



Vice President of Strategy and Planning and Senior Advisor to the President
Rhode Island School of Design
Providence, Rhode Island

THE SEARCH

Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) seeks an experienced, strategic-minded, and versatile individual to join the leadership team of one of the world's leading art and design colleges. New president Crystal Williams has joined the School at an exciting inflection point in its history, as RISD commits itself anew to assuring that RISD's students—talented young artists, designers, learners, and innovators—are well prepared for their futures. The Vice President for Strategy and Planning (VPSP) leadership role is an opportunity to advance and execute on the ambitious goals and strategic initiatives of the college, in broad collaboration with a range of internal and external partners and guided by the overarching goal for RISD to become a fully inclusive, innovative, and equity-focused educational community.

This vice president will strategically align and integrate a range of institutional planning activities to position the School for continuous improvement. The work will include generating processes to advance RISD's current strategic plan as well as driving new and cross-cutting initiatives. In addition, as a senior advisor to the president, the VPSP will play a critical part in helping the president to achieve maximum impact in her role. The vice president will provide strategic and analytical support to the president, manage special presidential initiatives from beginning to end, and assist the president's office and senior leadership team to function collaboratively.

The successful candidate will be a problem-solver and systems thinker who is able to shape and lead significant organizational change efforts. The VPSP will have a naturally consultative mindset and will have the vision and foresight to manage large-scale initiatives while also being able to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of internal operations. This individual will oversee the formation of the office of strategic initiatives as well as oversee the president's administrative office.

OVERVIEW: RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN

Founded in 1877, RISD is a relatively small, independent college that plays an inordinately large 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 has 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 2500 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 2,000 undergraduate students at RISD complete 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 635 dedicated staff members, 190 full-time faculty members, and approximately 115 part-time faculty members. 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%, which is an important sign that the work is starting to pay off.

President Crystal Williams

As accomplished leader, collaborator and community builder, Crystal Williams became president of RISD in the spring of 2022, bringing more than two decades of higher education experience to the institution. 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 and, as a result, being 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 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 33rd Trustee). The Board includes local members, those with both national and international prominence, and a diverse group of RISD alumni/ae, including more recent graduates. 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.

The president's cabinet is a diverse and talented team of senior academic and administrative leaders who guide decision-making at the institution. The executive cabinet includes the provost, senior vice president of finance and administration, vice president of enrollment and student affairs, and the vice president of institutional advancement. Other direct reports include the chief marketing and communications officer, and the director of the RISD Museum. Additional members of the president's cabinet include the associate vice president of student affairs, chief information officer, general counsel, vice president and associate provost for social equity and inclusion, vice president of campus services, and vice president of human resources.

Currently, RISD has an operating budget of \$170 million. About 73% of net operating revenue comes from tuition and fees and 16% from auxiliary revenue (primarily student housing and dining). In comparison to peer schools, RISD's discount rate is low (just 22% of gross tuition in FY19) and the college is near the top of tuition pricing. This past year, close to 100% of students who exhibited financial need received aid. Meeting full need 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 150th anniversary. The plan continues to provide a solid 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.

THE ROLE

The Vice President for Strategy and Planning and Senior Advisor to the President (VPSP) will report directly to the president and will serve as a liaison and strategic advisor to the president's cabinet. The VPSP will have oversight of the office of strategic initiatives (which they will help create) and the president's administrative office, which includes the community relations function.

The core charge for the VPSP is to advance the college's strategic priorities, including the integration across all planning and strategy work of the College's SEI goals. This individual will design and implement a process for bolstering and deepening the existing strategic plan to include new and evolving initiatives related to sustainability, community, student thriving and institutional growth/revenue generation. As a senior advisor, this individual will serve as a thought partner and strategic resource to the president to enable the achievement of the president's goals.

The VPSP will work closely with the provost and the provost's delegees on advancing the priorities and planning central to the academic program. They will also work closely with all members of the senior leadership team, including and especially with the vice president and associate provost for social equity and inclusion, to ensure all institutional activities and initiatives enable and foreground social equity and inclusion principles and outcomes.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The following are specific opportunities and responsibilities for the vice president of strategy and planning and senior advisor to the president.

Design, develop, and implement strategies and plans to assess, improve, and support the successful attainment of organizational and operational objectives.

The vice president for strategy and planning will be responsible for the overall performance management and integration of initiatives to deliver upon performance goals. The VPSP will work collaboratively with senior leadership to establish and prioritize key goals and benchmark measures of success. They will also establish, monitor and communicate key performance indicators for strategic initiatives. This will include

recommending and setting timelines and measures, and monitoring and reporting on progress and outcomes.

Facilitate the use of institutional data in college planning and decision-making.

The VPSP will monitor and communicate key performance indicators and metrics. They will integrate sources, analyses, and reporting to develop and maintain a coherent system of institutional knowledge and information. The VPSP will broadly communicate the results of assessment and evaluation activities so that the institution has a shared understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and is able to set appropriate priorities.

Support and facilitate the work of the president's cabinet.

The VPSP will serve as a resource and partner who enhances the leadership team's effectiveness, serving as a catalyst for strategic and tactical problem-solving around the implementation of key priorities. This will involve serving as a sounding board for senior leadership, and as a convener of strategic groups that must coordinate effectively to stay on task and meet institutional goals. In this regard, the VPSP must identify and address issues that require the attention of the cabinet and move processes forward at the necessary pace and with the essential communications between campus leaders.

Provide integrated policy analysis and strategic consultation to the president and senior leadership team on major issues affecting the institution.

The VPSP will monitor legislative and other external decision paths to determine impact of possible outcomes on the initiatives of the institution. They will advise the president and senior leadership on the best ways to position the institution with civic and business leadership, alumni, and regional elected representatives on issues that have a direct strategic impact on the core initiatives of the institution. The VPSP may interact with industry, government and community officials and external stakeholders in the representation and development of strategic program initiatives.

Cultivate the relationships and design the actions and plans necessary to move the president's initiatives forward.

As a senior advisor to the president, the VPSP will direct the effective sequencing and follow-through of presidential initiatives, including overseeing the research of and evaluation of background material. The VPSP may also participate in (and in the president's absence, may direct) key stakeholder meetings, as well as prepare briefings, presentations, and responses on institutional and strategic issues. Under the president's purview, the VPSP will lead committees and project teams and coordinate key matters that require the attention of the office of the president.

Oversee and facilitate external and internal community relations activities for the president.

The senior advisor will manage the operations of the president's administrative office and community relations to ensure that key issues are proactively addressed. The VPSP will advance RISD's positive interactions, will make recommendations on emerging issues and alert the president to matters requiring immediate attention. The VPSP will participate in key meetings with faculty, administrators, standing committees and working groups when needed and as assigned by the president, and will promote the college's values in working relations with internal and external constituencies. This individual may engage

with the board on behalf of the president as necessary and work closely with the director of trustee relations.

Support and help to build a culture of creativity, collaboration, and innovation.

RISD is an organization with many moving parts, where success depends on continual dialogue and collaboration. The VPSP must drive performance across multiple units and inspire the RISD community to be leaders of change. The work may include the design and implementation of administrative and organizational structures and systems to support integration and transparency. Within the complex and at times delicate process of institutional decision-making, this role will be instrumental in navigating the landscape of varied constituencies and resources. The VPSP will serve as a hub of information, with a nimble, entrepreneurial, and forward-looking perspective, able to capture new opportunities and adjust to changing environments.

QUALIFICATIONS

The VPSP will possess high-level management skills along with top-level strategic insight and the proven ability to lead the implementation and prioritization of organizational initiatives. The vice president will have demonstrated success with defining and leading projects of varying scope and size, in large or complex organizations. The VPSP should additionally have experience and aptitude with assessing and curating and translating complex data. The individual will lead critical projects and is accountable for ensuring successful execution.

The VPSP will work well both independently and collaboratively and must be genuinely enthusiastic about and committed to RISD's mission.

The successful candidate will bring ten to fifteen years of progressive leadership in higher education administration and a sophisticated understanding of trends and issues in higher education. An advanced degree is required, and a terminal degree is preferred.

Other desired qualifications include:

- Experience leading significant institutional and external collaborations. Proven record in change management, strategy and planning, and institutional effectiveness processes.
- A record of advancing social equity and inclusion goals across many institutional areas. Demonstrated sensitivity to, understanding of, and proven ability to work with people from a broad range of diverse interests and backgrounds. A proven commitment to inclusive excellence.
- Advanced analytic skills with knowledge of outcome measures and assessments, research design methodologies, and principles and practices involved in the research, collection, analysis, and reporting of statistical data. Proven ability to align data and assessment with institutional outcomes.
- Ability to manage sensitive information with the highest degree of confidentiality. Integrity, diplomacy, well-developed interpersonal skills and a high level of emotional intelligence.
- Excellent management and team building skills.

- Proven leadership skills and the ability to be effective in a deeply matrixed organization. The ability to work with faculty and staff at all levels of the organization, as well as other internal and external constituents.
- Excellent writing, editing, reporting and presentation skills. Success presenting complex information in different formats to various audiences, including senior management, faculty, staff, trustees, and external constituents.
- Ability to think, reason, and make sound judgments to decide how duties and responsibilities are completed in compliance with college standards and guidelines. Ability to work independently, and to prioritize and manage multiple complex projects simultaneously.

TO APPLY

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:

Sheryl Ash, Chloe Kanas and Quizayra Gonzalez
Isaacson, Miller
www.imsearch.com/8709

Inquiries, nominations, and referrals are also welcome, and will be handled in confidence.

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](#).