



Wisconsin Center for Education Research
University of Wisconsin-Madison
WIDA
Madison, WI

Search for the Executive Director

THE SEARCH

WIDA, the international leader in the research and development of products and services to support multilingual learners and their educators, seeks a dynamic and strategic leader to serve as the organization's next Executive Director (ED). WIDA offers a fully integrated, research-based academic language development system, including language standards, assessments, professional learning, research, and technical assistance, delivered through its unique consortium model currently serving 42 states, territories, and federal agencies. This comprehensive system, based on research and educator feedback, is built on standards, assessments, and professional learning. The organization is housed in the Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER) at the top-ranked School of Education (SOE) within the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison). Since its founding in 2003, WIDA has experienced impressive growth and currently employs 150 staff members with annual revenues of \$90 million.

Reporting to the Director of the Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, the Executive Director will join the organization at a moment of tremendous opportunity. Over the past 21 years under the direction of Founder Tim Boals, WIDA has evolved from a grant proposal involving three states into the nation's foremost provider of language development resources for multilingual learners (MLLs) and their educators. WIDA's products are unmatched, as is its commitment to providing world class educational opportunities for MLLs, which is infused into the policies and products it develops. In recent years, the business landscape of multilingual learning has transformed, leading to greater competition in the language assessment market. The political landscape has similarly evolved, reinforcing the need for WIDA to ensure its educational philosophy is reflected in its products and services.

The Executive Director will lead the organization through a critical period of transition as Founder Tim Boals moves into the new role of Founder/Sr. Principal Investigator in the organization. In setting the strategic direction for the next several years, the new Executive Director will work to maintain WIDA's dominant position in an increasingly competitive market; champion WIDA's founding mission in a changing political and educational landscape; manage external relationships with education departments, policymakers, and other testing organizations and education technology companies; and help to guide internal organizational culture.

A mission-focused, strategic, and process-minded leader, the Executive Director will bring a deep knowledge of PreK-12 education; balanced assessment systems including formative, interim, and large-scale assessment; standards; and professional learning, with a steadfast commitment to WIDA's vision of remaining the most trusted and valued resource in supporting the education of multilingual learners. The successful candidate will hold a master's degree, preferably in education, linguistics, business, or a related field, and have at least seven years of management experience effectively leading a team of committed and mission-driven professionals. A Ph.D. or Ed.D. is preferred.

WIDA has retained the national search firm Isaacson, Miller to assist in this important search. Confidential inquiries, nominations, and applications may be directed to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON, SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

WIDA is the largest education research, assessment, and professional learning organization focused on MLLs that is closely affiliated with a major research university. As part of the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Education, WIDA benefits from the institution's collaborative spirit as well as the material and intellectual resources of the nation's best education school, as named in the 2024 edition of *US News and World Report's* Best Education Schools ranking. The School of Education is one of 13 schools and colleges on the prestigious, 933-acre UW-Madison campus.

Many of the School's programs are widely regarded as being among the very best in the nation. The people and units that make up the School are addressing some of society's most critical needs – from challenges in education at all levels, to issues in health and other human services – while also contributing to quality of life through the arts.

The School is home to ten academic departments, a diverse range of research projects, and an array of outreach efforts. In addition to several core education programs, about half of the School's students are enrolled in fine art, dance, counseling, occupational therapy, and exercise science programs. It also houses several service units that serve the School and the broader community.

As of fall 2023, the School of Education enrolled 2,026 undergraduate and special majors (including second/additional majors) and 1,172 graduate and professional majors (including second/add majors). The School of Education employed 824 faculty and staff as of October 2023.

For more information about the School of Education, please visit: <https://www.education.wisc.edu/>

WISCONSIN CENTER FOR EDUCATION RESEARCH (WCER)

The Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's School of Education is one of the most productive and respected education research centers in the world. WCER is a financially self-sustaining research center that is fully supported by revenue generated from indirect cost recovery from both grants and fee-for-service projects. Annually, it supports 150 grant-funded projects and roughly 620 scholars—119 affiliated faculty members from the School of Education and other

units across campus, 288 academic staff, 192 graduate students, and 21 university staff. WCER supports projects ranging from one principal investigator to teams of researchers and hundreds of staff. It covers the full grant and fee-for-service life cycle and offers financial, human resources, technology, contractual, facilities, creative, and communication services, as well as ample opportunities for networking and exchange. Anyone researching education affiliated with any UW–Madison school or college is eligible to work with WCER, pending the approval of the WCER Director.

WCER is also home to a number of projects that produce revenue-generating products and provide services to customers including schools, districts, and educational bodies around the world. WIDA is the largest of these fee-for-service projects. In addition to WIDA, WCER is home to several smaller projects that produce revenue-generating products and provide services to customers including schools, districts, and educational bodies around the world. These projects include the Center for the Improvement of Mentored Experiences in Research (CIMER); the School Mental Health Collaborative (SMHC); the Field Day Lab; the Multilingual Learning Research Center (MLRC); the Rural Education Research and Implementation Center (RERIC); the Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN); the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC); and Wisconsin’s Equity and Inclusion Laboratory (WeiLab), which conducts research on how to best promote equitable and inclusive learning and work environments in higher education.

WCER Leadership

Dr. Courtney Bell assumed the Directorship of WCER on July 1, 2020. Bell came to this role after serving as Principal Research Scientist at the Educational Testing Service (ETS), the world’s largest private nonprofit educational testing and assessment organization. While at ETS, she co-led the conceptualization, launch, and development of the Understanding Teaching Quality Center, which supports research and development related to measuring various aspects of teaching. She also co-led eight economies in the Global Teaching InSights project, a study of mathematics teaching and learning across language and cultural contexts. A former high school science teacher and teacher educator, her research looks across actors in the educational system to better understand the intersections of research, policy, and practice.

ABOUT WIDA

WIDA is WCER’s largest fee-for-service program. Its mission is to advance academic language development and academic achievement for children and youth who are culturally and linguistically diverse through high-quality standards, assessments, research, and professional learning for educators. WIDA products and services are trusted by 42 U.S. states, territories, and federal agencies.

WIDA’s story begins with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which brought English Language Learners (ELLs) into the national spotlight. In 2003, the Wisconsin Department of Public Education was awarded an Enhanced Assessment Grant and WIDA was created to support it. In 2006, WIDA moved to its current home at WCER at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Today, WIDA offers a comprehensive suite of assessments, each built on a foundation of strong research and anchored in the WIDA English Language Development (ELD) Standards. The ELD Standards represent

the social, instructional, and academic language students use to engage with peers, educators, and the curriculum in schools and highlight the language needed to meet academic expectations set by state, college, and career readiness standards, as well as other content standards.

Using the ELD Standards, WIDA assessments identify and place MLLs, and measure and determine progress toward English language development for K-12 learners. The ACCESS for ELLs (ACCESS), begun in 2004, is the collective name for WIDA's suite of summative English language proficiency assessments. ACCESS is taken annually by more than two million MLLs in Kindergarten through Grade 12 in all 42 WIDA Consortium member states, territories, and federal agencies. Scores measure student learning towards a standard or goal and are used to describe student performance in terms of the WIDA ELD Standards and performance definitions. ACCESS, like other WIDA assessments, is offered online and on paper.

In addition to ACCESS, WIDA offers several other assessments, including WIDA Screener, an English language proficiency assessment given to new students in grades K-12 to help educators identify whether they are English language learners. WIDA also offers an interim assessment through MODEL (Measure of Developing English Language), a suite of English language proficiency assessments for Grades K-12 that can be used to predict student performance on ACCESS for MLLs domestically and internationally as a measure of language development. WIDA also supports Spanish language learners in grades K-12 with WIDA Español.

WIDA provides tools and resources to empower educators and advance the field of language development. The organization's professional learning reaches more than 20,000 educators annually and it hosts the largest conference dedicated to educators of early childhood through Grade 12 multilingual learners, offering nearly 2,000 attendees access to more than 100 educator-developed sessions. Today, most of WIDA's offerings are entirely digital.

About WIDA's Founder

Dr. Tim Boals is the Founder and current Executive Director of WIDA. His research interests involve the interplay between content and language learning for multilingual learners across the language acquisition continuum and the effects of standards on classroom practice for these learners. He has recently collaborated on books and articles about the re-conceptualization of academic language and the evolving construct of English language testing including "Multilingual Learners and Academic Literacies," "Formative Language Assessment for ELLs," and a book chapter on supporting multilingual learners with special needs. Current writings and presentations include the topic of opportunity to learn for multilingual learners and what is required to ensure high-quality academic environments for these students. In his new role, Dr. Boals will expand WIDA's position as a thought leader around language acquisition and development by convening national researchers, policymakers, and administrators in research-driven colloquia that inform innovation and future development. He will continue to ensure that WIDA's core vision, mission, and values are upheld, and support the new Executive Director and leadership team members while serving as the founder at conferences, events, and staff meetings.

Dr. Boals holds a Ph.D. in curriculum from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with an emphasis on the education of multilingual learners. His background includes language education, educational policy, and Spanish language and literature.

THE ROLE

The Executive Director will join WIDA following many years of growth and will sustain the organization's excellence through a significant transition in leadership. Since its founding, WIDA has expanded and improved its comprehensive system of assessments and instructional support for educators of multilingual learners and has grown from three to 150 employees with annual revenues of \$90 million. The WIDA Consortium has grown from three to 40+ member states, territories, and federal agencies. WIDA carries considerable name recognition and is positioned to play a meaningful role in influencing state and federal multilingual education policy through its Executive Director.

The Executive Director will lead WIDA's senior management team and serve as the organization's leading spokesperson to the global assessment community as well as WIDA's member states. In addition, the Executive Director will promote high-functioning decision-making, purposeful collaboration, strategic planning, and project prioritization and will help build a culture of trust, equity, and inclusion across the organization.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Executive Director will be expected to address the opportunities listed below:

Direct and refine WIDA's organizational strategy

As WIDA has grown in scope and scale, its horizon of opportunity has also expanded. The next Executive Director will provide meaningful strategic direction for the organization across its research, assessment, and professional learning divisions, assessing and building upon areas of strength and collaboratively crafting a vision for the future in the organization's next strategic plan. The Executive Director will provide vision and direction around priority growth areas including interim assessment and professional learning. As the organization's seniormost official, the Executive Director bears ultimate responsibility for product decisions, market direction, and organizational policy and structure, and will strategically respond to market realities, state and federal policy, and evolving student and educator needs to ensure that WIDA serves its mission of delivering high-quality products and services while honoring the organization's core values.

Continue WIDA's entrepreneurial and innovative spirit while maintaining its commanding position in an increasingly competitive market

In its first two decades, WIDA grew organically, benefiting from federal mandates for the assessment of English language learners and establishing nonbinding agreements with many of its state partners. While WIDA remains the preeminent provider of educational products for multilingual learners, new competitors have emerged in this market. As the MLL assessment marketplace becomes increasingly

open, the next ED will work to maintain WIDA's leading position. The ED will build a proactive, market-savvy mindset within the organization and maintain a critical eye toward WIDA's offerings to ensure they meet current educator needs and standards of research efficacy. The ED will identify and engage external partners in state and federal education departments to remain informed of potential policy changes and to anticipate and respond to those changes with adroitness. Similarly, the ED will maintain relationships across the education technology and assessment industries to stay apprised of shifts and trends, exchange industry knowledge and support, and identify additional industry partners, including vendors, to support future aspirations.

Champion WIDA's founding mission in a changing political and educational landscape

As Executive Director, this next leader will strategically guide external relations with state and federal policymakers. As the nation's largest educational consortia focused on multilingual learners, WIDA is uniquely positioned to influence the direction of multilingual education policy. Representing WIDA on behalf of states and their multilingual learners and educators, the Executive Director will advocate for policies that support the academic success of multilingual learners and provide thought leadership in state and national conversations that impact WIDA's mission, including recent challenges to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and increasing anti-testing sentiment. Internally, the ED will work closely with the Director of Consortium and State Relations to track and interpret state and federal policies that could impact WIDA and position the organization to provide consultative support to its staff and partners.

Sustain a mutually beneficial relationship with the University of Wisconsin

Since 2006, WIDA has resided within the Wisconsin Center for Education Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and benefits from the University's name recognition and resources. At the same time, as a large revenue-generating operation, WIDA requires distinctive supports from other University programs, including commercialization services offered by the Wisconsin Center for Education Products and Services (WCEPS). The next ED will advocate for WIDA at multiple levels—WCER, the School of Education, and the University of Wisconsin, by constructively communicating organizational needs related to business development, staffing, and finances to University leadership in order to ensure WIDA's continued success.

Help to guide organizational culture

WIDA's significant growth has introduced many new staff into the organization over the past five years. Remaining attuned to the strengths and challenges of virtual and hybrid work, the ED will help to nourish trust and strengthen community in WIDA's dynamic work environment. Additionally, the ED will lead internal conversations around the organization's social justice mission, its external threats, and WIDA's responses to those challenges. Finally, the ED will provide critical people leadership and coaching to WIDA's exceptional team, equipping them with vision, motivation, and direction.

QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

The successful candidate will hold a master's degree, preferably in education, linguistics, business, or a related field. Candidates with a Ph.D. or Ed.D are strongly encouraged to apply. The ideal candidate will possess many of the following professional experiences and personal characteristics:

- At least 7 years of management experience effectively leading a performance- and mission-based organization; ability to cite specific examples of having developed and operationalized organizational strategies that align with mission;
- Excellence in organizational management and demonstrated ability to coach staff; manage and develop high-performance teams; and manage a complex budget;
- Excellent professional judgment managing change and conflict resolution;
- Excellent communication and interpersonal skills; elevated level of skill managing communication strategies with stakeholders, particularly in making complex topics external-facing and accessible;
- Demonstrated commitment to and experience with equity, diversity, and inclusion;
- Leadership experience in the field of PreK-12 domestic education;
- Knowledge about/experience with national education policy and implications for multilingual learner education, language development, language proficiency assessments, and teacher professional development;
- Knowledge of and experience making strategic decisions for large-scale education-related assessment development and delivery systems;
- Experience analyzing current research and industry trends to improve organizational products and practices;
- Experience leading major product releases and enhancements;
- A willingness to engage in and deepen knowledge of WIDA's Social Justice value;
- Multilingual or bilingual/biliterate.

TO APPLY

WIDA has engaged Isaacson, Miller for this search. Inquiries, nominations, and applications should be sent in strict confidence to:

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/wida/executive-director>

Jeff Kessner, Diana Carmona, and Jenny Rubin

Isaacson, Miller

The University of Wisconsin System will not reveal the identities of applicants who request confidentiality in writing. See Wis. Stat. sec. 19.36(7). Candidates who are selected as finalists will be invited for campus interviews and their names will be announced publicly.

The University of Wisconsin is an Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Employer. We promote excellence through diversity and encourage all qualified individuals to apply.

If you need to request an accommodation because of a disability, you can find information about how to make a request at the following website: <https://oed.wisc.edu/disability-accommodation-information-for-applicants/>

Employment will require a criminal background check. It will also require you and your references to answer questions regarding sexual violence and sexual harassment.

The Annual Security and Fire Safety Report contains current campus safety and disciplinary policies, crime statistics for the previous 3 calendar years, and on-campus student housing fire safety policies and fire statistics for the previous 3 calendar years. UW-Madison will provide a paper copy upon request; please contact the University of Wisconsin Police Department.