



# Executive Director, RISD Ready!

## Leadership Profile

February 2026



## Executive Summary

Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) seeks a visionary, entrepreneurial, and collaborative leader to serve as the inaugural Executive Director of *RISD Ready!*.

RISD is a nonprofit college and museum founded in 1877 in Providence, Rhode Island. By cultivating expansive and elastic thinking, RISD equips artists, designers, and scholars to generate and challenge the ideas that shape our world, making it stand out among the world's preeminent colleges of art and design. The RISD community is made up of critical thinkers and makers who share a belief in the value of hands-on learning, experimentation, and an ever-evolving approach to studio education reinforced by liberal arts studies. Today 2,606 students from 60 countries engage in more than 40 full-time bachelor's and master's degree programs, supported by a committed faculty and worldwide network of more than 33,000 alumni.



Reporting directly to the President, the Executive Director will take the findings and recommendations of the [Preparedness for Life After RISD Strategic Initiative](#) and build a comprehensive and dynamic program for student readiness from the ground up, while thoughtfully leveraging existing resources and deepening partnerships with academic and administrative departments.

The Executive Director will possess deep familiarity with creative industries and an understanding of art and design education, and can integrate those knowledge bases to weave curricular, co-curricular, and professional development resources into a cohesive, equitable framework that serves all RISD students and that is sensitive to the differentiated needs of a diverse student body, including those who are first in their families to attend college, who enter art school without established networks in art and design, or who are otherwise underrepresented in art and design fields.

The successful candidate will bring a broad understanding of the high-impact practices and experiences that support and prepare emerging artists and designers, such as internships, residencies, exhibitions, publications, fairs, mentorship programs, and other professional opportunities. They will be excited by and dedicated to the goals of ensuring that art and design students are prepared for successful, sustainable, and purposeful creative lives upon graduation. They will also be a visible ambassador and fundraiser, building partnerships with faculty, alumni, donors, galleries, museums, design firms, and other cultural and creative institutions.

The Executive Director will have the leadership skills to successfully navigate complex institutional and budgetary realities, and will be intellectually curious, administratively agile, and socially collaborative. The successful candidate will also thrive in creative environments and will bring the initiative and self-direction necessary to work with significant independence.

To submit a nomination or express personal interest in this position, please see Procedure for Candidacy at the end of this document.

# Opportunities and Expectations for Leadership

The inaugural Executive Director of *RISD Ready!* reports to the President, and is tasked with taking the findings and recommendations of the [Preparedness for Life After RISD Strategic Initiative](#) and building a comprehensive and dynamic program for student readiness from the ground up, while thoughtfully leveraging existing resources and deepening partnerships with academic and administrative departments.

## Background

In March 2024, President Williams established the Working Group on Preparedness for Life After RISD (LAR) to evaluate and reimagine how RISD prepares students for post-graduation success. LAR sought to better understand how effective RISD is in providing integrated access to the necessary tools, knowledge, networks, experiences, advice and guidance, and habits of mind and action that will shorten students' time to launch into their chosen fields. LAR's overall objective was to assess and re-imagine the effectiveness of its curricular and co-curricular offerings for professional preparedness. Composed of faculty members, administrators, students, alumni, and the parent of a current RISD student, LAR thoroughly assessed RISD's current position through the fall of 2024, reviewing numerous internal studies and secondary research as well as leading its own primary research.

The case for change, augmentation, and coherence in RISD's approach to preparing students for life and careers after graduation is both necessary and urgent. Existing resources remain underutilized, and preparation for professional and personal life has yet to be fully integrated into the holistic student experience. Yet the foundation is strong. Through its distinctive pedagogical approach, RISD instills excellent technical skills alongside the "soft skills" that are indispensable for navigating a world of rapid change.

RISD students graduate having spent years creating, iterating, making, and problem-solving — emerging with the resilience to navigate uncertainty, the ability to communicate through compelling stories, and a deep commitment to enriching the communities they enter. The qualities they develop — curiosity, creative problem-solving, adaptability, communication, and persistence — are widely regarded by employers, and by those who are self-employed, as among the most essential for professional fulfillment and success—in all fields.

Thus, as an institution that continues to elevate and develop a network of impactful creative leaders, RISD is seizing this moment — not only to sustain the excellence of what we already do, but to do so in ways that meaningfully accelerate students' transitions into their chosen careers. The goal is for students to leave RISD more confident and assured about their post-graduation prospects: with the key questions about their professional lives answered, and equipped with the tools, skills, and habits of mind needed to launch quickly into their fields — or to pivot with purpose and clarity.

RISD seeks to fundamentally transform how students prepare for their professional futures, and the Executive Director of *RISD Ready!* will be an integral part of that effort. The Executive Director will be expected to help RISD achieve its institutional aspirations by addressing the following critical leadership opportunities, among others.

## Essential Functions

### Strategic Leadership and Program Development

- Develop and oversee a phased five-year implementation plan for *RISD Ready!* with clear milestones, budget allocations, and accountability measures to ensure sustainable cultural change.

- Build and launch the RISD Ready! Collaborative, a multi-stakeholder collaborative responsible for facilitating transformational change in RISD's approach and integration of resources, curricular and non-curricular, to guide current students and recent graduates on personal and professional life journeys.
- Establish key partnerships with faculty, academic departments, Career Services, Student Life, Institutional Advancement, Alumni, and Family Relations to ensure holistic readiness pathways for all students.
- Partner with faculty leadership to embed professional readiness into the curriculum, including establishing consistent learning outcomes for professional practice courses.
- Lead the design and implementation of supplemental programs, curricula, workshops, and events that equip students with the skills, networks, and knowledge to thrive as creative professionals.
- Serve as a strategic advisor to the President on matters related to student preparedness and alumni success in the creative industries.

## Student Success & Equity

- Implement a structured, professional development model that provides students with predictable, progressive career readiness throughout their RISD experience and that builds upon already existing resources at RISD.
- In conjunction with cross-campus partners, design and oversee programs that provide equitable access to resources for students, including first-generation students, international students, BIPOC students, students with disabilities, and students from low-income backgrounds.
- Envision and implement strategies that ensure appropriate advising occurs throughout a student's RISD journey. Create pathways to connect students without existing networks to professional opportunities, mentors, and alums.
- Foster an inclusive culture that validates diverse career trajectories in art and design, from entrepreneurial practices to community-based work to traditional industry roles.

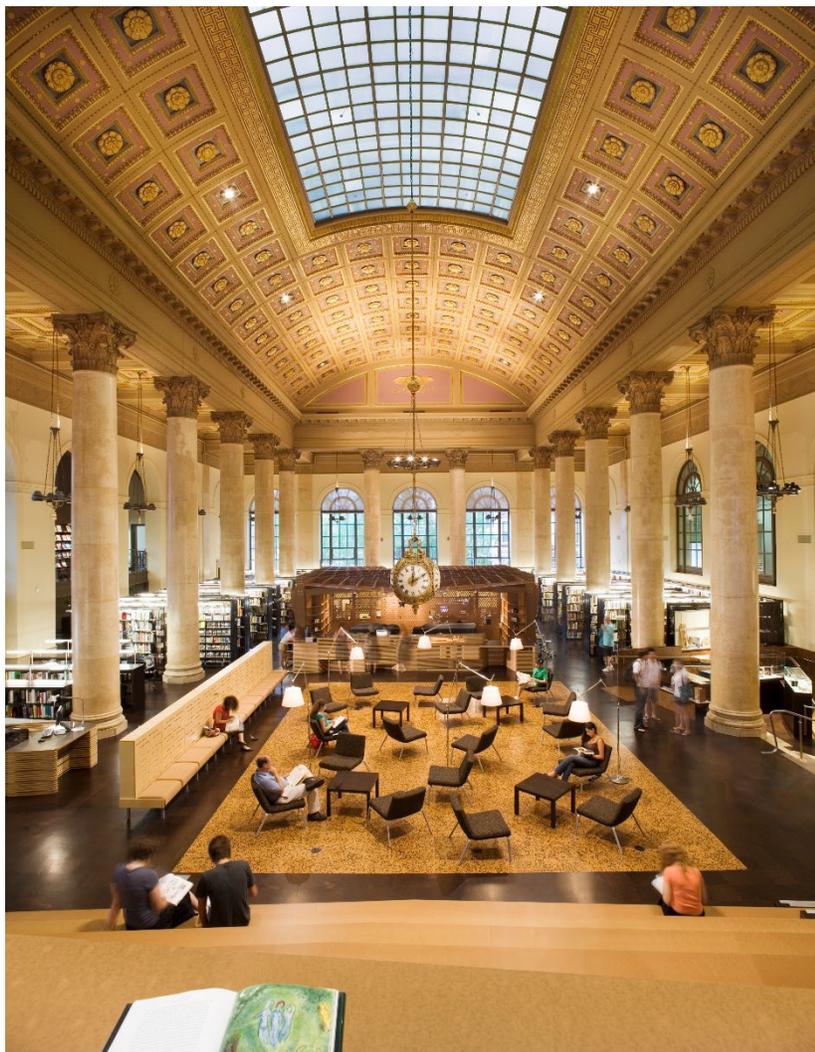
## External Engagement & Fundraising

- Build bridges between RISD students and alumni and the professional creative world, with particular attention to early-career opportunities such as internships, residencies, fellowships, exhibitions, and industry showcases.
- Working with the RISD Career Center, expand equitable internship opportunities by securing funding, building partnerships, and making internships a standard part of the RISD experience.
- In conjunction with Institutional Advancement, actively cultivate and steward relationships with donors, foundations, and corporate partners to secure resources that sustain and grow *RISD Ready!*
- Support and amplify existing, and, where necessary, create student-run enterprises (e.g., the Design Guild) that connect students with external clients and applied professional practice.
- Develop and launch structured job shadowing programs during winter and summer sessions to expand experiential opportunities.
- Represent RISD and its students in external forums, including national and international professional and academic events.

- Partner with RISD Marketing & Communications and other offices to effectively communicate initiatives, progress, and outcomes.

## Innovation & Assessment

- Stay current with trends in higher education, art and design pedagogy, and the evolving creative economy to ensure programs remain forward-thinking.
- Establish consistent data collection systems, including KPIs, student exit checklists, and post-graduate outcomes tracking, to inform program improvements and accreditation requirements.
- Create and disseminate consistent messaging about professional preparation (“designing your life”) across all years of study.
- Coordinate with Institutional Effectiveness and other partners to align RISD Ready! metrics with accreditation standards and key performance indicators.
- Serve as a thought leader by sharing RISD’s innovations and best practices with peer institutions and professional organizations.



## Professional Qualifications and Personal Qualities

Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) seeks a visionary, entrepreneurial, and collaborative leader to serve as the inaugural Executive Director of *RISD Ready!*. The successful candidate will bring 10+ years of progressively responsible leadership experience in higher education or creative industries and demonstrate most, if not all, of the following professional qualifications and personal qualities:

- **Understanding and appreciation of arts and design education:** Deep familiarity with creative industries and an understanding of art and design education, including knowledge of professional artistic and design opportunities (residencies, exhibitions, fairs, biennials, publications, etc.) relevant to emerging artists and designers. A track record of active engagement in professional creative practice.
- **Vision, strategic thinking, creativity, and capacity for execution:** Ability to establish a bold vision, set clear direction, articulate goals, ensure accountability, and affect change. Proven ability to design and implement programs that integrate curricular and co-curricular experiences. Experience in fundraising, donor cultivation, and resource development to support program initiatives.
- **Demonstrated commitment to equity, inclusion, and student success:** A record of working effectively with emerging artists and designers, diverse student populations, or both, including but not limited to international students, first-generation students, veterans, students from underrepresented backgrounds, and those without established networks.
- **Excellent collaboration skills:** An effective collaborator who can manage, motivate, and develop synergies across the institution and in the larger community that embraces RISD.
- **Exceptional communication skills:** Excellent communication, facilitation, and relationship-building skills across diverse stakeholders.
- **Analytical acumen and technological savvy:** Skill in data collection for reporting and harnessing data to shape strategic direction. Ability to leverage existing and emerging technologies in support of students and graduates and advance program aspirations.
- **Personal qualities:** Integrity, humility, emotional intelligence, and the capacity to build trust, inspire confidence, embrace authentic collaborations, and drive momentum.

# About Rhode Island School of Design

RISD is a college and museum founded in 1877 in Providence, RI, by a group of vanguard women who believed in the power and importance of art and design. Fast forward to now: RISD stands out among the world's pre-eminent colleges of art and design. The RISD community is composed of critical thinkers and makers who share a belief in the value of hands-on learning, experimentation, and an ever-evolving approach to studio education reinforced by liberal arts studies. Today, 2,620 students engage in 44 full-time bachelor's and master's degree programs, supported by a committed faculty and a worldwide network of more than 31,000 alumni who demonstrate the vital role arts and designers play in today's society.

In fall 2025, the student body comprised 2,163 undergraduate students and 443 graduate students. Among the undergraduate population, 43% were domestic students of color and 33% were international students. Seventy-three percent of undergraduate students identified as female, and 27% identified as male. Additionally, 15% of students were the first in their families to attend college. Approximately 35% of students received RISD financial aid, and Pell Grant recipients represented nearly 18% of the student population in 2025. Within the graduate population, 19% were domestic students of color and 48% were international students. Seventy-four percent of graduate students identified as female, and 26% identified as male. Approximately 95% of graduate students received RISD financial aid. Further details can be found [here](#).

By cultivating expansive and elastic thinking, RISD equips artists, designers, and scholars to generate and challenge the ideas that shape our world.

## Mission

The mission of Rhode Island School of Design, through its college and museum, is to educate its students and the public in the creation and appreciation of works of art and design, to discover and transmit knowledge, and to make lasting contributions to a global society through critical thinking, scholarship, and innovation.

## Values

- The material practices of artists and designers as principal modes of engagement with the wider world.
- The necessary and crucial contribution of deep disciplinary understanding to effective interdisciplinary practice.
- Collaborative interplay across design, fine arts, and the liberal arts to cultivate deep literacies, to shape cumulative understanding, to transform thought, and to expand making practices.
- Experimental, contextual, and culturally diverse methods of creative practice and rigorous scholarship are essential ways of creating knowledge and engaging with complexity and uncertainty.
- Enlightened engagement with emerging and evolving technologies, along with critical reflection on the interests those technologies serve and the impact they have on diverse peoples, communities, and the planet.
- Classroom, studio, and campus environment that advances principles of social equity and inclusion, environmental and climate justice, and equal access to resources and opportunities.
- Development of lifelong skills that integrate the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of our entire community.
- Careful stewardship of our human, financial, and physical resources.

- Their role as a place-based institution with a commitment to furthering progress in Providence and Rhode Island through mutually beneficial engagement with the community.

## Strategic Planning Process

When President Crystal Williams arrived at RISD in 2022, she introduced five interconnected priorities to set the stage for RISD's next 150 years: to **amplify** talented artists and designers; **evolve** our thinking, teaching, and learning; **cultivate** our people and their capacities; **engage** with the diversity of the world's people and traditions to expand possibilities; and **connect** by deepening our relationships with each other, key stakeholders, and the wider world. These presidential priorities are guiding the implementation of the [Presidential Initiatives](#) and the [strategic planning process](#), now underway.

In 2025–2026, RISD launched a new strategic planning process. Informing this work are recommendations delivered to President Williams in 2024 by three core committees of faculty, staff, and students, focused on **Holistic Student Wellness**, **Preparedness for Life After RISD**, and **Financial Optimization**. These recommendations reflect deep collaboration and represent the best of RISD's collective thinking — and their implementation is directly connected to the broader strategic planning process.

Further, the new Strategic Planning process also is sensitive and responsive to several additional initiatives: the NECHE Accreditation review (2026), the RISD Museum Strategic Plan (2025–2030), and a Community and Culture Assessment conducted in 2023.

RISD expects to finalize its new Strategic Plan in fall 2026 — on the threshold of the institution's sesquicentennial in 2027. This is a moment of profound excitement and forward momentum, one in which the RISD community is collectively focused on what success looks like in the years ahead, and on the operational, educational, and cultural commitments required to ensure that RISD remains a vital creative force for the next 150 years.

## Social Equity and Inclusion

Throughout RISD's nearly 150-year history, students, educators, administrative staff, and community members have used their voices and creative contributions to challenge the status quo and demand systemic change. RISD's commitment to social equity and inclusion is embedded in its mission, structure, policies, and strategic plan. Ensuring RISD's commitment to social equity and inclusion, in principle and practice, is, indeed, a cross-collaborative, community-wide effort.

RISD's Social Equity and Inclusion (SEI) Action Plan, launched in 2017, aimed to make education at RISD accessible to a larger, more diverse pool of talented students, particularly those from constituencies underrepresented in the fields of art and design. Importantly, the plan also specified ongoing action to ensure that all students who attend RISD have the support they need to enjoy equal access to the full range of educational opportunities RISD provides, both in and out of the classroom. Student-led movements strengthened the plan, and student voices continue to guide this work.

When President Williams took office in 2022, she reflected on the RISD community, noting, "I hear a beautiful community-wide chorus that envisions a campus and culture where the principles, goals, and outcomes of equity and inclusion are centered and central. A chorus that desires to inhabit and co-create a teaching, learning, and working environment where racism, ableism, classism, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, and other social scourges are expunged as inadequate intellectual and creative frameworks for the 21st century."

Today, RISD's commitment to social equity and inclusion is realized through contributions by institutional leadership, faculty across all disciplines, and a network of administrative offices that put key initiatives into action such the [Community and Culture Assessment](#), a roadmap to ensure a thriving community in all areas of academics, work, and campus life; the [MLK Series](#), which highlights the role of art, design and creative endeavors

in advancing democracy and justice; [Womxn @ Work](#), which honors and amplifies the voices of womxn within the campus community and fosters discussions around their experiences as working professionals, creatives, and innovators; and [Decolonial Teaching in Action](#), an annual professional development series that provides faculty, librarians, and museum curators with tools and guidance for creating classes and curricula shaped by decolonial, anti-racist principles.

## Academics

The path to making a creative impact begins with how students learn. The studio and classroom are immersive cross-disciplinary environments where students place as much emphasis on thinking, curiosity, and context as they do on making.

### Undergraduate Study

All undergraduate students at RISD take first-year studios in Experimental and Foundation Studies, followed by a major course of study in a specific fine arts or design discipline beginning sophomore year. Rigorous courses in Liberal Arts enrich studio learning.

In addition to a bachelor's degree, students earn deep disciplinary knowledge, strong critical thinking skills, and the agility to problem solve and connect the dots across a wide range of fields.

### Graduate Study

RISD's graduate programs bring together artists, designers, and thinkers from around the world to research, experiment, create, and push the possibilities of practice.

### Liberal Arts

At RISD, the exploration of both studio arts and liberal arts makes for a powerful experience. In fact, RISD stands out among art schools for its emphasis on liberal arts study. Expert faculty lead classes spanning a diverse range of scholarly areas, including anthropology, biology, creative writing, literature, history, performance studies, philosophy, religion, sociology, and more.

# Leadership

## Crystal Williams, President



Crystal Williams is a teacher, leader, advocate, and poet who believes that education, art and design, and commitments to equity and justice are essential to transforming our society. She was appointed RISD's 18<sup>th</sup> president on April 1, 2022.

With more than two decades of higher education experience, she has been an institutional catalyst, helping to envision, define, and achieve greater outcomes for students, faculty, and staff. As a faculty member, she has focused on advancing artistic inquiry and engagement. As a leader, her work has ensured that institutions are more effective, mission-aligned, and diverse, equitable, and inclusive.

A deeply collaborative leader, she has helped to drive meaningful change in higher education through national roles and collaborations, including as a member of the Oversight Committee for the Sloan Foundation-funded STEM Faculty Leadership program; the Executive Committee for the Creating Connections Consortium (C3), an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation-funded consortium of liberal arts colleges and research universities (including Bates, Connecticut College, Middlebury, Williams, the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Chicago, Columbia University, and the University of Michigan); as co-chair of the Liberal Arts Diversity Officers; as a member of the steering committee for the Consortium for Faculty Diversity; and as a collaborator with senior members of the Mellon Northwest 5 Faculty Consortium.

An award-winning poet and essayist, Williams has published four collections of poems. She is the recipient of several artistic fellowships, grants and honors, including a fellowship from the MacDowell Arts Colony, an appointment as the Distinguished Visiting Professor of University Writing at DePauw University, a Master Poet residency at Indiana University, the Naomi Long Madgett Poetry Prize, a Literary Arts fellowship, an Oregon Arts Commission individual artist grant and a Barbara Deming/Money for Women artist grant, among others. Her work regularly appears in leading journals and magazines nationwide.

The daughter of an educator and a musician, Williams was raised in Detroit, MI, and Madrid, Spain, and holds a BA from New York University and an MFA from Cornell University.



## Providence, Rhode Island

Between the thriving arts community, incredible history, gorgeous parks, and delicious eats, Providence, Rhode Island, is the place to be. Home to the Ocean State's capital, Providence combines the accessibility and charm of a small town with the diverse culture of a hip, vibrant city. The abundance of locally owned stores, the low-stress lifestyle, and the beautiful architecture easily put Providence on the list of America's top ten coziest cities.

Rhode Island has 400 miles of New England coastline, dripping with [beaches](#) and [fresh-from-the-ocean seafood](#). It's also [public art](#), [swanky mansions](#), [charming villages](#), and [flaming rivers](#). It's [local farms](#), [local brews](#), [winding trails](#), and walkable cities. It's artistic, rebellious, historic, and modern, welcoming, and diverse.



## Procedure for Candidacy

All applications, nominations, and inquiries are invited. Applications should include, as separate documents, a CV/resume and a letter of interest. Review of applications has begun and will continue until the position is filled. For fullest consideration, all materials should be received by April 9, 2026.

Please direct all nominations and applications to Charlene Aguilar and Shelley Arakawa, J.D. through the WittKieffer Candidate Portal by [clicking here](#). Candidates can also find this portal via the WittKieffer website at [www.wittkieffer.com](http://www.wittkieffer.com). Additional inquiries can be directed to:

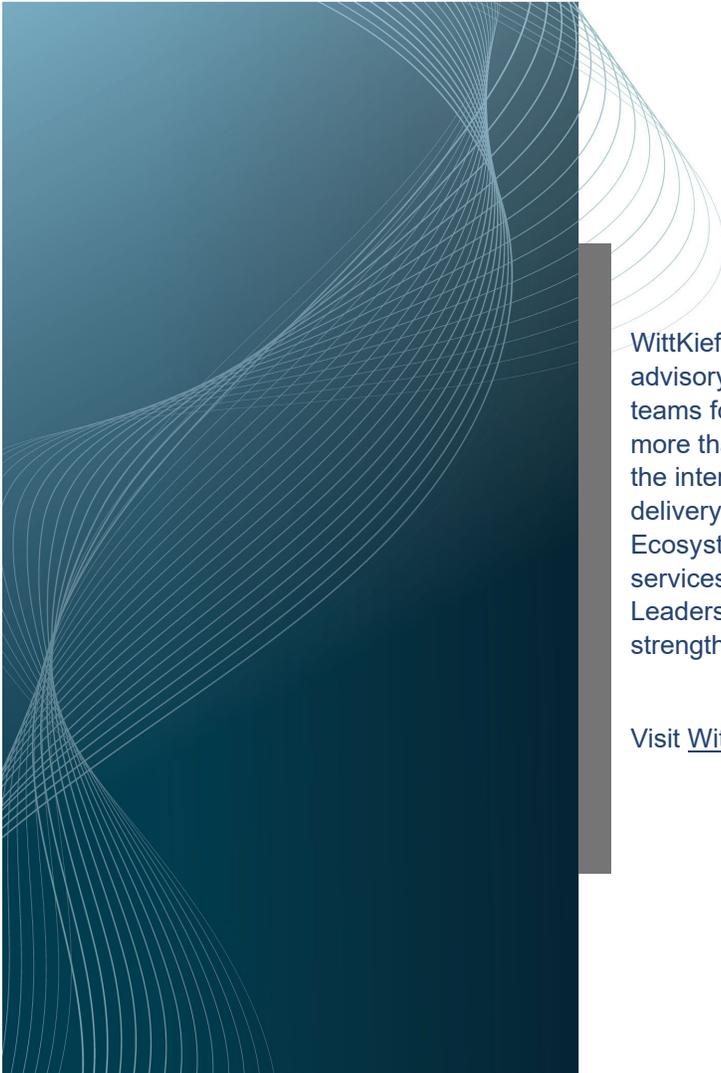
Charlene Aguilar and Shelley Arakawa, J.D.

[RISD-Ready@Wittkieffer.com](mailto:RISD-Ready@Wittkieffer.com)

*RISD recognizes diversity and inclusivity as fundamental to its learning community and integral to an art and design education. We welcome candidates whose experience has prepared them to contribute to our commitment to diversity and excellence. RISD is an Equal Opportunity Employer. Employment decisions are made without regard to race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, genetics, or any other protected characteristic as established by law*

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