Vice President for Institutional Advancement

RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

THE SEARCH

Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), one of the world's leading colleges of art and design, seeks a visionary, ambitious, and unifying fundraising leader to serve as its next Vice President for Institutional Advancement (VPIA). The new VPIA will join RISD at a time of tremendous opportunity and momentum. President Crystal Williams has assembled a reinvigorated leadership team that has brought fresh ideas, perspectives, and strategies, as well as a renewed commitment to ensuring that RISD's students—talented artists, designers, learners, and innovators—are well prepared for their futures. Social equity and inclusion (SEI) are central to President Williams' commitments, and these principles are expected to be integrated across all institutional outcomes.

35+
advancement professionals on the VPIA's team

$8 million
advancement operating budget

150 years
RISD's anniversary in 2027

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR TRANSFORMATION

THE SEARCH

The next VPIA will play a transformational role in the life of the institution, bringing creativity and innovation to all engagement and fundraising efforts. RISD has invested substantially in institutional advancement in recent years, and the VPIA will oversee a team of more than 35 professionals and an $8 million operating budget. In addition to new leadership and these investments, the VPIA will benefit from RISD's 150th anniversary in 2027, which is expected to galvanize interest among alumni, parents, trustees, and friends, as well as the wider art and design community around the world. The VPIA will also help lead an emerging capital campaign, which will be shaped by the soon-to-be-completed strategic plan. Working closely with the Chief Marketing and Communications Officer (CMCO) and the Board's Advancement and Reputation Committee, the VPIA will play a central role in positioning RISD for success over its next 150 years. To that end, the VPIA will design and implement an overarching vision and strategy for advancement across RISD—both the College and the Museum—strategically augmenting and aligning the existing team to elevate productivity, expand capacity, and meet RISD's short- and long-term philanthropic opportunities.

As chief philanthropic officer, the VPIA will report directly to President Williams and serve as a trusted advisor and strategic partner on her senior leadership team. Creativity and innovation are core to RISD's ethos, and the VPIA will be expected to engage students, alumni, faculty, trustees, and the wider community in ways that feel exciting and authentic. RISD is a complex, highly relational organization whose community is full of creative ideas, fascinating and untapped networks, and an eagerness to help—assets that have yet to be fully harnessed. The VPIA will bring systems thinking and genuine enthusiasm for fundraising to the position, both of which will be essential to success.

THE LEADER RISD SEEKS

THE SEARCH

The VPIA will be an innovative, ambitious advancement professional with a genuine commitment to RISD's mission and familiarity with the visual arts, design, and higher education. A superb storyteller, the VPIA will craft compelling cases for support and build authentic relationships across RISD's diverse community. The VPIA must be a self-starter who advances a clear set of priorities efficiently; demonstrates integrity, trustworthiness, and resourcefulness; adapts readily in a dynamic environment; and brings the creativity, emotional intelligence, judgment, and sophistication to partner effectively with internal and external constituents. The VPIA will work closely with members of the President's Cabinet, especially the Provost, the Senior Vice President for Finance and Administration, the Director of the RISD Museum, and the CMCO. The Cabinet is intentionally collaborative and consultative; its members work together to ideate, iterate, and support one another, reflecting the ethos of RISD's pedagogy and leadership.

KEY CABINET PARTNERS

- **Provost**
- **Senior Vice President for Finance and Administration**
- **Director of the RISD Museum**
- **Chief Marketing and Communications Officer**

RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN



Founded in 1877, RISD is a relatively small, independent college that plays an outsized role in the worlds of art and design—and it does so at a moment when art, design, and creative thinking are increasingly recognized as essential to shaping livable futures.

RISD has always occupied a singular place in art education. The College remains deeply committed to visuality, materiality, and craft, while also offering one of the largest and most wide-ranging liberal arts programs of any art school in the world. Its urban campus comprises a constellation of studios, shops, labs, foundries, looms, and glass, metal, and wood fabrication facilities that support the intense creative energy of a place where making is an essential form of thinking. RISD is also home to the third-largest academic art museum in the nation, which plays a vital role in the education of students and the cultural life of the community.

RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN

PLANNING

As RISD approaches its 150th anniversary, the institution is shaping its next chapter through a comprehensive strategic planning process that builds on the foundation established by *NEXT: RISD 2020–2027*. Launched in fall 2025, the planning process draws on extensive engagement with students, faculty, staff, alumni, trustees, and external partners to establish a shared vision and actionable priorities that will guide RISD over the next three to five years.

Under President Williams' leadership, RISD has advanced institutional priorities focused on holistic student wellness, preparing students for life beyond RISD, strengthening financial and operational effectiveness, and fostering a connected and supportive campus community. These efforts are informing a new strategic plan organized around four emerging pillars: *We Are RISD*, *Art and Design Futures*, *RISD for Life*, and *A Strong RISD*. Together, these priorities reflect RISD's commitment to academic and creative excellence, student success, community engagement, and long-term institutional sustainability.

Building on its longstanding work in social equity and inclusion, RISD remains committed to fostering a welcoming and supportive environment where all members of its community feel respected, have opportunities to contribute, and can thrive. Through ongoing institutional policies, practices, and initiatives, RISD continues to strengthen access, opportunity, engagement, and belonging for students, faculty, and staff.

FOUR EMERGING PILLARS

- *We Are RISD*
- *Art and Design Futures*
- *RISD for Life*
- *A Strong RISD*

RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN

STUDENTS

RISD's 2,600 students come from around the globe and are engaged in 44 full-time bachelor's and master's degree programs. Each of RISD's roughly 2,200 undergraduates completes a deep and rigorous exploration of making traditions through the first-year curriculum in Experimental and Foundation Studies and varied coursework in the liberal arts. Students earn a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in a wide variety of studio-based disciplines, including apparel design, ceramics, film/animation/video, furniture design, glass, graphic design, illustration, industrial design, interior architecture, jewelry and metalsmithing, painting, photography, printmaking, sculpture, and textiles. RISD also offers a five-year professional Bachelor of Architecture, a qualifying degree for licensure in architecture, as well as a dual-degree program with Brown University.

Approximately 400 students are enrolled in RISD's broad array of graduate programs, including the master's program in Design Engineering, created in partnership with Brown University. RISD continues to be recognized among the nation's leading institutions for art and design education. Although RISD no longer participates in the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings, the publication's 2026 rankings placed it fourth among Regional Universities North and tied for second nationally among graduate fine arts programs.

2,600
students

44
full-time bachelor's and master's degree programs

2,200
undergraduates (roughly)

400
graduate students (approximately)

RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN

STUDENTS

4,600
additional Continuing Education students annually (approximately)

41%
of currently enrolled students identify as students of color

2017
first art and design college to join the American Talent Initiative

RISD's Continuing Education programs extend the institution's reach to approximately 4,600 additional students annually.

In 2017, RISD became the first art and design college to join the American Talent Initiative, which aims to expand the number of accomplished low- and moderate-income students at the nation's most selective colleges and universities. RISD and other member institutions are enhancing their efforts to recruit and support lower-income students and contributing to research that will help other colleges and universities expand access. Among currently enrolled students, 41 percent identify as students of color, an increase of 13 percent over the past five years. Within this group, 17 percent identify as members of historically underrepresented populations, including American Indian or Alaska Native, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, multiracial, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander students.

RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN

FACULTY AND ACADEMIC STRUCTURE

500+
faculty members

~700
staff members

RISD is home to more than 500 faculty members and approximately 700 staff members. Accomplished artists, designers, architects, scholars, and educators, the faculty show exceptional dedication to teaching and mentoring students. Beyond the studio and classroom, they are leaders in their fields, pursuing a fascinating array of projects and producing a tremendous range of cutting-edge work.

RISD has four academic divisions, each led by a dean: the Division of Experimental and Foundation Studies, which oversees the studio curriculum for all first-year undergraduates; the Division of Architecture + Design; the Division of Fine Arts; and the Division of Liberal Arts. The deans work closely with department heads and graduate program directors to oversee faculty, degree programs, and curriculum.

FOUR ACADEMIC DIVISIONS

Division of
Experimental and Foundation Studies

Division of
Architecture + Design

Division of
Fine Arts

Division of
Liberal Arts

RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN

RISD MUSEUM

One of RISD's great assets is its museum. The third-largest university art museum in the country by size of collection, the RISD Museum believes that art, artists, and the institutions that support them play pivotal roles in promoting broad engagement and creating more open societies. Established with the College in 1877, the Museum holds more than 100,000 works of art and design from around the world, representing diverse cultures from ancient times to the present. A strong staff and seven curatorial departments—Ancient Art; Asian Art; Costume and Textiles; Decorative Arts and Design; Prints, Drawings, and Photographs; Painting and Sculpture; and Contemporary Art—are a rich resource for undergraduate and graduate research. The integration of RISD's academic program with the Museum has been greatly strengthened in recent years through new collaborative work, increased communication, and a clarified governance structure. The Director of the RISD Museum reports to the Museum's Board of Governors, which provides oversight on behalf of, and under delegation from, the RISD Board of Trustees. The Museum is an important bridge between Providence's past and its future, meaningfully connecting RISD to its local community.

100,000+
works of art and design

3rd
largest university art museum by collection

7
curatorial departments

1877
established with the College

RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN

PRESIDENT CRYSTAL WILLIAMS



A leader, advocate, and artist, Crystal Williams became the 18th president of RISD in April 2022, bringing more than two decades of higher education experience to the institution. Williams began her academic career at Reed College, where she served as professor of English and dean. Her work with colleagues to make Reed more equitable, diverse, and inclusive led to her appointment as the college's inaugural dean for institutional diversity. She continued this work at Bates College, where she served as associate vice president for strategic initiatives, professor of English, and senior advisor to the president. In 2017, she became the inaugural vice president and associate provost for community and inclusion at Boston University, as well as a professor of English.

At RISD, President Williams has prioritized increasing student financial aid and scholarships, with the aspiration that any student with the talent and will to study at RISD can do so. She has also launched a comprehensive examination of student wellness and committed to ensuring post-graduate success for RISD students. An award-winning poet and essayist, Williams has published four collections of poems, and her work is part of MoMA's Poetry Project, which invited writers to respond to works in the museum's permanent collection. The daughter of an educator and a musician, Williams was raised in Detroit, Michigan, and Madrid, Spain. She holds a BA from New York University and an MFA from Cornell University.

RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN

BOARD AND CABINET LEADERSHIP

RISD is governed by a Board of Trustees of more than 30 members, including local leaders, members of national and international prominence, and a diverse group of RISD alumni. The full Board meets three times a year and has an active committee structure, including standing committees for academic affairs, student affairs, finance, institutional engagement, investment, audit, and governance.

30+
trustees

3×
full Board meetings a year

The President's Cabinet is a diverse and talented team of senior academic and administrative leaders who guide decision-making at the institution. The Cabinet includes the Provost; Senior Vice President for Finance and Administration; Vice President for Enrollment; Vice President for Institutional Advancement; Chief Marketing and Communications Officer; General Counsel; Director of the RISD Museum; Special Assistant to the President and Secretary to the Board of Trustees; and Vice President for Social Equity and Inclusion. The Cabinet also includes the Vice President for Student Affairs, who reports to the Provost, and the Chief Information Officer and Vice President for Human Resources, who report to the Senior Vice President for Finance and Administration.

RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN

FINANCES

$190M
operating budget

$530M
endowment

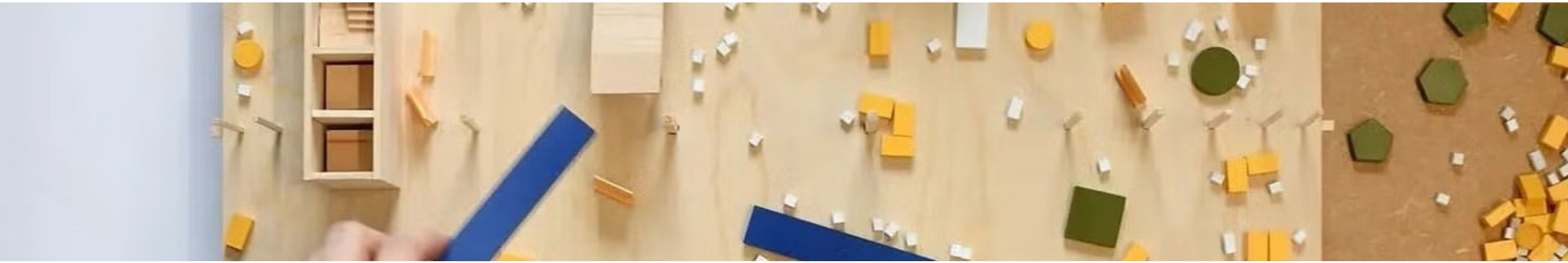
73%
of net operating revenue from tuition and fees

16%
from auxiliary revenue

22%
discount rate on gross tuition, FY26

RISD has an operating budget of $190 million and an endowment of $530 million. Approximately 73 percent of net operating revenue comes from tuition and fees and 16 percent from auxiliary revenue, primarily student housing and dining. Compared with its peers, RISD has a low discount rate—just 22 percent of gross tuition in FY26—and its tuition is near the top of the market. The College remains committed to bolstering its ability to provide robust financial aid to students with demonstrated need, and increasing scholarship funding has been, and continues to be, a top priority.

VICE PRESIDENT FOR INSTITUTIONAL ADVANCEMENT



Reporting to President Williams and serving as a member of her senior leadership team, the VPIA will provide strategic leadership for RISD's comprehensive fundraising and engagement efforts. The VPIA will play a central role in advancing the institution's mission, strengthening its culture of philanthropy, and building meaningful relationships with alumni, families, trustees, foundations, corporations, and friends of RISD.

The VPIA joins RISD at an important moment in its history, as the institution celebrates its 150th anniversary and develops a new strategic plan to guide its future. Building on recent investments in advancement staffing, infrastructure, and fundraising strategy, as well as record philanthropic support in fiscal year 2026, the VPIA will have the opportunity to sustain this momentum and expand RISD's philanthropic reach. The division includes more than 35 professionals supporting fundraising, alumni and family engagement, donor relations, advancement communications, and operations.

THE ROLE

VICE PRESIDENT FOR INSTITUTIONAL ADVANCEMENT

Working closely with the President, Board of Trustees, Museum leadership, and institutional partners, the VPIA will develop and execute a comprehensive, multiyear advancement strategy that supports the priorities of both the College and the RISD Museum. This leader will strengthen the pipeline of major and principal gifts, broaden alumni and family engagement, expand institutional partnerships, and grow sustainable philanthropic support, including for the endowment. The VPIA will also personally manage relationships with key philanthropic prospects and donors.

The successful candidate will be a collaborative, strategic, and accomplished advancement leader who appreciates RISD's distinctive creative community and can translate its ambitions into compelling opportunities for philanthropic investment.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

STRATEGIC VISION AND LEADERSHIP

1. Develop and implement a comprehensive, multiyear advancement strategy that supports RISD's emerging institutional priorities, strengthens philanthropic engagement, and advances sustainable revenue and endowment growth.
2. Serve as a trusted advisor to the President and senior leadership team, helping translate institutional priorities into compelling fundraising opportunities and advising on philanthropic potential, resource needs, and strategic investments.
3. Build on RISD's recent fundraising achievements by strengthening the major and principal gift pipeline, expanding annual giving, and developing strategies for donor acquisition, retention, stewardship, and long-term engagement.
4. Provide integrated leadership for advancement efforts across the College and the RISD Museum, fostering collaboration while recognizing their distinct priorities, constituencies, and philanthropic opportunities.
5. Evaluate the effectiveness of existing advancement programs, staffing, systems, and resources, identifying opportunities to strengthen performance, collaboration, and operational effectiveness.
6. Partner with campus leadership to develop clear and compelling narratives that communicate RISD's distinctive strengths, creative impact, and priorities to prospective supporters.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

EXECUTIVE ENGAGEMENT AND PHILANTHROPIC PARTNERSHIPS

1. Serve as a strategic partner to the President in cultivating, soliciting, and stewarding major and principal gifts, ensuring thoughtful coordination of leadership engagement with philanthropic prospects.
2. Engage and support the Board of Trustees, the RISD Museum Board of Governors, and other key volunteers in advancing philanthropic priorities and strengthening relationships with donors and prospective supporters.
3. Personally cultivate, solicit, and steward a portfolio of major and principal gift prospects, securing significant philanthropic commitments.
4. Strengthen partnerships with academic leaders, faculty, staff, and Museum leadership to identify fundraising opportunities and build a shared understanding of philanthropy's role in advancing RISD's mission.
5. Expand RISD's philanthropic relationships with alumni, families, foundations, corporations, and leaders across the arts, design, education, and broader creative communities, nationally and internationally.
6. Foster meaningful, lifelong engagement with RISD's alumni and families, creating opportunities for connection, participation, advocacy, and philanthropic support.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND OPERATIONAL OVERSIGHT

1. Lead, mentor, and develop a high-performing advancement team, establishing clear priorities, shared accountability, and a collaborative culture that supports professional growth and recognizes achievement.
2. Assess organizational structure, staffing, and resource allocation to ensure the division is positioned to achieve institutional priorities and sustain long-term fundraising success.
3. Promote a welcoming, respectful, and supportive working environment that values different perspectives, encourages innovation, and enables staff to contribute fully.
4. Ensure strong advancement operations, including gift administration, donor stewardship, prospect research, data management, technology, reporting, and compliance with applicable financial and legal requirements.
5. Establish meaningful performance measures and use data and analytics to evaluate fundraising effectiveness, inform strategy, and communicate progress to institutional leadership.
6. Oversee the division's operating budget, ensuring responsible stewardship of institutional resources and thoughtful investment in fundraising capacity and effectiveness.

QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

The successful candidate will bring many of the following qualifications and experiences:

1. Significant, progressively responsible leadership experience in institutional advancement, fundraising, or philanthropy—typically 15 or more years—or an equivalent record of achievement in a complex, mission-driven organization.

2. Demonstrated success developing and executing comprehensive fundraising strategies that produce sustained philanthropic growth, including in major and principal gifts.

3. A proven record of personally cultivating, soliciting, and securing significant gifts from individuals, foundations, corporations, and other institutional supporters.

4. Experience leading, developing, and inspiring high-performing teams, with demonstrated success strengthening organizational effectiveness and fostering collaboration and accountability.

5. The strategic judgment and executive presence necessary to serve as a trusted advisor to a president, board members, and other senior institutional leaders.

CONTINUED

QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

6. Exceptional communication, relationship-building, and storytelling skills, with the ability to articulate a compelling vision and inspire philanthropic investment.

7. Demonstrated ability to navigate complex organizations, build trust across varied constituencies, and lead effectively through change.

8. Strong financial and operational acumen, including experience managing budgets, leveraging advancement technology, and using data to guide decisions and measure performance.

9. Experience in higher education, museums, arts and cultural institutions, or similarly complex nonprofit organizations, with an appreciation for the distinctive role of art and design in education and society.

10. Sound judgment, integrity, creativity, adaptability, and a collaborative leadership approach, coupled with genuine curiosity about RISD's academic and creative community.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, and applications, including a résumé and cover letter, may be submitted in confidence via Isaacson, Miller's website.

THIS SEARCH IS BEING LED BY

Jack Gorman
Managing Partner and Practice Leader

Kahn Lee
Managing Associate

Lisa Clayton
Managing Search Coordinator

Isaacson, Miller

Apply or submit a nomination: imsearch.com/open-searches/rhode-island-school-design/vice-president-institutional-advancement

Rhode Island School of Design is an equal opportunity employer. RISD is looking for equity-minded applicants who represent the full diversity of the globe and who demonstrate a sensitivity to and understanding of the diverse academic, socioeconomic, cultural, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, and ethnic backgrounds present in its community. When you join the team at RISD, you can expect to be part of an inclusive, innovative, and equity-focused community that approaches higher education as a matter of social justice that requires broad collaboration among faculty, staff, students, and community partners. In deciding whether to apply for a position at RISD, you are strongly encouraged to consider whether your values align with RISD's Mission + Values, SEI Accountability Commitments, and Strategic Plan.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). 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 RISD would supersede any conflicting information in this document.