



Finance and Operations
The Rita Allen Foundation
Princeton, New Jersey

THE SEARCH

[The Rita Allen Foundation](#), a nationally prominent venture philanthropy organization, seeks a Finance and Operations lead to support its next phase of growth and impact at a pivotal moment. The Foundation invests in discoveries in their earliest stages in biomedical research, civic science, and philanthropic practice. Through its work in civic science, the Foundation seeds networks to accelerate learning, inclusion, and impact to ensure that science and evidence help to inform solutions to society's most pressing problems.

Established in 1953, the Foundation is well-known for its long-standing [Rita Allen Foundation Scholars Program](#), which has supported more than 225 early-career biomedical scientists conducting bold research that has reshaped fields—from neuroscience and immunology to cancer and pain research—and whose alumni have been recognized with Nobel Prizes in Physiology and Medicine and other prestigious honors. With the leadership of President and CEO Elizabeth Good Christopherson since 2009, the Foundation has emerged as a leader in civic science, co-creating the [Civic Science Fellows program](#), which to date has supported more than 75 partner organizations and 70 next-generation leaders in creating new pilots, partnerships, knowledge, models, and ways of working that can help seed collaborations between science and society. This approach to convening and field-building is evident in the Foundation's leadership of the [Civic Science Funders Collaborative](#).

These efforts, spanning discovery science, civic science, and philanthropic practice, reflect a distinctive model: investing early, thinking collaboratively, and building knowledge and networks that strengthen the effectiveness of philanthropy. Today, the Foundation combines institutional strength with the agility of a "philanthropic lab"—established enough to take the long view, small enough to move with conviction, and committed to learning in the open. Increasingly, the Foundation also seeks to demonstrate what a more adaptive, collaborative model of philanthropy can look like in practice.

Its close-knit team is entrepreneurial, innovative, and ambitious, with every role carrying real scope and impact. Colleagues are deeply committed to the mission, take pride in their work, and enjoy working closely together in an environment that values both intellectual rigor and balance. There is a strong sense

that people work at the Foundation not only because they believe in the work, but also in each other and in the culture itself.

Reporting to the President and CEO, Finance and Operations will serve as a senior operational leader, overseeing full financial stewardship and a range of internal operations. In a lean environment, this is a hands-on role responsible for the Foundation's full financial operations, as well as human resources, technology, and administrative operations. The role blends strategy and execution, collaborating with leadership to shape how the organization functions and grows in a rapidly changing landscape, including the thoughtful integration of AI into its work. This leader will help translate vision into operational reality, anticipating needs, shaping priorities, and co-architecting systems that enable the Foundation's continued evolution.

This is an opportunity for a doer and builder—someone energized by designing and implementing systems in support of a mission-driven organization. In doing so, Finance and Operations will be central in enabling a foundation that is not only advancing breakthrough ideas but also helping redefine how philanthropy can operate in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

The Rita Allen Foundation has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist with this important search. Confidential applications, inquiries, and nominations should be directed to the search team as indicated at the end of this document.

ROLE OF FINANCE AND OPERATIONS

Finance and Operations serves as the Foundation's senior staff member responsible for ensuring that its financial management and internal infrastructure are as strong and forward-thinking as the mission it supports. Operating at the director level, the position combines financial stewardship with operational and organizational effectiveness in a high-impact environment.

Finance and Operations is responsible for budgeting, forecasting, payables, contracts, reporting, and compliance within a private foundation context, supporting an annual total distribution of roughly \$10 million. A core responsibility is ownership of the Foundation's annual Required Minimum Distribution (RMD)—the IRS-mandated 5% payout across grants, direct charitable activities, and other qualified distributions. A key challenge is balancing rigor and flexibility, maintaining strong financial discipline while preserving the agility and experimentation that define the Foundation's "philanthropic lab" approach.

The scope extends beyond finance to include oversight of key functions such as talent and technology, as well as core operational infrastructure. Embracing the Foundation's lean structure and engagement with a broad "talent bank"—including outsourced investment management, accounting, audit, and tax—this leader serves as the central integrator across people, processes, and priorities.

The position offers direct reporting to the President and CEO and regular engagement with Board committees. Strategic Engagement will be a key internal partner and collaborator. This role is particularly well-suited for a finance professional motivated by both impact and craft—someone who takes pride in

contributing to organizations that are not only effective but exemplary in how they operate and collaborate.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE FINANCE AND OPERATIONS ROLE

Lead financial discipline and execution

The Foundation benefits from strong financial stewardship and a consistent track record of rigor and reliability. This role will build on that foundation by bringing a forward-looking dimension to financial leadership while executing across the full range of day-to-day finance and accounting activities. Central to this work is planning for and meeting the Foundation's annual RMD, which helps determine the pace and scale of grantmaking each year. This responsibility connects investment performance, payout requirements, accounting processes, and grantmaking systems, ensuring alignment across the organization and enabling clear communication about financial matters with diverse collaborators.

Sustain and strengthen a high-trust, highly collaborative culture

One of the Foundation's defining strengths is its culture: entrepreneurial, collaborative, intellectually serious, programmatically ambitious, and grounded in trust. With a lean, mission-driven team, this leader will play a key role in sustaining and strengthening a learning-oriented environment defined by listening, reflection, and innovation. With responsibility for human resources, this role will bring clarity to roles, expectations, internal coordination, and own the day-to-day HR functions including onboarding, offboarding, benefits, and talent management. They will help colleagues navigate processes and resources with confidence while preserving the collegiality that makes the Foundation a distinctive and meaningful place to work.

Drive process excellence across finance and operations

The Foundation combines greater impact through collaboration with agility, creating a meaningful opportunity to strengthen workflows across the organization. In recent years, the Foundation has made significant progress toward modern, cloud-based operations, including tools such as QuickBooks Online and Bill.com. This role will lead the next phase of operational evolution, bringing a practical, solutions-oriented approach and following through on improvements from concept to completion. This includes refining workflows, strengthening documentation practices, and developing a clear operational playbook that brings consistency to how work gets done.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The ideal candidate will bring strong financial stewardship, operational creativity, positive energy, and resourceful initiative—someone who recognizes that this moment of technological transformation calls for curiosity and a forward-thinking approach. This leader will be energized by the opportunity to work across functions, combining strategic thinking with disciplined execution to support the Foundation's continued impact.

While no one candidate will meet all the desired criteria, the successful candidate will bring most of the following qualifications and attributes:

- Strong financial acumen, including experience with budgeting, reporting, and financial statements; familiarity with private foundation requirements is preferred
- Experience managing human resources function, ideally within a lean, mission-driven organization
- Clear ability to operate across the full range from strategic thinking to hands-on execution, with a track record of delivering results across multiple operational functions
- 10+ years of progressive experience in finance, operations, or related fields, preferably in nonprofit, foundation, or other mission-driven environments
- An advanced degree (MBA, MPA, JD) or professional credential (CPA or equivalent) is preferred
- Experience managing external partners and vendors, ideally in a lean setting with end-to-end ownership
- A systems-oriented mindset, with the ability to design, refine, and improve processes using sound judgment and enabling technologies
- A strong sense of integrity and commitment to responsible stewardship of philanthropic resources
- Strong interpersonal and communication skills, with the ability to build trust, work collaboratively, and present complex information clearly to diverse audiences
- High agency and adaptability, with the ability to anticipate needs, take initiative, and follow through from concept to completion
- A commitment to continuous learning, with curiosity about emerging practices, including the thoughtful use of technology and AI to improve organizational effectiveness
- Comfort working in a lean, high-autonomy environment, with shared accountability and limited formal structure

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

The anticipated salary range for this position is \$175,000-\$200,000, commensurate with experience. The Foundation offers a highly competitive benefits package, including health, dental, and life insurance; a defined-contribution retirement plan; and a generous paid-time-off program.

The position is based in downtown Princeton, New Jersey, and operates in a hybrid work environment, with in-office expectations to be determined with the successful candidate.

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: <https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/rita-allen-foundation/finance-and-operations>

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We are committed to fostering an inclusive environment for people of all backgrounds. The Rita Allen Foundation is committed to a policy of Equal Employment Opportunity and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, creed, national origin or ancestry, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, sex or gender, marital status or civil union status, age, pregnancy, physical or mental disability, military status, genetic information, or any other protected characteristic as established under law. All individuals are welcomed and encouraged to apply.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by The Rita Allen Foundation. 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 The Rita Allen Foundation would supersede any conflicting information in this document.

APPENDIX I – ABOUT THE RITA ALLEN FOUNDATION

The Rita Allen Foundation is an independent, private grantmaking foundation founded in 1953 and based in Princeton, New Jersey. Organized as a 501(c)(3), the Foundation operates with an endowment of approximately \$200 million and distributes roughly \$10 million annually, including across more than 60 grants, matched and amplified with funding from philanthropic partners. Its philanthropic capital, built over decades through the generosity of the Allen and Cassel families—including Charles Allen, Jr., Rita Allen Cassel, Milton Cassel and Lucette Cassel—is deployed to advance early-stage, high-potential ideas addressing complex challenges in science and civic life.

Today, the Foundation operates on seven guiding principles: Innovation, Focus, Lasting Outcomes, Collaboration, Core Values (courage, hope, passion, shared aspirations), Leadership, and Learning. Its programmatic work is organized across three core domains:

- **Discovery Science** supports pioneering biomedical research through its legacy [Rita Allen Foundation Scholars Program](#), one of the earliest programs of its kind. Since 1976, the program has supported more than 225 scientists at the early stages of their careers – many of whom have gone on to receive honors, including the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, the National Medal of Science, the Wolf Prize in Medicine, and the Breakthrough Prize in Life Sciences. Today, Scholars receive up to \$110,000 per year for a maximum of five years to pursue research with above-average risk and promise. This year, the program is celebrating its 50th anniversary, reflecting five decades of sustained investment in scientific discovery with the potential to transform challenging health problems.
 - Complementing this work, since 2009 the Foundation and its philanthropic partners have awarded the [Rita Allen Foundation Scholars Award in Pain](#) to more than 40 emerging leaders in basic pain research. The program provides grants of \$50,000 annually for up to three years, supporting early-stage work with significant potential to advance new approaches to treating chronic pain.
- **Civic Science** represents a major expansion of the Foundation’s portfolio, focused on strengthening connections between science and society. Since its launch in 2020, the [Civic Science Fellows](#) program has supported more than 70 fellows across three cohorts and engaged over 75 partner organizations spanning media, academia, policy, and philanthropy. In September 2026, the program will welcome the 2026-2028 cohort. The Foundation also co-leads the [Civic Science Funders Collaborative](#), a network of peer philanthropic organizations working to advance a society in which all people can shape science to expand its benefits and horizons.
- **Philanthropic Lab and Future Exploration:** The Foundation explores and supports new models of collaborative grantmaking and shared learning to improve the effectiveness of philanthropy itself.

A defining characteristic of the Foundation is its emphasis on field-building and partnership-driven work. Rather than operating exclusively through in-house domain expertise, the Foundation engages a broad network of advisors, funders, institutions, and practitioners to inform its work and extend its reach. Through efforts such as the Civic Science Funders Collaborative, the Foundation collaborates with multiple philanthropic partners to co-invest in and advance initiatives at scale, amplifying the impact of its resources and shaping broader practices across science and philanthropy.

Leadership, Governance, and Advisory

Elizabeth Good Christopherson became the Foundation's first CEO in 2009, guiding the Foundation through a period of significant expansion, including building new investments and coalitions to strengthen the role of science and evidence in civic life. Before joining the Rita Allen Foundation, she was executive director of New Jersey's public broadcasting network (NJN), where her leadership earned wide recognition for digital innovation, program excellence, and strong public-private collaboration. As a member of the PBS board, she was selected to update the network's editorial integrity policies. She is a published author on civic science and science philanthropy, with work appearing in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, and *Nonprofit Quarterly*, and she serves on the board of the Science Philanthropy Alliance. A Wellesley College graduate, she holds five honorary degrees and has received numerous awards for public service, including the Women Who Make a Difference Award from the International Women's Forum.

Governance is provided by an engaged Board of Directors and supported by advisory bodies such as the Scientific Advisory Committee and the Practice and Science of Civic Science Advisory Committee, which bring domain expertise and strategic insight to the Foundation's work.

For more information about the Rita Allen Foundation: <https://ritaallen.org/about/>