



SEARCH FOR THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR HUMAN RESOURCES  
RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN  
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

## THE SEARCH

Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), known internationally as one of the leading art and design colleges, requests nominations, recommendations, and outstanding applications for its Vice President for Human Resources (VPHR). RISD seeks a passionate and strategic people and culture leader attuned to best-practice human resources administration to join the College and lead an equity-centered HR strategy aligned with RISD's unique culture and mission.

Reporting to the Senior Vice President for Finance and Administration, the VPHR is the Chief Human Resources Officer of the institution and is responsible for leading a human resources function and strategy that aligns with and advances RISD's mission and strategic direction. The VPHR leads the development and administration of human resources policies, procedures, programs, and services that advance RISD's mission and support a community of more than 2,600 students, 650 full and part-time faculty, and more than 650 staff. They are a strategic partner, collaborating closely with stakeholders across RISD to implement human resources management policy, practice, and strategy, making recommendations in concert with RISD's human resources philosophy and RISD's strategic interests. The VPHR is responsible for designing and operating human resources systems and practices that support employment and service across the employee life cycle of a unionized environment, overseeing programs and policies in compensation, benefits, labor relations, recruitment, social equity and inclusion, EEO, employee training and development, change management, and employee communications.

RISD seeks a collaborative and strategic human resources leader—who has a proven track record of successfully and affirmatively advancing social equity and inclusion goals—to articulate a vision for modern, equity-centered human resources functions responsive to RISD's unique culture and specific operational needs. The VPHR will be a visible, transparent, transformative, and collaborative leader, working closely with leadership on strategic human resources issues and institutional priorities.

RISD has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in the recruitment of its next Vice President for Human Resources. Please direct all applications, nominations, and inquiries to Isaacson, Miller, as indicated at the end of this document.

## ABOUT THE RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN

Founded in 1877, RISD is a relatively small, independent college that plays an inordinately significant role in the spheres of art and design—and doing so at the very moment when art, design, and creative thinking are ascending as essential methodologies for shaping livable futures.

RISD has always occupied a singular space in the art education sphere. The College remains deeply committed to visuality, materiality, and craft while also having one of the largest, most wide-ranging liberal arts programs of any art school in the world. RISD has an urban campus comprising a constellation of studios, shops, labs, foundries, looms, glass, metal, and wood fabrication facilities that are the platform for the intense creative energy of the place that engages *making* as an essential form of thinking. It houses 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.

RISD's 2,600 students come to the College from all over the globe and are engaged in 44 full-time bachelor's and master's degree programs. Each of the roughly 2,600 undergraduate students at RISD completes a deep and rigorous exploration of critical making 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 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 Baccalaureate Degree, the Bachelor of Architecture, which is a qualifying degree for a license in the field of architecture.

Approximately 500 students are enrolled annually in RISD's broad array of graduate programs. Peer institutions rate RISD's graduate programs highly; in the most recent fine arts rankings (*U.S. News and World Report*, 2020), RISD is rated as having the top graduate program in the country in Graphic Design, tied for second in Painting/Drawing and Printmaking, and tied for third in Photography. The Department of Continuing Education (CE) serves an additional 6,500 individual students per year.

RISD is home to approximately 650 dedicated staff members and 650 full and part-time faculty. As accomplished artists, designers, architects, scholars, and educators, faculty show exceptional dedication to teaching and mentoring students. Beyond the studio and classroom, RISD's faculty are leaders in their respective fields, pursuing a fascinating array of projects and producing a tremendous range of cutting-edge work. Central to the implementation of RISD's evolving social equity and inclusion (SEI) initiatives, a recent "[Race in Art & Design](#)" cluster hire initiative is underway to grow the College's cross-institutional expertise and breadth of course offerings through the hiring of ten new faculty in areas of race, colonization, post-coloniality, and cultural representation.

In 2017, RISD became the first arts and design college to join the select ranks of the American Talent Initiative, which aims to expand the numbers of accomplished low- and moderate-income students at some of the nation's most selective schools. 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. Since 2017, applications to RISD from historically underrepresented groups (American Indian or Alaska Native, Black, or African American, Hispanic, Multiracial, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific) have grown by 54 percent, which is an important sign that the work is starting to pay off.

### **President Crystal Williams**

Crystal Williams became President of RISD in the spring of 2022, bringing more than two decades of higher education experience to the institution. An accomplished leader, collaborator, and community builder, Williams began her career teaching at Reed College, where she became a faculty activist, collaborating with colleagues to envision and catalyze a more inclusive and diverse institution. As a result, she was appointed the College's inaugural dean for institutional diversity. She moved on to similarly catalytic roles, first at Bates College, where Williams was the College's first associate vice president for strategic initiatives, and then to Boston University, where she also served in inaugural roles, first as associate provost for diversity & inclusion and most recently as vice president and associate provost for community & inclusion. An award-winning poet and essayist, Williams has published four collections of poems, and her work is part of MoMA's Poetry Project, a tour of poems responding to pieces in the museum's permanent collection. The daughter of an educator and a musician, Williams was raised in Detroit, MI, and Madrid, Spain, and holds a BA degree from New York University and an MFA degree from Cornell University.

### **Organization and Finance**

RISD is governed by a 33-member Board of Trustees (including Ex Officio Trustees; the president is the 33<sup>rd</sup> Trustee). The Board includes individuals with both national and international prominence, including alumni, parents, and leaders in a wide range of industries.

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 Student Affairs, Vice President for Institutional Advancement, Chief Marketing and Communications Officer, Vice President for Strategy and Planning, Director of the RISD Museum, and Vice President for Social Equity and Inclusion. Additional members of the president's cabinet who report to the SVPF&A include the Chief Information Officer, Vice President for Campus Services, and Vice President for Human Resources.

Currently, RISD has an operating budget of \$185 million. Approximately 73 percent of net operating revenue comes from tuition and fees and 16 percent from auxiliary revenue (primarily student housing

and dining). In comparison to peer schools, RISD's discount rate is low (just 22 percent of gross tuition in FY19), and the College is near the top of tuition pricing. This past year, nearly 100 percent of students who exhibited financial need received aid. Meeting full needs is among RISD's ambitious goals.

## Planning

In 2019, the RISD community developed its ambitious [Strategic Plan](#), *RISD: Next 2020-2027*, to steer the organization in the years leading to its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The plan continues to provide a framework for growth even as it will benefit from deeper investment and enhancement in several priority areas.

In addition, President Williams' emerging strategic priorities signal her goals, which include deepening and bolstering the current strategic plan with data-informed decision-making and, where necessary, new initiatives; renewing the institution's focus on holistic student wellness and outcomes; a commitment to ensure that RISD's on-campus and off-campus communities are thriving; and advancing RISD's global engagements.

In 2017, RISD developed a Social Equity and Inclusion Plan (SEI Action Plan) and, in the summer of 2020, announced four clarified [SEI Accountability Commitments](#) that build upon that plan. These commitments serve as guideposts for accountability on the College's social equity and inclusion aims.

RISD is also guided by its 2012 [Master Plan](#), which seeks to address deferred maintenance, enhance academic facilities and equipment, and expand RISD's technology infrastructure. Rather than taking a 20th-century approach and developing a static list of projects, RISD chose to develop a set of dynamic and responsive tools calibrated to sustain long-term core values, principles, and policies. This master plan was designed to persist through future changes in leadership, economic variability, and pedagogical and technological advances.

## ROLE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR HUMAN RESOURCES

The Vice President for Human Resources is the Chief Human Resources Officer for RISD and also serves as an EEO Officer. They are responsible for leading RISD's human resources department and for developing, implementing, evaluating, and modifying, as appropriate, an HR strategy consistent with the mission of the College and in support of RISD's strategic direction. The VPHR ensures the development and implementation of programs that enhance employee performance and satisfaction while supporting RISD's continued fiscal stability. They oversee programs and policies in compensation, benefits, labor relations, recruitment, diversity and inclusion, EEO, training and employee development, change management, and employee communications that attract and retain a diverse, high-performing workforce.

The VPHR is looked upon to mentor, develop, and provide consultative and technical assistance to the human resources staff, fostering HR service and operational excellence via high-quality, cost-efficient, customer-oriented services, tools, analysis, and data.

## **KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR HUMAN RESOURCES**

The VPHR will be a practiced change manager adept at leading a compliant, efficient, customer-centric human resources suite. This is a unique opportunity to be the Chief Human Resources Officer of a storied and internationally renowned institution. Candidates for this role will enter a dynamic and informed community that is passionate about cultivating expansive and elastic thinking, equipping generations of artists, designers, and scholars with a space to generate and challenge the ideas that shape our world. Within this context, the VPHR will address the following opportunities and challenges:

### ***Steward a Human Resources function that supports RISD's unique needs***

The VPHR will develop a new vision for the operational, strategic, and philosophical nature of the human resources functions at RISD to ensure they support this unique institution, its community, and its mission. The VPHR will inherit an organization that will benefit from a deep and action-oriented commitment to organizational development and training and a staff that consistently articulates the desire for more professional, cross-functional development opportunities. The VPHR will review RISD's total rewards offerings, aligning strategic and financial imperatives while ensuring equitable benefits and compensation plans that support RISD's ability to attract and retain a talented workforce. They will be looked upon to analyze and make strategic recommendations to leadership about compensation and benefits plans and their components. RISD is seeking someone with strong human resources technical skills coupled with compassionate and empathetic people and cultural leadership skills to articulate a vision for a modern, compliant human resources function that is responsive to RISD's culture and operational needs.

### ***Support a unionized environment***

A portion of RISD employees are members of collective bargaining units. Nine unions represent 28% of all RISD employees and almost 100% of full- and part-time faculty. The VPHR will serve as an adept advocate for RISD's mission and operational and strategic needs while maintaining active and effective communications and collaborative relationships with union leadership. The VPHR will provide consultative advice to the Director of Labor Relations, working proactively to identify potential problem areas and solutions. Strong, nuanced communication and collaborative engagement will be paramount to ensuring a sense of equity across all employee types and maintaining effective and productive relationships with union leadership.

***Engage with leadership, stakeholders, and community members across RISD to develop and support an inclusive, equity-focused environment***

The VPHR will be looked upon to advance current work focused on building an inclusive and dynamic community, leading with emotional intelligence and informed practice. This position and its designates will collaborate with the VP for Social Equity and Inclusion and their office to establish and support the creation and implementation of affinity groups and drive excellence across the breadth of the RISD community and the employee life cycle. They will lead initiatives that increase recruitment, hiring, and retention diversity and ensure that policies and practices at RISD reflect inclusive, equitable practices. The RISD community is tremendously diverse in all respects, and there is an opportunity to celebrate and leverage that diversity to draw the community closer in service to its mission.

***Strategically review HR systems and structures to ensure optimal organizational, cultural, and mission support***

The VPHR will engage in a broad review of all HR systems and their associated procedures and processes across the employee lifecycle. They will engage with faculty and staff to learn the human resources operational needs of the community and then develop a strategy to collaborate with IT and other offices to implement changes. RISD implemented Workday for HR and Finance in 2019. There is a sense that the system is not being used optimally to leverage its inherent strengths and efficiencies. The VPHR will develop a process and roadmap to identify and update processes and procedures to ensure efficiency, compliance, and documentation, with the goal of achieving a more consultative and less transactional HR function.

**Strengthen HR communications**

The VPHR will be looked upon to develop responsive communication and engagement plans and documentation to support customer-focused HR service delivery at every stage of the employee lifecycle. The RISD community desires timely and effective communication to provide relevant and transparent HR information. The VPHR will maintain a proactive communication plan that anticipates employee needs and provides transparent information and support.

**Lead the HR office and staff**

The VPHR will be an advocate and energizing leader for HR staff, supporting their professional growth and needs and continuing to develop networks of constructive relationships to support RISD and HR needs. They will oversee and maintain a cost-effective budget for the Human Resources function. The VPHR will strategically review the overall office structure to ensure optimal alignment with the needs of the RISD community, articulating and executing a long-term vision for HR that will allow the department to realize its potential as a strategic and trusted campus partner.

## QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

- A master's degree in human resource management, Organization Development, or a related field, or equivalent combination of education and experience.
- A minimum of ten (10) years of progressively responsible experience in human resources.
- Prior experience as a chief human resources officer is strongly preferred; previous management experience is required.
- Previous experience in both a not-for-profit environment and a unionized environment is preferred.
- Demonstrated ability to work effectively with multiple constituencies is vital.
- The ability to read and comprehend documents and instruments and perform detailed work using reasoning and problem-solving skills,
- The ability to perform multiple concurrent tasks with constant interruptions.
- Strong oral and written communication skills and interpersonal skills
- Strong organizational acumen and analytic skills.
- Must be able to deal with confidential data and work in a high-impact, dynamic, and time-sensitive environment.

## Applications, Inquiries, and Nominations

RISD is assisted in this recruitment by the executive search firm Isaacson, Miller. All inquiries and nominations should be directed to the search firm. Please send a CV or resume and a letter of interest in strict confidence to the following:

Dan Rodas, Partner,  
Tim Lanigan, Senior Associate  
Isaacson, Miller

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/rhode-island-school-design/vice-president-human-resources>

***Rhode Island School of Design is an equal employment institution.***

*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 their 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 our [Mission + Values](#), our [SEI Accountability Commitments](#), and our [Strategic Plan](#).*