Sarma's contributions have been recognized with multiple awards, including the MIT MacVicar Fellowship and National Science Foundation CAREER Award. He has been honored by Business Week, Fast Company, and RFID Journal for his innovations.

In addition to his academic achievements, Sarma has been highly influential in education, helping establish Singapore University of Technology and Design, serving as the first Director of Digital Learning at MIT and as the Vice President for Open learning at MIT. His initiatives include MIT Open Learning, MicroMasters, the Jameel World Education Lab, the MIT Integrated Learning Initiative and MIT xPro. Sarma's multifaceted career is a testament to his commitment to innovation, education, and technological advancement.

The Board of Trustees

NEI will be a non-profit organization. As with any university governing body, the board will focus on ensuring NEI's mission, financial health, and long-term success. It will provide strategic oversight, help the president hire and evaluate leadership, and ensure responsible financial stewardship, including budgeting, fundraising, and endowment management. The board will also support academic excellence by approving major programs and policies while maintaining legal compliance and risk management. NEI is a startup, and the board will have an important role in shaping the trajectory in refining the vision, fundraising, and strategic decisions in pursuit of the ultimate goal: providing high-quality education at scale in an affordable way.

ROLE OF THE INAUGURAL EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT & COO

The EVP & COO will step into a dynamic role and a dynamic landscape for higher education with significant growth potential for impact. The ideal candidate will be entrepreneurial, forward-looking and adaptive, seamlessly integrating strategy and operations. The EVP & COO will have the opportunity to shape the organizational structure of NEI, to drive the scope and pace of development, and to build the eventual units and direct reports essential to strategy, operations, and execution. The EVP & COO will work collaboratively with the president and a rapidly expanding leadership team to build the trajectory of NEI's success.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Serve as a strategic operational partner to the inaugural president and Board of Trustees

NEI will raise funds, target its appropriate student demographic, identify the campus location, and acquire the real estate for its inaugural campus. As the president and the Board make their first commitments, each step in the launch will require critical choices and swift execution. The president – and through him, the board – will rely heavily on the analytic capacity and the business and operational judgment of the EVP & COO to deliver at scale.

Effectively lead NEI through campus procurement and development

The EVP & COO will lead NEI's real estate strategy and will manage its execution, building a real estate portfolio from scratch. Real estate will sit prominently in the EVP role.

The choice of campus location will drive initial student demographics and will place NEI in a suitable, competitive environment, in a context of public and private universities with their own programs and price points. The choice of location, buy-lease decisions, and partnerships will govern much of NEI's early success.

The EVP will lead site selection, provide the analysis comparing sites, and create alternative sites for consideration. Within the broader University strategy, the EVP will find locations that suit the program while maximizing the use of resources.

Analytics is only a part of the role. In execution, the EVP & COO will manage site development and all ongoing facilities operations, building out the necessary managerial capacity to scale all the elements of a broad program and real estate portfolio.

Launch and scale campus, administrative, and digital operations while building toward long-term fiscal health

NEI will launch its first site as a pilot and proof of concept and will inevitably learn through this early mode. It will build out its faculty, its MIT collaboration, its enrollment strategy, and its operational strength. NEI's founders have large ambitions: they intend to graduate thousands of students each year. To meet the goals of its founders and its donors, NEI will scale rapidly. The foundational systems and core administrative units must adapt to do strategically vital work in a rapid-growth organization. In concert with the president and other key figures who will join NEI, the EVP & COO will adapt quickly and manage NEI's ability to scale at the same rate.

Help to grow and shepherd a leadership team

The EVP & CEO will join the chief academic operations officer and the president as one of the earliest executive hires. In due course, NEI will hire academic and student experience leaders, with appropriate supporting groups. The EVP & COO should join the president and CAO in searches for the leadership team and must welcome each additional recruit and help to incorporate their work systematically into the foundations already developed.

Provide strategic financial and administrative leadership to build NEI

To succeed immediately and to build the brand, NEI must husband resources, maximizing their use for the most appealing and effective student academic and personal experience. It will rely on the EVP & COO to create a lean, operationally impressive, and disciplined financial and administrative organization, with strong systems and staff who can manage finances, organize real estate, ensure compliance, and build technological platforms. The University aspires to excellence in all its activities. The EVP & COO will lead much of the University's ambitious execution.

Establish business processes and policies, leveraging enterprise administrative technologies

NEI must acquire the full range of university platforms, including student record systems linked to NEI finances, financial operations, telecommunications, HR, and facilities management, among others in the administrative and financial suites. In addition, NEI will partner with MIT to create online educational programming that will require sophisticated learning software and telecommunications platforms. NEI will need to build out a technology group and work to acquire the most cost-effective and efficient systems that can be found and deployed readily.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

While no one person will embody them all, the successful candidate will bring many of the following professional qualifications, skills, experiences, and personal qualities.

- Track record as a highly regarded, successful financial officer of a large, complex, well-run organization known for strong financial management discipline and systems; experience in a university with a strong undergraduate program is an advantage.
- A collaborator, with a proven track record of joining and supporting a fully functional, executive leadership team.
- The proven “start-up” capacity to start, stop, and re-start critical new ventures central to a university’s strategy.
- A broad understanding of all of the elements of real estate acquisition, development and maintenance, tested at scale.
- Demonstrated success in budgeting, business analysis, and strategic thinking, allied to resource allocation and operational success.
- Ability to oversee a diverse range of functional areas, including real estate, facilities management, information technology, human resources, research administration, and others.
- Experience in initiating and successfully solving, implementing, structuring, and managing complex business projects, preferably in a geographically decentralized environment, including asset dispositions, acquisitions, contract negotiations, lease extensions, etc.
- Action-oriented with an ability to implement strategic and tactical goals.
- Proven ability to bring about complex change in a thoughtful manner and establish best practices that are tailored to the unique needs of the institution.
- Experience as a fair, respectful leader, and a skilled administrator with proven ability to effectively manage resources to maximize institutional effectiveness.
- Knowledge and understanding of current and emerging issues, trends, and strategies in finance, and a proven track record of success with revenue enhancement.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Confidential inquiries, nominations/referrals, and applications (including resumes and letters of interest responding to the opportunities and challenges outlined above) should be sent electronically to the Isaacson, Miller executive search team via the link below.

John Isaacson, Chair
Dan Rodas, Partner
Amy Gillespie, Senior Associate
Mindy Cimini, Senior Search Coordinator
Isaacson, Miller

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/new-education-initiative/executive-vice-president-and-chief-operating-officer>

MIT is an equal employment opportunity employer. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment and will not be discriminated against on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, ancestry, or national or ethnic origin.