Higher Education Policy Research

January 2022

Work Location

Remote or Philadelphia, PA

About the Organization

Research for Action (RFA) is an independent, non-profit educational research organization with a mission of using research to achieve equitable educational opportunities and outcomes to help inform better policy and practice decisions. With 30 years in business, our work is designed to strengthen public schools and postsecondary institutions; provide research-based recommendations to policymakers, practitioners and the public at the local, state and national levels; and enrich the civic and community dialogue about public education.

RFA's postsecondary portfolio of research and policy studies spans critical topics related to advancing equity for traditionally underserved students, from state approaches to addressing racial equity in higher education to state postsecondary finance and policies and programs focused on college readiness, access, and success in community colleges and four-year institutions. Examples of RFA's research include an equity-centered study of outcomes-based funding models, a multi-state evaluation of college Promise programs, a national study of postsecondary readiness with GradNation, developmental evaluations of state and system-level efforts to advance racial equity in postsecondary attainment, the development of a toolkit to support out-of-classroom credentialing for adult learners, analysis of state policies affecting college access for undocumented students, a quasi-experimental study of a statewide developmental education reform and a randomized control trial of a statewide completion coaching model. Our research projects are supported through federally- and state-funded grants and contracts as well as philanthropic investments from major foundations such as the Lumina Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and Arnold Ventures.

This Position

RFA is seeking an experienced higher education researcher to lead and contribute to research projects that assess the equity and effectiveness of policies, programs, and interventions designed to improve student postsecondary access and success. These projects may include formative and summative evaluations of programs; policy analysis and evaluation; and mixed-methods research. The researcher will develop and design research studies that center equity and apply literature-informed frameworks for data collection and analysis. The researcher will direct the collection, organization, and analysis of primary and secondary data at the student-, institution-, and state/systems-level. The researcher will develop and present policy and program insights for varied community groups. The researcher will use insights from their studies to inform design and implementation of current and future policies and initiatives, contribute to the knowledge base of the field, and influence postsecondary policies at multiple levels.

This position will report to the Associate Director of Postsecondary Policy and will have significant opportunity and autonomy in building and directing a portfolio of mission-aligned projects,

supervising and collaborating with staff in support of projects, and supporting the Associate Director in leading the postsecondary research team.

Responsibilities

- Design and execute research projects that uplift the experiences of students of color, low-income students, adult learners, and institutions of higher education, particularly institutions serving those student groups, including:
  - Research design and data collection plans for qualitative/quantitative/mixed-methods/policy research studies
  - Conduct interviews and focus groups, design and administer surveys
  - Use research insights to provide formative feedback to community groups/clients/partners
  - Write a variety of research reports, policy briefs, emails, memos, grant reports
  - Present research on behalf of RFA at conferences, webinars, partner meetings, and other venues
  - Maintain awareness of relevant literature, news stories, policies, and other issues that inform your portfolio of work
- Lead and participate in team efforts to design and conduct qualitative and mixed-methods research across the postsecondary research team
- Collaborate with state policymakers, program developers, funders, and intermediaries in the field to identify and examine policy solutions that support student movement into and through college
- Manage multiple projects with differing research designs, timelines, funders, and audiences, as well as well as complete administrative requirements such as projections, budgeting, and reporting
- Strong interpersonal and collaboration skills, including ability to work with team members on projects and ease at building rapport with clients and colleagues with diverse backgrounds
- Supervise the work of project and/or other postsecondary researchers, particularly in mentoring and growing the skills and opportunities of colleagues with diverse expertise and experience

Education, Experience, and Skills

RFA considers a wide-range of experience and skills in candidates. Candidates should have many of the following:

- Ph.D. in a relevant field such as education, higher education, or public policy, with advanced training in qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods research, or program evaluation. A Master's Degree plus significant experience will also be considered.
- 5+ years experience designing and conducting rigorous applied research studies, policy, and program evaluations, experience designing and implementing culturally responsive research studies within the demands of applied research spaces a plus
- Experience managing large and complex research and policy projects that involve mixed-methods, as well as high-level collaboration and communication with clients, funders, and partners.
- Experience supporting research operations including grant writing, proposal development, IRB application, protocol design, data collection, data coding and analysis, and the reporting of research findings for internal and external audiences
- Demonstrated ability to contribute to and enhance our team's equity-focused practices in research design, data collection, analysis, and reporting

The following skills are important for this role:

- Navigating complex relationships and interests of multiple parties and making sense of ambiguity.
- Translating complicated research data and policy analysis into compelling, accessible, and well-written reports and engaging presentations.
- Effectively supervising the work of others in the context of your projects.
- Prioritizing and managing your own work, performing well under pressure, and meeting deadlines, while ensuring acute attention to detail and accuracy.
- Thriving in our open, collaborative, and team-oriented culture.
- Demonstrating flexibility in collaborating virtually with a remote team.

Work for RFA

Culture: RFA is a fast-paced, highly-collaborative, team-based, diverse organization where the thoughts, opinions, and perspectives of all staff members are valued. RFA welcomes applications from people of all underrepresented backgrounds and credentials.

Salary and benefits: The anticipated salary range for this full-time position is $75,000-95,000 dependent on qualifications and experience. New hires will rarely be placed at the top of the range. RFA offers a competitive benefit package, including generous time off, employer-paid medical, dental, and vision insurance, 403(b) plans with employer match, and flex spending plans.

Other requirements: This full-time position can be 100% remote or based in RFA's Center City Philadelphia office (Philadelphia-based employees currently have the option of working remotely, hybrid, or in the office). This position will require project-related U.S. travel of up to 15-20% (dependent on COVID mitigation measures). RFA takes COVID-19 precautions and the health and safety of our staff and their families seriously; masking when in person or conducting fieldwork, as well as proof of vaccination consistent with current CDC guidelines, is required.

How to Apply:

Qualified candidates should submit:

- A resume;
- A detailed cover letter;
- 1-2 writing samples that demonstrate an understanding of issues in higher education access, affordability, and student success and also demonstrate facility in working with data; and
- Salary requirements.

Please apply here: https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/124a872508944a0e855aa9e9f5afda6b

All qualified applicants receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, sex, national origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, religion, domestic violence victim status, veteran status, disability, history of disability or perceived disability, or other status protected by law.