

SEARCH PROFILE:

PRESIDENT AND CEO

Achieving
the Dream



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Achieving the Dream (ATD), a national nonprofit organization, is a partner and champion for a network of more than 300 community colleges in 46 states across the country and beyond. Launched in 2004 – drawing on expert coaches, groundbreaking programs, and peer learning opportunities – ATD helps colleges build integrated, tailored support for every aspect of their student success work, from foundational capacities such as leadership and data to intentional strategies for supporting students holistically, including building a culture of teaching and learning excellence, designing k-12 partnerships, and more. ATD knows that with the right partner and the right approach, colleges can drive access, completion rates, and post-completion outcomes so that all students can access life-changing learning that propels them into community-changing lives and careers. ATD's vision is for every college to be a catalyst for equitable and economically vibrant communities.

Over the last decade, the organization has transformed from a nascent nonprofit into a dynamic and entrepreneurial organization that has become one of the driving forces leading community college improvement and transformation. With this leadership record and the upcoming departure of long serving President and CEO Dr. Karen Stout, ATD is ready to build on these strengths in its next strategic climb. The organization has a strong leadership team, a staff with significant experience, a diversified funding stream, and a high degree of brand awareness and respect among college leaders, policy makers, funders, and partners.

ATD is pleased to invite inquiries, nominations, and applications for the position of President and CEO. ATD seeks a strategic, transformative leader and astute advocate who will continue to grow the network, demonstrate the impact of ATD's approach, and influence the national conversation around community colleges and higher education.



ABOUT ACHIEVING THE DREAM

Since its beginning, ATD has partnered with hundreds of community colleges as well as Tribal Colleges and Universities – serving over four million students – that have been willing to experiment, innovate, and recognize students as the center of their efforts. Through their work with ATD, most of these colleges have reported increasing resources to support student success and their use of data to inform decision-making and close equity gaps. Indeed, a recent network-wide evaluation demonstrated that ATD colleges' graduation rates are increasing much more quickly than non-ATD institutions.

ATD continues to grow each year, providing institutions with holistic, tailored support for every aspect of their work – from foundational capacities such as leadership, data, and equity to intentional strategies for supporting students holistically, building k–12 partnerships, aligning programs with workforce needs, and more. ATD calls this structure the Whole College Transformation. Through the years, ATD has demonstrated that innovative, evidence-based community college programs and interventions can produce and sustain improved student success and lead to increased social and economic mobility for all students and families. ATD remains steadfast in its commitment to delivering student-centered strategies to guide and support colleges to redesign themselves to ensure that all students succeed and prosper. ATD's network comes together annually for the DREAM conference – one of the largest and most unique gatherings for community college leaders, reform partners, practitioners, funders and policy makers and the past 11 years has included institutions from other countries, including delegates from universities in South Africa and New Zealand.

ATD drives transformation by exploring new ideas and champions solutions across the higher education field through research, advocacy, and partnerships. Some of ATD's efforts include helping states and systems support colleges in scaling and evaluating shortened academic terms, reforming policies and practices to improve postsecondary success for adult learners – particularly student parents – and developing research-based tools to help colleges craft strategic enrollment management plans that match the needs for colleges to expand their focus on access.

ATD's recently released [Community Vibrancy Framework](#) builds on its steadfast commitment to empower college leaders to redesign systems that truly support students and shape lasting, meaningful change. This Framework calls for a bold new access agenda and deeper work in designing programs of value that create greater social and economic mobility for more learners and their families and help communities flourish across a broad range of measures. This program looks beyond the walls of campuses to bring ATD's work directly into communities where the local college is not currently a consideration for many. With the view that community colleges are engines of economic mobility for the communities they serve, ATD is supporting institutions as they begin to capture and analyze what ATD calls "next-generation metrics": data on graduates' mobility and return on investment, educational milestones of the community, quality employment opportunities, improved economic outcomes, improved social outcomes, and societal gains realized.

ATD also seeks to be a thought leader, hosting peer learning events and workshops throughout the year and playing an important role in the higher education space by widely disseminating knowledge and research

ABOUT ACHIEVING THE DREAM (CONT.)

in the form of guides, toolkits, case studies, and other practitioner-centered publications.

A significant part of ATD's commitment to the network it serves is demonstrated by the team of ATD coaches who play an integral role in the organization's work. Experts in their fields – ranging from data, teaching and learning, and holistic student supports to leadership and dual enrollment – ATD's coaches have worked in community colleges throughout the nation and are familiar with the challenges and understand the tools required to help create smart solutions. Pulling from their extensive experience, ATD's coaches know how to adapt ATD's frameworks to the unique needs and circumstances of each college to provide highly tailored support.

In addition to supporting colleges, ATD brings the student voice into everything it does, including through the highly regarded DREAM Scholars program, which recognizes and supports outstanding community college students who have demonstrated remarkable determination, resilience, and commitment to both their academic goals as well as to uplifting their communities. The program provides each recipient with a scholarship and year-long learning opportunity designed to enhance leadership, critical thinking, and networking skills. The experience culminates with the scholars attending and sharing their experiences at the annual DREAM conference. By highlighting the encouraging stories and achievements of these scholars, ATD aims to inspire and motivate other students as well as educators, leaders, and advocates in the higher education student success field.

ATD's revenue model relies on a combination of contributions from individual institutions as well as private philanthropy. Active philanthropic partners within the most recent full fiscal year include Ascendium Education Group, Barr Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Brave of Heart Fund, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Cognizant U.S. Foundation, Coleridge Initiative, Crimsonbridge Foundation, ECMC Foundation, Greater Texas Foundation, JPMorgan Chase Foundation, Lumina Foundation, Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies, Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, The Ford Family Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and Woodward Hines Education Foundation. Most of its annual revenue comes from grants, contributions, and program service fees. Of note is the 2021 \$20 million gift from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott, the largest in ATD's history. This gift has helped to bring new under-resourced colleges into the ATD network each year. A portion of the gift was also endowed to give the organization a source of additional operating income.

To learn more about ATD, please visit achievingthedream.org. You may also review the latest [Annual Report](#).

OUR VISION

ATD will help our network colleges catalyze equitable, economically vibrant communities through institutional transformation that advances community colleges as profoundly accessible hubs of learning, credentialing, and economic mobility that eliminate inequities in educational and workforce outcomes.

OUR MISSION

To lead and support a national network of community colleges to achieve sustainable institutional transformation through sharing knowledge, innovative solutions, and effective practices and policies, leading to improved outcomes for all students.

OUR APPROACH

For two decades, ATD has been working to transform community colleges into catalysts for more equitable, vibrant communities through a multipronged approach. We provide tailored support to individual colleges through our array of services, empower colleges through collective learning made possible by our national network, and contribute to the advancement of the student success field by testing innovative solutions and widely sharing our findings. All of these approaches are underpinned by our longstanding and deep commitment to data-informed decision making and centering the student.





GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The President and CEO works closely with a 12- to 15-member Board of Directors that leads ATD, providing strategic and fiscal stewardship for the organization. The Board includes nationally recognized leaders from both inside and outside higher education who bring vast and diverse experiences and a lifelong commitment to the transformation that is possible through post-secondary access and attainment.

The President and CEO currently oversees a team of seven talented and dedicated staff who make up the leadership team of the organization: a Chief Data, Research, and Analytics Officer, a Chief Operating Officer, a Chief of Staff, a Chief Learning Officer, a Chief Program and Network Officer, a Chief Strategy Officer/Vice President for External Partnerships, and an Executive Assistant. The organization employs more than 60 individuals who reside throughout the country, and more than 100 higher education professionals serve as contracted coaches.

LEADERSHIP AGENDA FOR THE NEXT PRESIDENT AND CEO

The Board of Directors seeks a President and CEO who demonstrates strong emotional intelligence, political and financial acumen, and exceptional communication skills. The next President and CEO must have the ability to thrive within an everchanging environment and be a dynamic leader who will represent ATD on a national scale and continue to champion and build upon its community vibrancy work. This individual must have a deep understanding of and commitment to the community college sector and the variety of student populations served, including high percentages of first-generation

students, working parents, part-time adult learners, veterans, and traditional students. The next President and CEO will develop, in consultation with the Board, a new strategic vision (to access the 2021-2025 plan, click [here](#)), including examining and expanding upon current revenue streams, continuing to grow the ATD community college network, and remaining true to ATD's core mission. This new leader must demonstrate the capacity to inspire, manage, and mentor others, building and continuing to cultivate a successful team.

LEADERSHIP AGENDA FOR THE NEXT PRESIDENT AND CEO (CONT.)

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES:

Strategic Vision and Mission Focus

- Ability to identify future trends in community colleges – drawing from emerging needs, assets, and opportunities and lessons from the field – and use that knowledge to lead staff at all levels in developing new strategies, programs, and services to support colleges and communities to move in new directions, and in developing communications and advocacy themes that serve community colleges in a variety of political settings.
- Knowledge of and engagement with the student success reform efforts of ATD and allied organizations, with demonstrated evidence of leading successful student success reform work at the institutional level.
- Deep and demonstrated commitment to and focus on addressing the needs of racially minoritized, economically marginalized students and other historically marginalized learners.

Network Leadership & Advocacy

- A leader of leaders who can listen to, learn from, and support a network of presidents and practitioners to strive for success in an ever-changing and occasionally volatile economic and political environment.
- Experience as a thought-leader in the higher education sector in general and community colleges specifically. The ability to advocate for community colleges and stimulate innovation in the sector, and raise awareness of how institutions, communities and employers can work together to achieve more equitable student and community outcomes through publication of scholarly papers, presentations, or other means.
- An ability to holistically assess and grow all aspects of an organization, focused on improving policy and practice, leading greater peer learning, advocating for the future of the sector, and strengthening communities in which network colleges are located.
- Exceptional strategic planning and analytical skills that keep ATD's mission, programs and services, and philanthropic investments aligned with the evolving needs of the colleges in the network.

Organizational Leadership

- Ability to lead a small organization that requires the president, senior leadership, and staff to wear multiple hats and be extremely adaptive. Demonstrated support in the professional development of senior leadership and staff that deepen the effectiveness of the organization.
- Expertise in board governance, and willingness to engage an experienced Board in strategic conversations that shape the programmatic and financial future of the organization.
- Strong skills in fostering the growth, learning, and leadership of staff and coaches as crucial agents of change within the community college field.
- A leader who values the culture of evidence and insists upon continuous rigorous research and evaluation and the use of data for program improvement and decision-making.

Strategic Communication

- Demonstrated ability to represent the organization on the national and international stage, interacting with diverse stakeholders including institution presidents, faculty and staff, funders, national/state/local policymakers, business and community leaders, as well as partner organizations.
- Excellent organizational spokesperson, writer, and presenter; agile respondent to external organizations and the media.



LEADERSHIP AGENDA FOR THE NEXT PRESIDENT AND CEO (CONT.)

Financial Leadership

- Proven fundraising success and working knowledge with “big” philanthropy. Demonstrated success in building strategic partnerships with business and government to strengthen an organization.
- Strong understanding of nonprofit business models, financial analytics, and stewardship responsibilities and a commitment to ensure the financial well-being of the organization.
- Experience with a successful nonprofit business model that relies on a diversified funding stream. Deep understanding of college-based fees from a strategically structured portfolio of product offerings, contracts for services provided to other reform partners and non-network colleges, events, philanthropy, and investment income.

QUALIFICATIONS:

- Demonstrated record of senior leadership within a complex organization, managing the administrative, financial, and operational functions.
- A proven commitment to ATD’s mission as well as the community college sector and the partner organizations and stakeholders that it serves.
- Experience cultivating relationships with a Board as well as leading and building a strong internal team and positive organizational environment.
- Ability to create and implement a strategic plan, communicate a narrative effectively, and think innovatively about the future needs of community colleges.
- Experience advocating to a broad range of constituencies and serving as the spokesperson for an organization.

Salary range: \$550,000-\$650,000

Desired start date: Spring 2026

Work location: Silver Spring, Maryland

Travel: Frequent





INQUIRIES, NOMINATIONS, AND APPLICATIONS

Achieving the Dream is being assisted by Academic Search in filling this position. Inquiries, nominations, and applications should be emailed to ATDPresident@academicsearch.org. Applications must include a cover letter that addresses the expectations and responsibilities discussed in the leadership agenda above and a CV. Applicants and prospects will be asked to complete a questionnaire. This position is open until filled, but only applications received by **August 15, 2025**, can be assured full consideration.

Achieving the Dream is committed to creating and maintaining a diverse work environment and is proud to be an equal opportunity employer. ATD strongly encourages applicants from diverse and historically underrepresented backgrounds to apply. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions of the role.

Employment policies and decisions at ATD are based upon merit, qualifications, performance, and business needs. All qualified candidates will receive consideration for employment without regard to age, race, color, national origin, gender (including pregnancy, childbirth or medical conditions related to pregnancy or childbirth), gender identity or expression, religion, physical or mental disability, medical condition, legally protected genetic information, marital status, veteran status, or sexual orientation.

ABOUT ACADEMIC SEARCH

Academic Search is assisting Achieving the Dream in this work. For more than four decades, Academic Search has offered executive search services to higher education institutions, associations, and related organizations. Academic Search was founded by higher education leaders on the principle that we provide the most value to partner institutions by combining best practices with our deep knowledge and experience. Our mission today is to enhance institutional capacity by providing outstanding executive recruitment services, executive coaching, and transition support, in partnership with our parent organization, the American Academic Leadership Institute.

