



**Search for the CEO
Children's Literacy Initiative (CLI)
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

THE SEARCH

Children's Literacy Initiative (CLI), a nationally recognized educational non-profit, seeks a forward-looking, strategic, culturally competent, racial equity-driven, institutional leader to serve as its next CEO. Helping educators, school leaders, and school districts serve historically marginalized student populations, CLI seeks to dismantle structural racism by providing Black and Latinx children with anti-racist early literacy instruction, support, and advocacy needed to create equity in early childhood education for all. Headquartered in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, CLI has been supporting literacy in classrooms since its inception in 1988. Today CLI's services and resources include teacher coaching and professional development, workshops and seminars, books and materials, and leadership development support. Using its unique and transformative methodologies, CLI partners with and supports teachers in helping them to develop their students more effectively into powerful and self-affirming readers, writers, and thinkers.

Deeply rooted in reading research including (i) the science of reading, (ii) culturally sustaining pedagogies, and (iii) effective adult learning strategies, CLI currently serves Pre-K- through fifth-grade students in cities and counties across the United States including, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Broward County, Florida; Chicago, Illinois; Elizabeth and Passaic, New Jersey; Omaha, Nebraska; and a statewide partnership in Massachusetts.

This leadership transition comes at a time of significant opportunity for CLI as the need and demand for the organization's work is greater now than ever. CLI believes that literacy is a vital pathway to creating lasting social change and in fostering a just and equitable society.

Looking ahead, the CEO of CLI will oversee the financial and cultural health and strategic, long-term growth of the organization - working to strengthen its capacity to deliver on its burgeoning racial justice mission. This leader will bring knowledge of early childhood literacy and an understanding of the impact of structural racism on the country's educational systems and practices; along with a principled commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging for all students. The CEO will serve as a strategic

leader, with demonstrated effectiveness in developing organizational culture and relationships with staff and boards; a highly effective communicator, skilled at identifying funding opportunities and partnerships across a broad range of constituencies; and will be a strong and accountable financial and people manager. Currently, the work of CLI is led by 91 employees – of that 40 are coaches – and 12 board members and the organization has an operating budget of \$13.3 million.

CLI has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national search firm to assist in the recruitment of its CEO. Please direct all nominations, inquiries, and application materials in confidence to the search firm, as indicated at the end of this document.

FOUNDING AND HISTORY

CLI began in 1984 from the vision of a single librarian in Philadelphia. Founder Linda Katz created the Children's Expo to ensure the distribution of high-quality books to families across the city. In 1988, as the Expo grew, Linda, along with co-founders, Pat Federman and Marcia Moon, realized that the need for literacy tools extended to educators as well, and as a result, the Expo became known as Children's Literacy Initiative. In the early 1990s, the organization began working with Head Start and childcare centers in economically challenged and underserved neighborhoods. At the time, CLI focused on bringing high-quality books into classrooms and providing teachers with one-time training around best practices for early literacy instruction. The team quickly learned, however, that literacy learning could not be achieved in isolation and that books and one-time trainings alone were not enough to create lasting change. Upon this realization, the organization expanded its service model to include sustained one-on-one trainings with teachers in an effort to build sincere bonds and honest relationships, so that teachers could feel comfortable and supported while developing professional learning communities that create change.

Throughout the years, CLI continued to grow and improve its methodologies to reach more underserved students. In 2008, CLI partnered with several public, charter, and private schools and released its first Pre-K curriculum, called [Blueprint](#). The curriculum provided detailed teaching plans and resources for teachers to deliver engaging, intentional, and responsive Pre-K instruction. In 2010, CLI emerged as one of just 49 organizations nationwide to receive an Investing in Innovation grant (i3) from the US Department of Education, and one of only 19 service models awarded in the i3 program's Validation category, which highlights winners with already proven evidence of success. With this five-year \$21.7 million i3 grant, and the organization's largest school district contract with Philadelphia at \$13 million, as well as an influx of philanthropic dollars, CLI was able to expand quickly and broadly.

In time, CLI's impact continued to expand across the country. Utilizing the results of the i3 Validation grant, in 2015 CLI won, as the highest-scoring applicant, a prestigious, \$19 million i3 Scale-up grant to expand into 27 public schools across the nation. This allowed the organization to develop new partnerships with school districts in Texas, Colorado, New Jersey, and Florida; providing successful literacy programs combined with high-quality materials and curriculum. In addition, in 2017, the Library of Congress awarded CLI its top honor, the David M. Rubenstein Prize, for its outstanding and measurable

contribution to increasing literacy levels; and in early 2018, Charity Navigator awarded CLI a coveted four out of four rating for its accountability and transparency.

Unfortunately, with CLI's focus on expansion and growth, the organization failed to develop and implement a long-term business development plan that would sustain itself beyond the life of these large federal grants and contracts. In 2020, the i3 grant was set to sunset. At the same time, the global pandemic arrived and the Philadelphia school district, which had historically provided one-third of CLI's funding, decided to reallocate its resources to other critical areas of need. With the loss of two major financial resources and no clear pipeline or strategy for funding development, CLI had no choice but to restructure the organization, conduct layoffs, and downsize. CLI also made the tough but necessary decision to close its doors in Texas and Colorado, taking CLI from a \$31.4 million-dollar organization to a \$13.3 million-dollar organization in FY23.

During that same time, CLI continued to accelerate its focus on racial equity in literacy by refining its mission and emphasis on being an anti-racist organization. In 2019, CLI engaged outside facilitators to provide racial literacy training for staff members and started an extensive review of the book collections it provides to schools. In June 2020, CLI hired a Director of Equity and Inclusion to help ensure the organization addresses racial inequity and bias in all its programs and operations, including hiring practices and board recruitment. These key efforts helped CLI systemize its anti-racist and culturally sustaining approach to early literacy instruction and teacher professional development and is now central to every aspect of CLI's work – the stem cell. This also led to a newly adopted mission statement in 2021, which has led CLI to take a culturally sustainable approach to literacy instruction, seeing literacy as a liberatory practice, and centering the ideas, experiences, and voices of Black and Latinx students. Today the mission statement reads as: Children's Literacy Initiative seeks to dismantle structural racism by providing Black and Latinx children with the anti-racist early literacy instruction, support, and advocacy needed to create equity in education.

CURRENT CONTEXT

When the former CEO of CLI departed from the organization in June of 2022, the organization's CFO stepped in as interim CEO. Since that time, key members of the Board of Directors have played an active and strategic role in providing support for the organization and senior leadership team during this time of transition.

Despite the organization's financial necessity to scale down their operations and services, incremental steps have been taken to begin to build out CLI's capacity to continue its anti-racist work. The organization has diversified its staff, leadership team, and board; adopted internal staff and board community agreements; launched identity affinity groups; and continued to expand and modify their DEI department with an associate director of DEI Programming and Development as well as an associate director of Employee Culture and Engagement.

With respect to its programs and coaching, CLI has clarified the articulation of its anti-racist literacy framework, which is rooted in culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy and centers students' identities and communities as critical assets to schools and classrooms.

CLI'S PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH AND FRAMEWORK

CLI focuses its combined expertise in culturally sustaining pedagogy and supplemental reading instruction to create a comprehensive Pre-K – 6 validated professional development (PD) program that accelerates and sustains the reading and skills of students while cultivating joy, embracing and affirming identity, and responding to the social and emotional needs students bring into the classroom each day. Though they specialize in grades Pre-K – 6, their approach is fully transferable through secondary grades.

On a macro level, CLI's approach to training and professional development integrates effective culturally sustaining pedagogical practices that specifically center and empower Black and Latinx students. A culturally sustaining approach (Paris, 2012):

- Is strength-based, building on the wealth of knowledge and cultural and linguistic assets of students, families, and communities
- Views classrooms as places where the cultural ways of being in communities of color are affirmed and sustained, rather than erased or devalued
- Understands education as a liberatory practice, a means of engaging students in criticality, and giving students agency toward a more just world
- Centers the voices of Black and Latinx researchers and educators

By centering students who have been most impacted by systemic racism and underserved by the education system, they go beyond advancing opportunity for Black and Latinx students — CLI works alongside their learning community partners to co-create systems of teaching and learning that support all students, while enabling equitable teaching and learning outcomes that propel students into lifetimes of success.

CLI offers a core of high-impact professional development services that increase capacity at every critical point of impact within a learning community:

- Teacher coaching and development (including 1:1 coaching, large group trainings, professional learning communities (PLCs))
- Leadership coaching and development for school and district leaders (1:1 coaching, large group trainings, PLCs)
- Support with change management practices
- The science of reading and instructional practices

- Literacy curriculum and materials review and implementation

The source code shaping every aspect of CLI's professional development content and services is their signature "Framework for Teaching and Learning" (FTL). Rooted in the research of scholars at the vanguard of culturally responsive pedagogical practice (Elmore, Ladson-Billings, Gholdy Muhammad, Milner, Vaughan, and Hammond), CLI's FTL provides a practical guide for understanding the core dimensions that make up powerful teaching and learning experiences.

Ultimately, their framework supports gathering instructional data, offering actionable feedback, leveraging data within strategic planning, setting priorities and goals to enhance professional development sessions, and coaching and developing school leaders and teachers.

GOVERNANCE

CLI is governed by an experienced nine-member Board of Directors comprised of leaders from diverse sectors, including education, nonprofit, business, law, and government. The Board structure includes a Chair, Vice-Chair, Treasurer, and Secretary. Traditionally, the Board meets quarterly each year, and it is organized around committees including Development & Finance, Personnel, and Governance. Given this time of transition for CLI, the Board meets with frequent regularity.

EXECUTIVE STAFF AND LEADERSHIP

With approximately 91 employees, CLI is comprised of two divisions, the School Support Center (SSC) and School Service Delivery (SSD). The organization's senior leadership team (SSC members) includes the CEO, the Chief Academic Officer, the Chief Development Officer, and the Chief Financial Officer. Additionally, there are three executive directors that report to the Chief Academic Officer. A large portion of the leadership team and staff are in or near Philadelphia, while others reside in other parts of the country.

A review of CLI's organizational chart can be found in the "addendum" at the end of this document.

FUNDING AND FINANCE

Historically, CLI has been funded through a combination of federal grants, school district funding, individual school contracts, and philanthropic sources. In fiscal year 2022, CLI received \$12.5 million in school partnership revenue, \$1.6 million in federal grants, and \$9.1 (inclusive of \$6 million in Paycheck Protection Program (PPP)) million in philanthropic contributions, bringing the organization's overall total revenue to \$23.2 million. With more than 50% percent of CLI's total revenue generated by school contracts (73% when adjusting for PPP), it is critical that the next CEO works closely with the executive leadership to grow and strengthen current partnerships. Creating a clear business development plan to expand into new districts and creating a pipeline of potential partnerships to ensure long-term financial sustainability is also a top priority for CLI's next leader.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The successful candidate will lead the organization in addressing the following:

Shape CLI's next institutional chapter by advancing CLI's operationalization of its mission, vision, and values that center racial equity in the work of early childhood literacy.

The CEO of CLI will serve as a strategic and tactical leader who is motivated to further lead the organization in implementing and advancing its mission and vision. In partnership with staff and board, this leader will ensure that all programmatic, operational, financial, and personnel facets of the organization are well aligned with CLI's overarching strategic direction and organizational goals. This will also include investment in more internal capacity building and working to develop anti-racist policies, practices, and procedures within the organization.

While this sharpened mission of equity-focused early literacy work is already in place, there remains significant opportunity for the incoming CEO to create and innovate. This leader should relish in offering a fresh and independent assessment of the organization's strengths, potential, and growth opportunities. The intention is that with time, CLI will continue to grow its impact and footprint.

Ensure CLI's long-term financial stability.

As CLI grapples with the loss of some of its primary sources of funding, it is critical that this next leader work closely with the senior leadership team to solidify the philanthropic and partnership pipeline, financial planning, and budget development for the organization, as well as oversight for all fundraising and resource development activities. This leader will work to identify and cultivate new markets for CLI's offerings, considering what school districts and school leaders desire and require, while keenly understanding their financial structures. Additionally, philanthropy dollars will augment CLI's budget.

Enthusiastically share the CLI story to raise the profile of the organization.

As CLI looks to the future, it will be paramount that the CEO serves as an exceptional public face of the organization, amplifying the reputational strengths of CLI and communicating where it is headed and why. This articulation and storytelling to school administrators, leaders, teachers, and the media will be critical for increasing the visibility and stature of CLI in philanthropic and educational policy-making communities across Greater Philadelphia, each of its other regions, and nationally.

Assess and enhance CLI's current program offerings and build out the assessment capacity to measure impact.

As CLI continues to sharpen its mission and services, it will be critical that the organization more heavily invest in rigorous evaluation infrastructure to ensure that CLI has the tools and metrics necessary for making an evidence-based case to school partners, foundations, and individual donors. Building out this

framework and gathering consistent data is no easy feat, given the variabilities across state, teacher, and student benchmarks and how impact is measured.

Effectively build, support, and nurture a high-performing, collaborative, and diverse organization.

The CEO of CLI will be a courageous, inspiring, and effective leader with the skills and appetite to support and manage the organization's internal infrastructure and make difficult choices as needed, including but not limited to appropriate staffing capacities. They will work to build, develop, manage, and retain a cohesive and high-performing team that collaborates, communicates effectively, and efficiently manages and delivers on CLI's programmatic and operational portfolios.

This leader will work to ensure a shared sense of purpose and foster a culture of transparency, respect, and belonging for all members of CLI's community. They will usher forward the organization's continuous, internal anti-racism journey and will prioritize a commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging across the organization.

Work with the Board to provide effective governance for CLI and to continue to grow and diversify the Board.

This CEO will work with the Board to deliver on multi-year programmatic, strategic, and financial plans and will also support board members as they deepen their engagement and commitment to CLI's new mission. There are also opportunities for CLI to grow, expand, and diversify its board; increase board fundraising efforts; and continue to adhere to best board governance practices.

This leader will also ensure that there are transparent, timely, and clear lines of communication between the board and staff and that the goodwill generated during this transitional time remains.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

While no one individual will embody every quality or have all relevant experience, the successful candidate will bring many of the following professional and personal qualifications:

- A deep commitment to racial equity in education, the mission and values of CLI, and the ability to articulate the organization's unique value proposition.
- Knowledge and/or passion for early childhood literacy and research-based reading curriculum and culturally sustaining and responsive pedagogy, and ideally familiarity with school systems; preferably fluency with public/charter school finances, politics, and decision-making.
- Significant evidence of inspirational and strategic leadership and the capability to successfully drive change management in an organization of similar complexity and scale.

- A track record of executing organizational priorities and holding an organization accountable around decision-making. Must also be experienced in using data, benchmarking, and assessments to track and drive progress and impact.
- A deep familiarity with the history of structural racism in education and its resulting impact on educational outcomes; a principled commitment to the values of equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging; and a track record of turning those core values into action within an organizational and community context.
- Must be able to support and listen closely to diverse perspectives and backgrounds, often with conflicting perspectives, and coalesce various stakeholders to develop and advance a unified vision.
- Passion for and proven ability to identify, develop, and sustain funding relationships, advocates, donors, and strategic partners to ensure a position of organizational fiscal sustainability. Additionally, brings strong business and financial management skills.
- Proven strength in leading a senior team and reporting to a diverse Board of Directors; along with a record of effectively recruiting, supporting, managing, and retaining diverse talent at all levels of an organization.
- Exceptional communication, public speaking, and media relations skills. Must also be able to establish strong relationships, collaborations, and partnerships across a broad range of constituencies.
- Experience with program innovation, implementation, assessment, and adaptation to meet changing needs.
- Track record of leveraging technology to improve organizational efficiency and outcomes.
- A forward-looking, roll-up-your-sleeves, decisive leader who inspires positive direction, motivation, and purpose for an organization. Must also be able to address the complex realities and challenges that accompany CLI's work and mission and have the endurance to flourish in a resource-constrained environment.

LOCATION AND COMPENSATION

The location for this position is flexible. The CEO will be expected to travel to Philadelphia and other regions with some regularity in order to support CLI's close-knit culture. Exceptional candidates from all locations will be considered. Compensation will be competitive and commensurate with experience with an anticipated salary range of \$240,000 to \$265,000.

APPLICATIONS, NOMINATIONS, AND INQUIRIES

All inquiries, nominations, and applications (including resume and a two-to-three-page letter of interest responding to the opportunities and challenges outlined above) should be submitted via Isaacson, Miller's website:

Rebecca M. Swartz, Partner
Karson Freeman, Associate
Isaacson, Miller
<http://www.imsearch.com/8861>

Children's Literacy Initiative is an Equal Opportunity Employer

INTERIM CEO/CFO

Chief Academic Officer

Chief Development Officer

Managing Director of Operations

Senior Executive Director

Managing Director of Content, Coaching, and Implementation

Associate Director of Accounting

Officer Major Gifts

Executive Director

Executive Director

Senior Operations Manager

Director of Creative Design and Production

Project Manager

Project Manager

Associate Director of DEI Programming and Development

Associate Director of Employee Engagement and Culture

Foundations, Relations, and Grants Manager

Associate Director of Creative Design and Marketing

Nicole Bethea
Associate Director of Custom Design and Delivery

Sara Lazrow
Associate Director of Custom Design and Delivery

Senior Manager of Accounting

Associate Director of Recruitment

Associate Director of Talent Strategy

Multimedia Editor

Production Editor

Manager of Multilingual Program and Content Development

Manager of Leadership Coaching and Development

Project Manager

Books Curation Manager

Special Projects Manager

Data, Systems, and Process Manager

Accounting and Payroll Specialist

Human Resource Business Partner

Benefits Administrator

Production and Content Systems Coordinator

Resource Coordinator

Recruitment Manager

Talent Coordinator

School Service Delivery

Chief Academic Officer

Senior Executive Director

Executive Director

Executive Director

Partnership and Implementation Manager

Partnership and Implementation Manager

Partnership and Implementation Manager

Partnership and Implementation Manager

Regional Manager

Partnership and Implementation Manager

Content Writer

Content Writer

Partnership and Implementation Manager

Partnership and Implementation Manager

Content Writer

Early Literacy Interventionists

Broward Literacy Coaches

Mass Literacy Coaches

Literacy Coach

Philly Metro Literacy Coach

North New Jersey Literacy Coaches

North New Jersey Literacy Coaches

