

Position Description



Director of Research and Evaluation Buffett Early Childhood Institute University of Nebraska

April 2017

Much of this material contained herein is gained in confidence and as such should be regarded as confidential. Accordingly it is understood that dissemination of this material should be limited to those individuals in your organization who are directly connected with this specific search or whom a reasonable person would agree have a need to know.

[2]

Confidential Position Description

Title: Director of Research and Evaluation
Buffett Early Childhood Institute

Institution: University of Nebraska

Reports to: Dr. Samuel J. Meisels
Founding Executive Director

Location: Omaha, Nebraska

Summary of Opportunity:

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute seeks a recognized leader in the field of early childhood and child development research and evaluation to serve as Director of Research and Evaluation. Envisioned as a new model for how public higher education is engaged in the first years of life, the Buffett Early Childhood Institute is a four campus, university-wide, multidisciplinary research, practice, policy, and outreach institute of the University of Nebraska committed to transforming early childhood development and education in Nebraska and across the nation. Established with a generous gift from Omaha philanthropist Susie Buffett and matching funds from the university and other private sources, the Institute aims to be a leading center where scholars, practitioners, community members, and policy makers collaborate to advance a unified approach that can improve the lives of young children and families and the systems that support them. No other university in the nation has made a greater commitment to the early years than the University of Nebraska and its private donors. (For more information about the Buffett Institute, please visit www.buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu).

The Institute seeks a highly respected research leader to serve in this important position. The director will be expected to develop and design applied research and evaluation programs that advance the work of the Institute and its signature programs and shape the direction of the field of early childhood growth and development. She or he will play a leading role in promoting evidence-based research and practice that have impact in creating social change and positively affecting the lives and well-being of vulnerable children and families in Nebraska and beyond.

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute – Vision and Mission

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute emerged from the shared vision of the University of Nebraska and Susie Buffett, a longtime philanthropist and champion of early childhood education and development. Their vision was to create an institute that would transform early childhood development – especially for children at risk – by leveraging the resources of the four campuses of the University of Nebraska and applying the best of what is known about the science and benefits of early childhood intervention.

The vision of the Buffett Early Childhood Institute is “to make Nebraska the best place in the nation to be a baby.” The Institute’s mission is “to transform the lives of young children by improving their learning and development.” This mission is accomplished by harnessing the interdisciplinary resources and research of the four University of Nebraska campuses and developing collaborations with schools, agencies, community partners, and policymakers across the state to implement and support high-quality, evidence-based services, programs, and policies for young children and their families.

The Institute’s programs and activities are governed by five important assumptions:

- The Institute is an entity of the University of Nebraska in its totality and not affiliated with any single campus or discipline. While its administrative home is located at the University of Nebraska Omaha (UNO), it has facilities, programs, and/or affiliated faculty and students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC), and the University of Nebraska-Kearney (UNK).
- While the Institute is dedicated to promoting the development and learning of all children, it is especially focused on children who are vulnerable as a consequence of being raised under conditions of poverty, abuse, and/or developmental, learning, familial, or behavioral challenge.
- The Institute’s work is devoted to the first eight years of life as a means of enhancing the likelihood of lasting change and growth.
- The Institute is committed to working in both urban and rural areas of the state, beginning first in Nebraska and then moving nationally and beyond.
- The Institute is focused on applied research, translating the knowledge acquired from basic research to programs, policies, and actions that foster the development of all children.

History and Organization

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute was established in 2011 with a generous gift from Susie Buffett through the Sherwood Foundation. This gift was matched by the University of Nebraska to create a substantial endowment for the Institute that has funded much of its growth and development. The Institute's budget is supported by income from the endowment, together with grants, contracts, and other fundraising efforts.

The Institute became operational in 2013 with the appointment of Founding Executive Director, Samuel J. Meisels, who joined the University after serving as President of Erikson Institute in Chicago. One of the world's leading authorities on the assessment of young children, Dr. Meisels has led the Institute through strategic planning efforts to chart its future directions, built the Institute staff, secured additional resources, and led the recent move into newer and larger space adjacent to the UNO campus.

The Institute's *Strategic Master Plan, 2014-2019* (<http://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/-/media/beci/docs/buffett-institute-strategic-master-plan.ashx?la=en>) was forged by the work of a Strategic Planning Commission composed of nearly three dozen stakeholders from across the four campuses of the University of Nebraska as well as representatives from state agencies, school districts, social service and educational organizations, and practitioners in the field. The plan established the vision, guiding principles, and key strategies for the Institute's work.

The Institute also created a national Board of Advisors consisting of ten distinguished thought leaders appointed by the president of the university. The Board of Advisors meets annually to review the work of the Institute and provide recommendations on how it can fulfill its mission and achieve its potential.

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute reports to the President of the University of Nebraska through the Provost of the University, who oversees other major university-wide academic initiatives. The Executive Director works closely with an associate executive director and with directors of Research and Evaluation, Finance and Administration, Program Development, Workforce Planning and Development, Communication, and Development (part of the University of Nebraska Foundation). The Institute has a total staff of more than 30 onsite plus 20 staff with primary affiliations to public schools. In addition, the Institute has established four endowed community professorships – one for each NU campus. Two of these have been appointed – Kathleen Gallagher, the Cille and Ron Williams Community Chair for Early Childhood Education at the University of Nebraska at Kearney and David Dzewaltowski, Community Chair in Activity, Nutrition, and Obesity Prevention at the College of Public Health, University of Nebraska Medical Center.

Signature Programs

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute has established two signature programs that form the scaffolding for its research and intervention activities. The first, the Achievement Gap Challenge, is a commitment to close the achievement gap for vulnerable young children and the second, the Early Childhood Workforce Development Program is a commitment to ensure that a skilled, diverse workforce is available to care for and teach young children. Surrounding these programs are the additional goals of engaging all four NU campuses on behalf of early childhood; collecting policy-oriented data and using it on behalf of children and families; and growing support for the field of early care and development in the community, throughout the state, and beyond through strategic communications initiatives.

The goal of the Achievement Gap Challenge is to increase opportunities to learn and eliminate income- and race-based achievement gaps for children by the end of third grade. At the request of 11 superintendents in the Omaha metro area, the Institute has launched a ground-breaking initiative to address this challenge. Known as the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan, this initiative is built around the provision of intensive, continuous, and evidence-based services for children living in high concentrations of poverty in these 11 school districts in Douglas and Sarpy Counties. The plan is a strong collaborative, community effort overseen by the Institute and made possible with funding from the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties (\$2.8 million annually), involving thousands of children, families, and teachers. Evaluation of the plan is being conducted by the UNL Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools and the Interdisciplinary Center for Program Evaluation of the Munroe-Meyer Institute at UNMC in partnership with the Buffett Institute. Now in its third year it has received renewal for four more years and is the largest birth through third grade intervention in the nation.

The Early Childhood Workforce Development Program focuses on the challenging question of how best to ensure a high-quality early childhood workforce that is recognized for the critical role it plays in children's growth and development. To better understand the conditions faced by the early childhood workforce, the Institute launched three initial activities: (1) The Nebraska Early Childhood Higher Education Inventory, launched in partnership with the University of California, Berkeley, aims to better understand professional preparation for those working in early childhood in the state; (2) the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Survey provided data about the views and perspectives of the state's early childhood workforce; and (3) the appointment of a Commission on the Early Childhood Workforce that brings together a wide range of stakeholders who will spend the next three years developing a systematic plan for "reinventing" the workforce.

The Position

The Director of Research and Evaluation is responsible for leading the Institute's efforts to build a world class research and evaluation function that contributes to the work of the Institute and helps to shape the focus of work in the early childhood development field. Reporting to the Executive Director, the director serves as a member of the Institute's senior management team and plays a formative role in the Institute's overall work and commitments. While this position is supported by the Institute's endowment income, the director will be expected to obtain partial salary support from grants, contracts, or other existing external sources.

In conjunction with Institute staff, faculty, and staff from the University of Nebraska, and state- and community-based organizations, the director plays a leadership role by developing and contributing to a variety of applied studies involving children (birth to age 8) and their families placed at-risk due to poverty, family distress, or developmental delay. The director will be actively engaged with the Institute's two signature programs, the Achievement Gap Challenge and the Early Childhood Workforce Development Program, conducting translational research and implementation studies, and developing, designing, and leading rigorous research studies and a research agenda relevant to the Institute's mission of transforming the lives of young children by improving their learning and development.

The director will oversee a core staff currently consisting of an associate director, a research specialist, and graduate assistants who work on the Institute's signature programs. The director will also work collaboratively with the Institute's program staff and with faculty, staff, and students from the four campuses who work in early childhood. As part of this effort, the director will need to become familiar with the resources and assets on each campus that can be drawn upon and leveraged to support the work of the Institute. The director will be an important part of a highly collaborative multidisciplinary staff that operates in a team-oriented environment.

The director will serve as a spokesperson for the research and evaluation conducted by the Institute, sharing and translating evidence-based findings to internal and external audiences, the early childhood community, the business community, and the legislative community. The director will be expected to leverage and maintain partnerships within the community and find ways to break down silos and increase collaboration.

Major responsibilities for this position include:

- Applying a perspective on research and evaluation that contributes to the Institute's overall vision and mission;
- Proposing and managing innovative research and evaluation projects and building an Institute research and evaluation agenda;

[7]

- Providing supervision and technical assistance (methodological, managerial, and substantive) to staff conducting research and evaluation for the Institute so that work is conducted according to specifications, on schedule, and within budget;
- Writing proposals, developing survey instruments, analyzing data, developing evaluation designs, preparing reports and articles, translating results, and making presentations regarding findings to diverse audiences;
- Serving as a public spokesperson regarding the research of the Institute and engaging in state and national efforts to inform policymakers, key stakeholders, and the public;
- Working closely with University of Nebraska staff, faculty, and students, as well as community partners, to integrate their work, ideas, and recommendations into new and ongoing projects; and
- Making an active commitment to interdisciplinary and collaborative efforts both within the Institute and with its partners.

Key Selection Criteria

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute seeks a recognized leader in the field of early childhood and child development research and evaluation to serve as Director of Research and Evaluation. The ideal candidate will have a background designing applied research programs using mixed-methods approaches; conducting evaluation studies; leading or coordinating complex research projects; and working in a collaborative setting. She or he will also have experience in conceptualizing and preparing briefs, reports, articles, and proposals and responding to media requests for research-based information related to early childhood programs, policies, and development.

The director will have a strong track record of research and publication that includes successfully obtaining grants and contracts from governmental agencies, private foundations, donors, and other sources of external support. She or he must have broad multidisciplinary intellectual interests that span the domains of early childhood research and practice and an integrative approach that links research to policy and practice. The director must be a persuasive communicator who can work effectively with people from diverse groups and disciplines, including faculty, staff, and students; leaders from industry, government and non-governmental agencies; and community organizations. The ability to build and sustain partnerships and networks and foster collaboration among these diverse groups is essential. She or he will be a passionate advocate for the Institute who brings ideas, positive energy and the motivation to work with others to find solutions and implement best practices. The director will embrace the importance of the Institute's mission and its focus on high quality research with practical applications that are accessible to the local and national community. In this context, it would be important for the director's own research agenda to align and be able to integrate with the Institute's strategic initiatives and directions. With appropriate academic credentials, the

[8]

successful candidate may be eligible for a courtesy appointment in an academic department on one of the University's four campuses.

The successful candidate might come from a host of backgrounds, including the early childhood academic research community; relevant government agencies addressing birth to age eight; private foundations that are interested in these areas; research or policy institutes; early childhood education and practice groups; or non-profit or government organizations dealing with early childhood issues. She or he must demonstrate evidence of excellent research leadership skills; collaborative and interpersonal skills in teaming with colleagues and partners; and a track record of commitment to diversity and to working with diverse leadership teams. The capacity to work within a national context is essential together with the ability to work within a Nebraska culture that is direct, pragmatic, authentic, and inclusive.

The following criteria are essential:

- Strong academic credentials (an earned doctorate in education, psychology, or a related discipline) and a record of scholarly publications;
- At least ten years of experience in positions of increasing responsibility in program evaluation and research in child development or a related field, with several years of successfully managing programs, projects, and proposal development;
- Advanced knowledge of early childhood development (birth – age 8) through extensive exposure to the research literature and broad experience with field-based work;
- A demonstrated commitment to research with strong practical applications; the ability to lay out questions that the work of the Institute can help to answer;
- Ability to work with communities and systems to implement evidence-based practice;
- Innovative skills and acumen in identifying targets of research opportunity consistent with the Institute's mission and direction; an understanding of the interplay between evaluation and program development;
- Skills in quantitative and qualitative analysis;
- Excellent oral and written communication skills and highly developed interpersonal abilities;
- Excellent organizational skills, an understanding of systems and the way to portray data, a strong sense of accountability, and experience in communicating innovative results;

- Ability to interact effectively with colleagues, researchers, practitioners, educators, and others and to work collaboratively across the University's four campuses, to build relationships and leverage connections across disciplines, and to motivate and energize others to work together; strong skills in managing people and gaining satisfaction through their success; a high degree of comfort, sensitivity, and flexibility in working across geographic boundaries.

In addition, strong candidates will also be expected to demonstrate the following professional and personal competencies:

- Intellectual agility, an entrepreneurial spirit, and evidence of being a team player who seeks to advance the Institute and its goals;
- Knowledge, enthusiasm, and passion for the field of early childhood; ability to establish credibility in the education/human service and university communities;
- A fast self-starter who is comfortable with attention to detail and able to work independently, along with having the judgment to seek supervision and/or input from others when necessary;
- A strong sense of the requirements of a stable organization and its long term needs combined with the ability to exercise significant initiative and creativity in developing new value-added relationships with the Institute's stakeholders;
- A spirit that is open-minded, optimistic, positive, resilient, and insightful; evidence of being a performance-driven decision maker, problem solver, collaborator, and consensus builder; enthusiasm for working with and through others to achieve significant outcomes;
- A strong commitment to social change.

The University of Nebraska is an Affirmative Action / Equal Employment Opportunity employer, which seeks and encourages expression of interest from minorities and groups traditionally under represented.

For additional information, please consult the University of Nebraska's website at <http://www.nebraska.edu> and the Institute's website at <http://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu>.

Search Team and Contact Information

The Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska has retained Diversified Search to assist in this search process. Confidential nominations, recommendations or expressions of interest (cover letter, CV, and five references) in the position should be directed electronically to: BuffettInstitute_Research@divsearch.com.

Team:

Kim M. Morrisson, Ph.D.
Senior Managing Director, Education and Not-for-Profit Leadership Searches
215 656-3546
kim.morrisson@divsearch.com

Nancy Helfman
Vice President and Senior Associate
215-656-3579
nancy.helfman@divsearch.com

Karen A. Engel
Executive Assistant
215 656-3557
Karen.Engel@divsearch.com

Diversified Search
One Commerce Square, 2005 Market Street
Suite 3300, Philadelphia, PA 19103
www.diversifiedsearch.com
Fax: 215.568.8399

Search 12968_04/2017

Appendix A: About the University of Nebraska

Founded in Lincoln, Nebraska in 1869, the University of Nebraska (NU) is a four-campus public university that serves the citizens of Nebraska through quality teaching, research, outreach and engagement. One of the early land-grant universities, founded less than two years after Nebraska became the nation's 37th state, NU is the state's only public university. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln was the first institution west of the Mississippi to offer graduate education. The University's medical center in Omaha was founded in 1902 and given its own campus by Legislative Act in 1968 at the same time the University of Nebraska at Omaha was added to the University. In 1991, the University of Nebraska at Kearney became a campus of the University. Today, NU comprises the land-grant and comprehensive research campus in Lincoln, the medical center in Omaha, the campus in Omaha, and the Kearney campus as well as research, extension, and service facilities statewide. NU employs approximately 13,000 people and enrolls approximately 50,000 students.

The University of Nebraska is led by the President of the University. The Chancellors of each campus serve as the chief operating officers of their campuses and also as Vice Presidents of the University. The President and the University's Central Administration provide a single focus and voice for the University as a statewide institution, and they ensure its accountability to the public. The President and the officers of University Administration are the principal spokespersons for the University in the Legislature and with other political bodies, and are primarily responsible for interpreting and implementing statutes and regulations, and responding to official requests.

Each campus within the University has a unique role and mission. Where appropriate, the resources of the four campuses are linked in cooperative efforts and through University initiatives, such as the Buffett Early Childhood Institute, that encompass the mission of all four campuses.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), enrolls 24,000 students and is ranked among the nation's top 50 public universities. The primary intellectual and cultural resource for the State, UNL fulfills its mission of teaching, research, and service through its schools and colleges.

The University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) is Nebraska's metropolitan campus. A comprehensive university with a Carnegie classification as a doctoral research university and located in Nebraska's largest metropolitan area, UNO provides undergraduate instructional programs based on a strong liberal arts foundation; graduate programs, research, and creative activity; and a strong focus on public service.

The University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK) is a comprehensive university located in central Nebraska and serving students throughout the state. UNK enrolls 6,750 students from more than 40 countries and offers more than 170 academic programs with a strong emphasis on undergraduate research.

The University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC), located in Omaha, is Nebraska's only public academic health sciences campus, offering programs in health professions education, research, patient care and community service. UNMC's mission is accomplished through eight major units: the College of Dentistry, the College of Medicine, the College of Nursing, the College of Pharmacy, the College of Public Health, the School of Allied Health Professions, the University Hospital and Clinic; the Munroe-Meyer Institute for Genetics and Rehabilitation, and the Eugene C. Eppley Institute for Research in Cancer and Allied Diseases. In addition, the Office of Graduate Studies and Research conducts a variety of Master's and Ph.D. programs under the auspices of the University-wide Graduate College. UNMC prepares nearly 3,500 students annually for careers in Health Sciences and participates in a broad-based program of health-related research.

Under the State Constitution, the University is governed by a Board of Regents consisting of eight voting members elected by district and four non-voting student Regents. The Board supervises the general operations of the University and the control and direction of all expenditures. The Board's minutes, notices, policies, and bylaws are public and available on the University's website.

The University of Nebraska has a total budget of \$2.55 billion in 2016-17. Approximately 13 percent of the University's operating budget is derived from tuition. Nearly 23 percent of the University's operating budget comes from State support. The remaining 64 percent comes from private funds, governmental funds, revolving and other sources.

Research funding at the University of Nebraska has continued to increase, more than doubling since 2000. Most of the funded research at NU occurs at UNL and UNMC. UNL was awarded a record-high \$146.9 million in external research funding in 2016, an increase of more than 12 percent over the previous year. Nearly 80 percent of sponsored research at UNL comes from federal sources, including the National Science Foundation, the Departments of Education, Energy, and Agriculture, and the National Institutes of Health. UNL's federal research funding in 2016 saw a record increase of 19 percent. Total sponsored funding, which includes all external funds awarded for research, instruction, public service and student services, also set a record at \$267.8 million, an increase of nearly 23 percent in the fiscal year that ended June 30.

NU is supported by the University of Nebraska Foundation, a private, non-profit corporation that exists to provide financial support for the University. In fall 2009, the foundation announced the largest comprehensive campaign in its history, the Campaign for Nebraska: Unlimited Possibilities. The campaign aimed to raise \$1.2 billion by the end of 2014 for a wide range of

critical university priorities, including financial aid, faculty support, global engagement, agriculture and life sciences, information technology, cancer research, architectural engineering and construction, water and natural resources, and early childhood education. At its conclusion, the campaign had surpassed its goal, with nearly \$1.9 billion committed by the university's alumni and friends.

The University's goals and aspirations are laid out in the key planning document, *Investing in Nebraska's Future: Strategic Planning Framework, 2014-2016*. This framework lays out six overarching goals, along with related objectives, strategies and accountability measures that detail the University's commitment to access and affordability, quality academic programs, workforce and economic development, research growth and excellence, engagement with the state, and accountability. In particular, the University aims to focus its resources on areas of strength in research where there is opportunity for regional, national, and international leadership and where there are areas of strategic importance to the health and economic strength of Nebraska. These areas include agriculture and life sciences; natural resources, especially water; prevention and cure of diseases such as cancer, and early childhood education.