Search for the President and Chief Executive Officer
KnowledgeWorks
Cincinnati, Ohio

“By delivering innovative education approaches and advancing aligned policies, KnowledgeWorks activates and develops the capacity of communities and educators to imagine, build and sustain vibrant learning ecosystems that allow each student to thrive.”

The Search

KnowledgeWorks, a national education nonprofit dedicated to ensuring that “every student experiences meaningful personalized learning that enables the student to thrive in college, career, and civic life,” seeks a strategic, inspiring, and tested leader to serve as the organization’s next President and Chief Executive Officer.

Throughout its impressive nearly 20-year history, KnowledgeWorks has been a leader in education transformation and strategic foresight, encouraging and galvanizing educators around the country to imagine what a radically personalized learning ecosystem could look like. Today, with its specific focus on competency-based education within the personalized learning landscape, KnowledgeWorks continues to partner with K-12 educators, policymakers, funders, and other education stakeholders nationwide to ensure that all students are prepared to succeed in the classroom and beyond.

The next President and CEO will join KnowledgeWorks at an exciting and critical time in the organization’s evolution. After a careful review of its strategic direction and rightsizing of its internal structures, KnowledgeWorks has emerged with a sharpened and streamlined focus, and has the opportunity in the years ahead to become a national leader in the implementation, advising, and advocacy of personalized learning efforts. Indeed, over the past 15 years, KnowledgeWorks has developed a leadership presence in the education policy arena as well as the tools and expertise needed to successfully implement effective, data-driven learning strategies on the ground. The time is ripe for large-scale impact on our country’s public education system through best-in-class policy work, expert advising, and effective, scalable implementation programs across the P-16 continuum.

Reporting to an 11-member Board of Directors, the incoming President and CEO will oversee a talented 52-person staff and manage a $14M operating budget. KnowledgeWorks’ new leader should be a clear and captivating communicator; a confident, collaborative manager; and an inspiring external representative for the organization and its goals. The next President and CEO must be knowledgeable about personalized learning and competency-based education, and passionate about its potential for innovation and outcomes-focused improvement when done in close partnership with educators on the ground. The leader should also bring to the role a demonstrated commitment to addressing issues of systemic inequity in public education, an appreciation for the nexus of policy and practice in education transformation work, and a leadership style that encourages relationship- and partnership-building in support of the organization’s strategic, programmatic, and resource-generating efforts.
The executive search firm Isaacson, Miller is assisting KnowledgeWorks with this important search. All inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed in confidence to the search consultants as indicated at the end of this document.

About KnowledgeWorks: Roots and the Road Ahead

From its very beginning, KnowledgeWorks has been committed to improving education opportunities for students. The organization’s strategies and tactical efforts have shifted slightly over time to adapt to changes in the educational landscape, but its focus has remained steadfast: empowering district leaders, teachers, and students to achieve their highest potential. Notably, KnowledgeWorks’ programs target practitioners and policymakers. Through its early college high schools and personalized, competency-based education, KnowledgeWorks helps administrators and teachers implement innovative and more effective learning environments. Outside of the classroom, KnowledgeWorks aims to educate legislators, policy makers, funders, educators, business leaders, and the community at large on future trends in teaching and learning, as well as the policy changes needed to effect the kind of change that enables all students to excel academically. While there is opportunity for the next leader to expand the work of the organization in the coming years, there is also a commitment to deepening its impact in personalized learning.

Personalized learning became a formal and stated part of the KnowledgeWorks vision and mission in 2013, but the core idea and the organization’s philosophical belief in the value of personalized learning have existed at KnowledgeWorks since its inception – from its work restructuring large high schools into small schools that offered personalized education in the early 2000s, to the use of data and continuous improvement in districts and schools to improve student achievement in the 2010s, to partnering with districts and communities today to help them realize their own vision for personalized learning in their classrooms. KnowledgeWorks has always sought to put the student at the center of its work.

Also since its early days, KnowledgeWorks has recognized the importance of and demonstrated a firm commitment to understanding the trends shaping the future of education – essential data points for preparing students for college and the careers of tomorrow. Beginning in 2006, KnowledgeWorks started developing forecasts of the future of learning, examining possible futures and exploring actions that learning communities could take today to shape the future they want for their graduates. (KnowledgeWorks’ first Future Forecast, Map of Future Forces, was published that same year. Its fourth and most recent Future Forecast, The Future of Learning: Education in the Era of Partners in Code, was published in 2015.) The cumulative results of these forecasts underscore KnowledgeWorks’ commitment to prioritizing the learner. In other words, instead of focusing on the needs of a given institution, school leaders need to put learners at the forefront and create environments that foster growth mindset, the cultivation of essential social-emotional skills, and student agency – encouraging learners to demonstrate content mastery in a variety of ways and to make meaningful connections with their work in the classroom.

In recent years, as KnowledgeWorks has refined its organizational vision for personalized learning, the leadership and staff have leveraged the collective learnings and expertise in house to create a unique and focused point of view on personalized learning, specifically competency-based education, and its impact is already apparent. KnowledgeWorks brings to the national conversation a concentration of thoughtful policy briefs focused on federal policy reform, aligned advocacy, and partner engagement.
KnowledgeWorks
President and Chief Executive Officer

This body of work, combined with a deep, on-the-ground understanding of schools and communities, has helped KnowledgeWorks become a trusted resource for policymakers and other organizations interested in moving to a competency-based education system.

Over the years, and as a key counterpart to its research and policy work, KnowledgeWorks has built up critical expertise and experience operating on-the-ground efforts in schools and communities. Rooted in the early successes of StrivePartnership – a KnowledgeWorks-funded, community-based organization in the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky area focused on supporting students from cradle to career – KnowledgeWorks established StriveTogether in 2010 in an effort to scale StrivePartnership’s community empowerment efforts nationally. StriveTogether’s focus on building capacity within communities nationwide took hold, and the organization grew quickly and effectively. In 2017, given StriveTogether’s strong foundation and national scope, KnowledgeWorks decided to spin off StriveTogether, which now operates as a standalone organization still focused on continuing and expanding its success through collective impact. Today, the national StriveTogether network supports more than 70 community partnerships and operates in 31 states and Washington D.C. Its work and programs reach more than eight million students and engage with over 10,200 local organizations. (KnowledgeWorks still helps to operate the local StrivePartnership network.)

Similarly, from 2009 to 2014 KnowledgeWorks acquired and then operated New Tech Network, a school-based organization that helped established schools with project-based learning pedagogies across the country. In its effort to streamline its work and strategic focus, KnowledgeWorks also spun off New Tech Network, which still operates today, very successfully, as a separate organization.

Today, through its portfolio of school and community approaches, KnowledgeWorks provides innovative tools, training, and assistance to school leaders, teachers, and community partners – work that collectively influences pedagogy and practice on the ground and policy discussions at the state and national level. And, critically, this work fuels and inspires continued research, innovation, and assessment in service of our country’s students.

For more information about KnowledgeWorks, please visit https://knowledgeworks.org.

The KnowledgeWorks Team

The President and CEO reports to an 11-member Board of Directors made up of national education leaders, seasoned policymakers, organizational design and development experts, funders, and long-time education improvement supporters with ties to the local and national education communities. The KnowledgeWorks staff numbers 52 in total, of which 16 work remotely, and the organization’s six-person senior leadership team includes the Chief Learning Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Vice President for Communications & Marketing, COO & Vice President for Policy & Advocacy, Vice President for Strategic Partnerships & Development, and Vice President & Executive Director of StrivePartnership.

The KnowledgeWorks’ culture is close-knit and collegial; staff value the passionate work ethic of their colleagues and the strong sense of community in the workplace – whether on the ground in Cincinnati or working remotely off-site. Teambuilding and professional development have been cornerstones of the organization under the current President and CEO and the leadership team.
Finances

KnowledgeWorks is a 501(c)(3) operating foundation with a $14M annual budget and a $125M investment portfolio. In the current fiscal year, the organization will draw a majority of its operating funds from the investment portfolio (about $9M) and the rest from fee-for-service revenue (about $2M) and external grant funding and other contributions (about $3M), including from national philanthropies such as the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and the Lumina Foundation and regional funders like the Haile/USB Foundation and the Greater Cincinnati Foundation. Continued and increasing foundation support is a priority for the organization moving forward.

The $126M investment portfolio is invested in U.S. Equity, international equity, alternative investments, and fixed income, and has performed well over the last several years. The 2017 calendar-year net return was 13.7%. The investment portfolio is structured to be well diversified, to have a balanced risk profile, and to maintain a high level of liquidity to meet spending needs. Based on the current asset allocation strategy, the long-term total expected return is 7% with a volatility of 11.4%.

In 1998, in the wake of the reorganization of a nonprofit student loan organization with over $3 billion in assets, KnowledgeWorks was formed with the foundational intent to improve learning opportunities and outcomes for students. In 2000, KnowledgeWorks sold a significant portion of its student loan assets to Sallie Mae for more than $200 million, but remained an active participant in the student lending and education finance industries until 2012 when it began a multi-year process of winding down its student lending activities. From 2012 to 2013, KnowledgeWorks sold over $300 million in student loan assets to third party lenders. As of December 2017, KnowledgeWorks still owns approximately $35 million in student loan assets which are in pay-down mode.

The scope and scale of its organizational and operational structures have shifted over time, largely in response to the organization’s sharpened focus and refined goals. Most recently, the Board and senior leadership have restructured the organization, spinning off New Tech Network and StriveTogether in order to more fully concentrate their efforts around competency-based education. This change encouraged a rethinking of the KnowledgeWorks’ budget and financial objectives as well, for rightsizing purposes. Looking ahead, the new President and CEO will be expected to grow the organization’s annual revenue through increased fundraising and school service fees in order to shrink and stabilize the annual draw on the investment portfolio.

StrivePartnership

KnowledgeWorks is a proud founding member of StrivePartnership, and remains committed to supporting its hometown community of Cincinnati, OH. Established in 2006, StrivePartnership is a collective impact organization made up of leaders from the education, business, philanthropic, nonprofit, civic, and grassroots communities in Cincinnati. These leaders all believe in the importance of education and the power of working together to transform systems of education for every child, from cradle to career.

StrivePartnership tracks outcome data related to six critical milestones along the cradle-to-career continuum to determine the success of every child and learner and to assess the effectiveness of the broader urban education ecosystem. Over the past 10 years, StrivePartnership programs have made measured improvements in all six indicators along the cradle-to-career continuum.
As StrivePartnership enters its second decade, it is committed to advancing the next level of collective impact by fortifying the urban education ecosystem in Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky to ensure racial and economic equity.

StrivePartnership is a key partner for KnowledgeWorks and an important proof point for the national StriveTogether apparatus. KnowledgeWorks provides funding, office space, and human capital support to StrivePartnership, and the StrivePartnership Executive Director reports to the KnowledgeWorks President and CEO. StrivePartnership has a local advisory board, but it ultimately operates under the fiscal and governing authority of the KnowledgeWorks Board of Directors; the KnowledgeWorks President and CEO serves on both.

**Role of the President and Chief Executive Officer**

This position presents a rich opportunity for an experienced, innovative, and energetic leader who will passionately promote the KnowledgeWorks mission and vision nationwide, strengthening the KnowledgeWorks brand and championing the potential for personalized learning and competency-based education to dramatically improve and level our country’s PK-16 landscape.

The President and CEO will provide spirited and savvy external leadership, clear operational direction, and forward-looking thought leadership for the KnowledgeWorks team and stakeholders across the country. Specifically, this individual will work to address the following challenges and opportunities:

**Build on KnowledgeWorks’ current strategic direction to advance innovation in education through personalized learning and competency-based education; message the KnowledgeWorks vision and goals crisply and compellingly.**

Building on the momentum of KnowledgeWorks’ current strategic direction, the next President and CEO will be expected to grow the organization’s leadership presence in the personalized learning and competency-based education communities. The President and CEO should leverage KnowledgeWorks’ multi-tiered and interconnected layers of impact – among policy makers, practitioners on the ground, and the education research community – to accelerate the uptake and measurable success of competency-based education in schools across the country.

Critically important will be the President and CEO’s ability to persuasively and plainly make the case for personalized learning and competency-based education as key to improving student achievement. By telling the story persuasively, the President and CEO will broaden the tent of supporters.

**Embrace the work of representing KnowledgeWorks externally with partner organizations, potential funders, policy makers, and community leaders; strengthen the KnowledgeWorks brand, expand its local, statewide, and national reputation, and grow its funding base.**

KnowledgeWorks’ President and CEO will be the public face of the organization, and should prioritize growing its external presence and brand recognition. The next leader will inherit a strong foundation for this work: excellent and far-reaching partnerships with school and school system leaders; growing connections with colleges, universities, and the postsecondary space; long-standing relationships with state and federal policymakers; strong links to the education research community.
through its Future Forecasts work; connections to local and national education funders; and close ties with community leaders and other educational allies. Key to KnowledgeWorks’ continued success will be the next President and CEO’s ability to maintain and build on these existing partnerships and, at the same time, explore opportunities for initiating new (or growing existing) revenue-generating relationships.

The President and CEO must be an enthusiastic and effective fundraiser and should welcome the chance to share KnowledgeWorks’ vision for impact with potential donors and partners.

**Reinforce and grow KnowledgeWorks’ commitment to addressing issues of equity and access in our country’s learning ecosystems.**

Central to conversations about personalized learning is the belief that a student-centered approach increases our ability to eliminate the structural inequities of our nation’s public education system. The next President and CEO should recognize the power of personalized learning to address these systemic challenges for underserved learners, and should not shy away from using the KnowledgeWorks platform to draw attention and resources to these issues.

**Continue to foster a collaborative internal culture and shared vision among KnowledgeWorks staff.**

Working in concert with the organization’s senior leadership team, the President and CEO should ensure that KnowledgeWorks’ strong culture of shared purpose and collaboration persists. In particular, given the geographic spread of the organization’s employees, it will be especially important for the President and CEO to present a strong and unifying vision that resonates with, and continues to inspire, all of the KnowledgeWorks staff.

**Qualifications and Characteristics**

In its next President and CEO, the Board of Directors seeks an entrepreneurial leader and flexible thinker, who will bring content knowledge and passion to the role. The President and CEO should be comfortable leading a mixed team of Cincinnati-based and remote employees, and should be willing to travel regularly. For this important role, KnowledgeWorks seeks candidates with the following experiences, characteristics, and abilities, understanding that no single candidate will have all of the ideal qualifications:

- A proven record of senior-level experience in education leadership, philanthropy, nonprofit leadership, public policy, and/or government.

- Knowledge and understanding of education innovation with a national reputation as an inspiring and galvanizing thought-leader, speaker, and writer who understands the educational challenges facing diverse groups, and who, when in the national spotlight, can champion groups who do not have a voice.

- A demonstrated ability to manage well: to communicate, delegate, prioritize, motivate, and build a strong team. Successful management and operational experience overseeing budgets and staff, growing revenue and expanding markets; a collaborative leadership style and an appreciation for
how best to balance staff autonomy to capitalize on creativity with team goals, working with a team of local and remote employees.

- A belief in a growth mindset and the idea that all children should have access to a high-quality education; the audacity and vision to grow KnowledgeWorks’ impact as an implementer, advisor, and advocate on the national stage; experience leading strategic implementation and assessing programmatic progress and outcomes within an educational context; both a big-picture, systems-level thinker and a data-driven leader.

- Experience harnessing the power of communities, uniting them locally, regionally, and nationally; has built partnerships and connections with leaders in the field across many sectors from funders, to school systems, to policy makers, to strategists.

- Experience or familiarity with philanthropy and the work of foundations, and a sense for how philanthropy can effectively support assessment and evaluation and generate action in policy and practice. A proven track record of raising money.

- A confident, independent thinker, who is comfortable reconciling complex ideas and recognizes the value of considering varied perspectives; creative, innovative, and intellectually curious.

- Superb written and oral communication skills; the ability and inclination to strengthen relationships and build partnerships across the K-12 sector.

- Open, honest, loyal, warm, and inclusive; organized, nimble, flexible, and knowledgeable.

- Proven fiscal savvy, business leadership, and operational management skills. A record of reliable and responsible financial oversight.

- A graduate-level academic degree is highly desirable.

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 for the search: www.imsearch.com/6556. Electronic submission of materials is strongly encouraged. First consideration will be given to applications received by May 15th.