



# Position Specification

Aspen Institute

President and Chief Executive Officer

Private and Confidential

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## Position Specification

Ref: President and Chief Executive Officer  
The Aspen Institute  
<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/>

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*“The Aspen Institute brings together people with different outlooks to search for common ground and make the world a better place.” -- Walter Isaacson, President and CEO*

### Our Client

The Aspen Institute is an educational and policy studies organization based in Washington, DC. As a nonpartisan forum for values-based leadership and the exchange of ideas, the Institute fosters leadership based on enduring values and provides a venue for dealing with complex social issues. With campuses in Aspen, Colorado, and on the Wye River on Maryland’s Eastern Shore, it also maintains offices in New York City and has an international network of partners.

Three core tenets of the Institute’s work are: Ideas, Leadership, and Action, reflected in the following statements:

- Spark intellectual inquiry and exchange, connecting new concepts to timeless values (Ideas)
- Create a diverse worldwide community of leaders committed to the greater good (Leadership)
- Provide a nonpartisan forum for reaching solutions on vital public policy issues (Action)

The Institute endeavours to equip individuals with ideas on how to create better lives for themselves, their families, and their communities. By engaging and enabling a broad and inclusive conversation, the Institute cultivates differing viewpoints and works to identify common ground to identify viable solutions to complex problems.

Today, the following elements encapsulate the Institute’s work:

- Policy Programs - Nonpartisan initiatives that drive dialogue and action on today’s challenges.
  - 30+ programs provide nonpartisan forums that frame critical topics, bring new evidence to bear on a wide range of issues, propose innovative ideas, and gather leaders and experts to reach constructive solutions.
  - Each program serves as an impartial forum, and each is unique in its substance and approach. Together they share a common mission and methodology: convening diverse perspectives for informed dialogue and action.
- Leadership Initiatives - Multi-year programs in which leaders explore their core values to drive action in their communities and businesses.
  - The Aspen Global Leadership Network (AGLN) is a worldwide community of successful, high-integrity, action-oriented leaders committed to making the world a better place.
  - AGLN has 2,500+ Fellows in 50+ countries and continues to grow; groups of 20 are selected annually to be part of one of 14 geographic or sector-specific initiatives around the world.

- **Conferences & Events** - Opportunities for the public to engage with experts and each other.
  - Public programs open the Institute to wider audiences ranging from major conferences — such as the Aspen Ideas Festival, CityLab, and the Aspen Security Forum — to more intimate roundtable discussion series.
  - The programs take place in Aspen, Colorado; Washington, DC; New York City; San Francisco; and other locations in the US and abroad.
- **Youth & Engagement Programs** - Initiatives designed to develop values-driven young leaders and activate the next generation of citizens.
  - Programs that work directly with youth ages 14 to 24. Their purpose is to educate and develop citizen leaders who mirror our nation’s diversity and to identify, nurture, and celebrate local youth and their ideas to improve our communities.
  - Relatively new, these youth-focused initiatives include longstanding Institute programs that work with youth in more recently launched efforts. Examples include Aspen Challenge, Teen Socrates, and the Aspen Young Leaders Fellowship.
- **Seminars** - Small gatherings in which experts and leaders reflect, connect, and share ideas.
  - Seminars use text-based dialogue with expert moderators and accomplished peers to help participants refine their tools of intellectual analysis, test the wellsprings of their convictions, and enhance their capacities to think more creatively about the problems that confront society.
  - Seminars include: The Aspen Executive Seminar, Wye Academic Seminars, Custom Seminars, and the Socrates Program.
- **International Partnerships** - A network of partners that address global challenges and develop values-based leaders.
  - Ten international Aspen Institute partners conduct independently developed and supported programs, conferences, and seminars on region-specific issues, global challenges, and leadership development.
  - Partners are in: Spain, France, Germany, Italy, Czech Republic, Romania, Ukraine, India, Japan, and Mexico.
- **Media Resources** - Digital content and publications that present and promote innovative thinking and solutions.
  - Aspeninstitute.org, the Institute’s website and mobile platform
  - Publications include *IDEAS: the Magazine of the Aspen Institute*, *The Aspen Journal of Ideas*, and *The Aspen Ideas To Go Podcast*.
  - Aspen Idea Blog

- Five Best Ideas of the Day: published each weekday, at noon.

As the Aspen Institute considers its future, other guiding values for the Institute might include:

- **Embrace its mission.** The Great Books and the “good society” are not as fashionable as they were in the 1950s, but they remain profoundly relevant to our world. Bringing leaders into dialogue about these foundational concepts is core to the Institute’s unique value and identity.
- **Elevate others.** Aspen supports the leaders who shape our world. We do not supply the answers, and we do not implement the solutions.
- **Be an agent of change.** There should be an obvious relationship between our programs and the most significant challenges of our era. Programs should be assessed, in part, on their ability to have an impact in their areas.
- **Tell better stories.** In the past, elites shaped policy and culture, but our “flattening” world demands that Aspen engages with citizens from all walks of life. It must scale its dialogue to this broader polity in the modes and on the platforms where dialogue takes place today.
- **Preserve integrity.** The Aspen Institute seeks the public good, and must continue to do so unimpeded by outside influence, especially from corporate and philanthropic largesse.
- **Build bridges.** Aspen programs should never hew to the interests of one faction, however appealing, but instead bring opposing stakeholders together to form shared solutions. The Aspen Institute is not an advocacy group.
- **Reach more Americans.** The United States is pulling apart culturally, demographically, and economically. To remain nationally relevant, the Institute must speak to the aspirations of Americans beyond the coastal hubs.
- **Expect excellence.** Internal operations and all outward facing activities should reflect and reinforce an identity of exceptional quality, competence, and discernment.
- **Joy.** The Aspen Institute bends history through its strategic convening of world leaders. It is a privilege to be part of this mission, and the excitement of that challenge should be palpable to all members of its team and network of supporters.

Under Walter Isaacson’s leadership, the Institute has grown considerably. With annual revenues of \$128M, a \$99M endowment, 1,799 society of fellows members, and 415 staff, the organization is poised to sustain profound impact across its next era of leadership.

More information about the Aspen Institute can be found online at <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/>.

## The Role

Reporting to and working with the Board of Trustees, the President and Chief Executive Officer has responsibility and is accountable for the strategic, programmatic, financial, and management operations of the Aspen Institute.

The President and CEO will:

- Provide intellectual leadership, fostering an environment for creativity, convening, imagination, and innovation;
- Continue to grow the organization, and its programs and individuals, while abiding by a searching, nonpartisan concern for the public interest;
- Weave the Institute's programs (current and future) into a coherent narrative that is larger than the sum of its parts;
- Communicate the Institute's mission and the direction of the organization to multiple stakeholders;
- Keep the Institute at the center of civil discourse while providing the vision and disciplined course-setting in our effort to advance values-based dialogue.
- Ensure that governance, asset management, and programs are ethical, transparent, aligned with the Institute's values and aims, and led by dedicated, diverse, and creative staff and officers.

## Candidate Profile

The Aspen Institute is seeking a highly differentiated leader with intellectual curiosity and practical experience with the nonprofit, academic, government, and business sectors. S/he will bring demonstrated leadership and intellectual versatility. The President and CEO will be a person of intelligence and deep curiosity, whose professional experience and personal characteristics will inspire confidence and respect among all of our constituencies. In addition to exhibiting clear management acumen, this person must be a visionary leader, a humanist at heart, and a passionate advocate for the power of knowledge, diversity, and connection in all its forms.

The successful candidate will have demonstrated accomplishments in developing a strategy for an organization, building the financial and institutional support for its implementation, and skillfully balancing the needs of multiple interests. S/he must possess the business skills, management, and leadership experience needed to lead the Institute into the future.

*Specific competencies include:*

**Intellectual Range and Unusual Vision:** A strong candidate for the Aspen Institute presidency will model the kind of mind and thinking that the Institute exists to support. With strong and deep intelligence, s/he will bring a demonstrated body of work that signals an interest in unconventional, creative thinking. S/he will be neither ideological nor view leadership as a means of driving messaging stimulated by a philosophical or political agenda. The Aspen Institute pursues original thinking and uncommon connection, unconstrained by pre-determined partisan boundaries. The President and CEO will be credibly curious across the full range of the Institute's areas of interest. S/he must have a strong, current, well-informed grasp of big questions shaping the country's future or at least a plurality across a broad range of interests.

**Strategic Acumen and Judgment:** S/he will possess the ability to make clear, timely decisions and to set limits even in the face of resistance, while producing an experimental, adaptive, and self-regenerating institution that questions its relevance continually and searches for new directions. S/he will have the capacity to define constituent engagement strategies for the Institute's work with the ability to curate new ideas, challenge colleagues, and reach beyond the conventional.

**Management Experience and Leadership Style:** A broad, global thinker, s/he will bring a track record of managing people and building institutions and the capacity to manage multiple constituents including a Board of Trustees. S/he will be a leader who is inspiring, inclusive, questioning rather than adamant, driven toward solutions, accountable to colleagues, and open rather than closed. S/he will bring a demonstrated ability to recruit, cultivate, support, and retain talent – with a strong commitment to diversity.

**Above the Partisan Debate:** The right candidate for the Institute should think through issues on the merits, wholly independent of partisan loyalty. Further, the public reputation of the candidate should not strain credibility that the Aspen Institute remains a nonpartisan organization.

**Communications and Fundraising:** S/he will be a strong communicator, before larger audiences and in private settings. S/he will possess the ability to convey a sense of excitement and purpose to the Institution. S/he will bring the capacity to maintain and grow a supportive and exciting intellectual environment, while raising the resources to invest in intellectual capital and innovative programming.

**Good Nature and Disposition:** S/he will bring an implicit generosity of spirit, have a healthy/intact ego and, as such, will be confident, but will not always need to receive credit. S/he will bring a demonstrated ability to work effectively with strong personalities, but not lose his/her own character while accommodating. S/he will have a sense of humor, unquestionable integrity, and bring joy to his/her work.

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## Contact

Russell Reynolds Associates has been exclusively retained for this search. Given the need for confidentiality throughout this process, prospective candidates are invited to reach out directly to our search consultants at [Aspen@russellreynolds.com](mailto:Aspen@russellreynolds.com) with a CV and brief explanation of interest.

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