Position Specification

Children's Defense Fund

President
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Leave No Child Behind®
The Children’s Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.

Our Client
The Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) is a national, nonprofit advocacy organization that has worked relentlessly for nearly 50 years to improve the lives of America’s children. Their work focuses especially on poor children, children of color and children in other historically marginalized groups.

In 1973, civil rights leader Marian Wright Edelman founded the Children’s Defense Fund to serve as a strong and independent voice for millions of disadvantaged and neglected children. Through her inspired activism and dedication, the organization has served for more than four decades documenting the challenges facing America’s children and advocating for solutions to improve their lives. From its inception, the Children’s Defense Fund has challenged the United States to make children a national priority. Over the past 47 years, the organization has partnered with numerous organizations and policymakers on both sides of the aisle to enact meaningful policy changes that have helped millions of children fulfill their potential and escape poverty because they received the health care, child care, nurturing families, proper nutrition and quality education that all children deserve.

The Children’s Defense Fund leads a national movement for children making local impact across the country. The organization has its national headquarters in Washington D.C, and regional offices in California, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Mississippi, and Texas. They have a staff of roughly 120 people and an annual budget of $22MM. In addition to pursuing local, state and national policy change to improve the odds for all children, the Children’s Defense Fund runs programs that change the odds for children who need help now. CDF Freedom Schools® reaches more than 12,000 children in 28 states every year, empowering them to excel today and make a difference tomorrow. The Children’s Defense Fund also trains and equips young people, faith communities, decision makers and community organizations to become local advocates for children across the country, with CDF Haley Farm in Clinton, TN serving as a vibrant training ground and space for intergenerational, interfaith dialogue about the issues facing children.

The Children’s Defense Fund is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. The CDF Action Council is an affiliated 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization. For nearly half a century, the Children’s Defense Fund has been fiercely independent and unwavering their defense against any attack on children, and they continue to work every day, at every level and on behalf of every child to improve their lives right now and for generations to come.

For more information please visit:
https://www.childrensdefense.org/
The Role
The President reports to the governing Board of Directors and is responsible for the overall management and leadership of CDF’s activities and programs. The President’s job is to develop and implement CDF’s strategic vision, policies and programs to advance the mission of keeping children at the center of the conversation. The new President will be charged with leading this important organization during a time of great change in the country and will be working every day to improve the lives of children by identifying and overcoming societal and legislative barriers. At the same time, s/he will be working to engage, educate and empower millions of fair-minded Americans to advocate for children’s rights.

Specific responsibilities include:

Provide vision and focus for a dynamic organization. CDF is a large, diverse and highly motivated organization with activities occurring simultaneously in many locations and on a variety of issues, with a unique combination of professional staff, volunteers, allies, boards, donors, and members. The President must be able to inspire, motivate, coordinate and honor these multiple constituents in ways that advance the mission of CDF and maintain the highest standards of service and integrity.

Lead the development and promotion of legislation and public policies that positively impact children and families, as well as, oppose legislation and public policies that would adversely affect these communities. CDF’s President also is the strategic visionary on how to identify supporters of CDF’s agenda to create equities for children throughout society.

Attract new donors and increase revenue streams. The next President will serve as the primary fundraiser and must be skilled in stewarding donors and guiding the development team in its efforts. The new President must be able to lead CDF in building on its growth by effectively finding new ways through social media and online fundraising to retain and attract a broader supporter base.

Enhance CDF’s visibility and influence public opinion. The President of CDF must have the gravitas and credibility to reach government and business decision-makers and influence public opinion on issues vital to their mission. It is essential that the new President be able to market CDF’s programs and broadly engage communities through the use of social media and other communications tools, in order to champion new initiatives and promote fundraising activities effectively and persuasively to thought leaders and partners.

Build, maintain and continually inspire a work environment to achieve the highest standards of performance and accountability. CDF strives to attain those goals with its own employees by fostering a workplace that welcomes and embraces diversity and encourages industry, teamwork and mutual respect. The new President must not only embrace these values, but continually lead in creating an atmosphere that promotes teamwork, diversity, accountability, and professional development and helps the organization adapt to changing and disparate needs within the community.

Manage through change. The effectiveness of CDF as a civil rights organization will depend on how well it manages uncertain changes in the political and social environment and how nimble it can be in responding to external changes. The new President must honor the legacy that has built CDF’s success
while also managing through change in ways that keep CDF relevant and central to the movement to today.

**Engage diverse constituencies.** Diversity and inclusion have been embedded in CDF’s mission since it was founded in 1973. The President must work to broaden public support for child advocacy by engaging fair-minded people and partner organizations that represent the multiple dimensions of diversity, including ethnicities, national origins, ages, sexual orientation, gender identity, beliefs, religions and faiths, geographies, experiences, cultures, socio-economic backgrounds and levels of physical ability.

**Candidate Profile**
CDF is seeking a charismatic, visionary, and strategic leader with public policy acumen. The President will be a poised, confident and energetic spokesperson who is capable of leading an organization and movement during a time of great evolution and change. The President will be a force for constructive dialogue and relentless advocacy – passionate and productive in his/her pursuit for child advocacy and social justice. The ideal candidate will have a sophisticated understanding of the child advocacy and policy environment and be a passionate ambassador for the organization whether it be in front of a camera giving an interview on national television or in someone’s living room. The next President must also understand the importance of Hayley Farm; the breeding ground for CDF’s servant leadership programs, youth empowerment and faith-based initiative work.

*Specific competencies include:*

**Strategic Vision and Fundraising:** S/he will be a strategic thinker who will work with CDF’s senior Staff and Board of Directors to establish plans and methods to achieve its mission while providing the strategic direction necessary to evolve the organization. They will have a record of success cultivating donors and raising funds in support of institutional goals. Ability to diversify revenue generating and fundraising activities to support existing and future programs and operations. They will ensure fiscal responsibility and oversight by having the financial acumen to develop and monitor the annual budget against actuals.

**Passion and Shared Values:** The successful candidate will have a passion for child advocacy and improving the lives of children, families, low-income communities and people of color. They must have an absolute commitment towards realizing a nation that achieves fundamental fairness. The successful candidate will not only have earned the appropriate leadership credentials across their lifetime, but be implicitly anchored by CDF’s core values.

**Movement Building and Civil Rights Activism:** They must possess the marketing, communications and development skills to mobilize and empower others towards a common goal. The successful candidate will be an inspiring and persuasive communicator who can articulate CDF’s vision and direction effectively through mass and social media, debate, lobbying, public speaking, writing, networking, fundraising and one-on-one discussions. S/he must be able to engage and partner with the faith-based community, build up and inspire a youth coalition through effective servant leadership programs and understands the necessity of community organizing. The next leader must speak out for justice,
especially for children and families in poverty. People of faith, places of worship, denominations and religious organizations play a powerful role in urging elected officials to invest in children.

**Management of a Complex Organization:** Experienced at running a large and complicated organization and navigating change. Demonstrated success empowering, motivating, and mentoring a highly-skilled team, building a strong and cohesive organizational culture, and providing oversight for financial assets. Has a proven and tangible commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. The President will have a track record of recruiting, retaining and motivating a professional and highly performing staff. The candidate will be an inspirational leader to the staff, and encourage openness, transparency and mutual respect.

**Interpersonal Acumen:** The successful candidate must be a person of the utmost personal and professional integrity with a high level of energy. Candidates must possess the right combination of self-confidence balanced with humility and a healthy sense of humor. The successful candidate needs to be gracious in manner and comfortable in any situation. S/he will have the ability to connect with and secure results from national leaders, government policy makers, community partners, donors, Board Members and staff.

**Judgment:** The successful candidate will have the demonstrated ability to make timely and clearly communicated decisions and take appropriate risks to achieve results. Likewise, s/he will be thoughtful about deploying the organization’s budget in a way that maximizes outcomes aligned with CDF’s strategic plan and core institutional values while managing risk. S/he will listen to and learn from key stakeholders inside and outside of the organization and will be an inclusive and independent thinker, who can manage ambiguity and devise solutions even when a clear path is not evident.

**Contact**
Russell Reynolds Associates has been exclusively retained for this search and prospective candidates are invited to contact Russell Reynolds Associates directly. All inquiries and discussions will be considered strictly confidential.

To apply for the role or submit a nomination, please reach out to: childrensdefense@russellreynolds.com.