



Chief Executive Officer
UNC Charlotte Grid Modernization Engine in the Carolinas
Charlotte, North Carolina

THE SEARCH

Leading the powerhouse coalition selected as a National Science Foundation Regional Innovation Engine to modernize the nation's electrical grid and transform the regional economy across North and South Carolina, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNC Charlotte) is seeking a dynamic, innovative, and transformational Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for the Grid Modernization Engine in the Carolinas (GMEC). The coalition includes Clemson University, the South Carolina Research Authority, York Technical College, Joules Accelerator, and more than 100 public and private partners spanning academia, industry, utilities, government, nonprofits, and other regional stakeholders. Backed by up to \$160 million in federal support over ten years, the initiative represents one of the largest grants in the history of the UNC System and is expected, when fully realized, to generate an estimated 20,000 new jobs and \$2 billion in economic activity across the Carolinas.

The Grid Modernization Engine in the Carolinas (GMEC) is part of the NSF's broader Regional Innovation Engines program, which is designed to build technology-driven regional innovation ecosystems that advance critical technologies, address societal and geostrategic challenges, drive economic growth, create quality jobs, and expand equitable career pathways. NSF Engines bring together diverse partners around an integrated portfolio of use-inspired research, translation and commercialization, entrepreneurship and venture creation, workforce development, community engagement, and ecosystem building. Operating

over a period of up to ten years, these enterprise-scale initiatives are intended to create durable regional capacity and translate innovation into tangible economic and societal outcomes.

For GMEC, this mandate will require an executive leader capable of translating an unprecedented federal investment into measurable, lasting results. The CEO will establish the Engine's strategy and operations, build and lead a high-performing executive team, coordinate a complex portfolio of activities and partnerships, oversee implementation of the NSF award, and serve as a trusted cross-sector connector and compelling external representative. This leader must be comfortable navigating coalition governance and board oversight while balancing the interests of diverse partners and stakeholders. Operating at the intersection of industry, academia, government, utilities, commercialization partners, and regional stakeholders, the CEO will build the relationships and alignment necessary to move ideas from research and early development through commercialization, workforce development, economic development, and industry adoption. The CEO will also engage funders, elected officials, industry leaders, utilities, government agencies, academic institutions, and regional organizations, while cultivating strategic funding opportunities and building long-term sustainability.

A rare opportunity, the CEO will not simply manage an established institution; they will shape the strategy, culture, partnerships, and long-term capacity of a nationally significant initiative backed by an unprecedented federal investment, creating a lasting impact across the Carolinas and beyond. With an ambitious mandate to convert innovation into new technologies, businesses, jobs, and economic opportunity across the Carolinas, GMEC provides an extraordinary platform for a leader who wants to tackle significant challenges at scale. The role combines the intellectual depth of a leading academic and research environment with the pace and entrepreneurial spirit of a start-up, the reach of a major public-private partnership, and the opportunity to influence the future of the electric grid and the regional economy. The successful candidate will be energized by building, connecting people and institutions, and turning bold ideas into measurable impact.

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in this important recruitment. Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and resumes/CVs with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website.

UNC CHARLOTTE + NSF

UNC Charlotte is a dynamic public research university at the heart of one of the nation's fastest-growing metropolitan regions. As North Carolina's largest public research university in its largest city and one of the newest R1 research universities in the country, UNC Charlotte combines the scale and accessibility of a public institution with a growing national research profile and deep connections to industry and the community. With more than 32,000 students, 170+ undergraduate majors, master's and doctoral programs, and students representing all 50 states and 128 countries, the University offers an unusually rich environment for collaboration, innovation, and talent development. Located in Charlotte, a major center for energy, finance, technology, advanced manufacturing, and transportation, UNC Charlotte is

uniquely positioned to translate research and discovery into practical applications with regional, national, and global impact.

This momentum has been particularly evident in the University's longstanding leadership in energy and electrical-grid innovation. Through the William States Lee College of Engineering and the Energy Production and Infrastructure Center (EPIC), UNC Charlotte has spent nearly two decades building expertise, research capabilities, industry relationships, and workforce-development pathways focused on energy production, transmission, and distribution. This foundation, coupled with the Carolinas' concentration of utilities, manufacturers, technology companies, research institutions, and workforce-training organizations, helped establish the region as a compelling environment for tackling one of the nation's most pressing infrastructure challenges: modernizing the electric grid.

Against this backdrop, the National Science Foundation selected UNC Charlotte in July 2026 to lead the NSF Grid Modernization Engine in the Carolinas, one of only 12 new NSF Regional Innovation Engines selected nationwide. The initiative emerged from the NSF Engines program, a landmark federal effort designed to build technology-driven regional innovation ecosystems by connecting research with industry, entrepreneurship, workforce development, and community engagement. NSF created the program to accelerate the translation of research into technologies and businesses, strengthen regional economies, create quality jobs, and enhance U.S. competitiveness and national security. Each Engine is intended to develop a sustainable ecosystem capable of becoming a national leader in its area of focus, with awards providing an initial investment and the potential for up to \$160 million over ten years based on performance. UNC Charlotte was selected because of the strength of its existing energy research and innovation infrastructure, its history of collaboration with industry and government, and the exceptional network of partners across the Carolinas capable of advancing grid technologies from research and testing toward commercialization and deployment.

The Carolinas Grid Engine now brings together more than 100 partners across North and South Carolina—including research universities, utilities, manufacturers, entrepreneurs, investors, workforce organizations, nonprofits, and state and local governments—to accelerate the development, testing, commercialization, and deployment of technologies that can make the electric grid more resilient, reliable, secure, and efficient. The Engine spans 36 counties and is designed not simply to advance research, but to build a self-sustaining regional innovation ecosystem that connects scientific discovery with investment, manufacturing, workforce development, entrepreneurship, and real-world adoption. Its long-term vision is to establish the Carolinas as a nationally recognized leader in grid technology and workforce development while strengthening America's energy security. The initiative is expected to generate more than \$2 billion in regional economic impact and create or retain more than 20,000 high-growth energy jobs, while helping develop the technologies, companies, talent, and infrastructure needed to meet rapidly growing energy demand. The next CEO will therefore have the extraordinary opportunity to lead a nationally significant, cross-sector initiative at the intersection of research, technology, economic development, energy, and workforce transformation—and to help translate the Carolinas' considerable assets into lasting regional and national impact.

ROLE OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

The CEO of the Grid Modernization Engine in the Carolinas (GMEC) will have the rare opportunity to build and lead a complex, cross-sector enterprise whose success could materially shape the future of the region's energy economy. The ideal candidate will be both an internal architect and an external ambassador—aligning diverse stakeholders around common objectives, cultivating strategic partnerships and investment, navigating board and coalition governance, and representing GMEC with funders, elected officials, industry leaders, and other regional and national stakeholders.

The role carries an unusual level of accountability because GMEC is not simply implementing a traditional research grant; it is expected to develop into a sustainable regional innovation ecosystem. The CEO must therefore bring an entrepreneurial, founder's mindset and the ability to operate effectively amid considerable complexity, connecting research and development with commercialization, entrepreneurship, workforce development, and community engagement. Success will require a leader who can move promising technologies toward market adoption, build organizational capacity, secure additional public and private investment, and continually adapt partnerships and priorities as the ecosystem develops. Deep knowledge of energy infrastructure, grid modernization, advanced technology, or a related field will be important, as will experience translating research and innovation into commercial, workforce, or economic outcomes.

Importantly, the CEO will lead the Engine within a rigorous performance framework established by NSF. The initial award supports the first two years, with continued funding contingent on the Engine's performance against goals and [milestones](#) established in its cooperative agreement with NSF. NSF conducts comprehensive assessments at the end of Years 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, and 9, with additional reviews possible, evaluating progress toward tangible outcomes, long-term goals, ecosystem development, governance, and the commitments made by participating partners. Among the early requirements, the Engine must demonstrate meaningful progress toward a sustainable, STEM-based innovation ecosystem with long-term economic impact, demonstrate a commitment to inclusive innovation and career pathways, and secure NSF approval of all components of its five-year strategic and implementation plan by Month 15. Subsequent funding is not guaranteed: NSF releases additional funding based on demonstrated performance, with the potential for the Engine to receive up to \$160 million over ten years.

For the right executive, this combination of scale, autonomy, complexity, and consequence makes GMEC an extraordinary leadership opportunity. The CEO will have the resources and coalition needed to build an organization from the ground up and will also be entrusted with delivering against a clear set of milestones that will determine whether the initiative realizes its full potential. It is an opportunity for a visionary, results-oriented leader to bring together scientific discovery, industry expertise, investment, entrepreneurship, and workforce development around one of the region's most consequential infrastructure challenges—and to build an enduring institution capable of advancing innovation well beyond the life of the federal award. With the potential for up to \$160 million in NSF support over a decade, the CEO will have both the platform and the responsibility to turn an ambitious regional vision into a measurable and lasting impact. To learn more about NSF Regional Innovation Engines and the

funding structure, visit: <https://www.nsf.gov/funding/initiatives/regional-innovation-engines/funding-opportunities>

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The ideal candidate will bring many, if not all, of the following qualities and experiences:

- Demonstrated success leading complex, technically driven, innovation-focused organizations or initiatives, with the ability to establish a clear vision and translate it into measurable results.
- Experience launching, building, or scaling a complex organization; establishing effective operations; developing organizational capacity; and recruiting and leading a high-performing executive team.
- Demonstrated ability to lead complex, multi-organizational initiatives involving industry, academia, and government, while navigating the distinct priorities and cultures of each.
- A natural connector who can build trust, align diverse partners around shared objectives, and cultivate productive relationships across a broad regional ecosystem.
- Experience managing significant budgets, establishing organizational systems, and building the infrastructure necessary to support a complex, growing enterprise.
- Familiarity with federal funding requirements, including compliance, reporting, budgetary accountability, and complex grant administration.
- Experience working effectively with governing boards, advisory councils, or executive leadership committees.
- Demonstrated success in securing public and private investment, cultivating strategic funding opportunities, and building toward long-term organizational sustainability.
- The ability to reassess priorities, rebalance portfolios, and adjust partnerships and approaches as circumstances change, without losing sight of the Engine's overarching objectives.
- The ability to communicate clearly and persuasively with audiences ranging from researchers and industry executives to government officials, community stakeholders, investors, and the public.
- Bachelor's degree required; advanced degree preferred, particularly in engineering, business, public policy, or a related discipline.

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

Compensation will be competitive and commensurate with the successful candidate's background, experience, and expertise. The CEO is expected to reside locally or within close proximity to Charlotte, North Carolina.

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/university-north-carolina-charlotte/chief-executive-officer-nsf-grid-modernization>

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This document has been prepared based on the information provided by UNC Charlotte Grid Modernization Engine in the Carolinas. 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 UNC Charlotte Grid Modernization Engine in the Carolinas would supersede any conflicting information in this document.