



Position Specification

CAST

Chief Executive Officer

The Opportunity

An entrepreneurial nonprofit with a steadfast commitment to mission, the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) works to expand learning opportunities for all individuals through Universal Design for Learning (UDL), an educational framework created at CAST. Unlike many other frameworks, UDL is designed to meet learners where they are. Rather than “fixing” the learner, UDL makes changes to the environment to provide multiple avenues of access to learning. This has significant bearing on CAST’s work, not only with non-traditional learners, but also as it relates to equal opportunity for all students. UDL draws upon a deep understanding of learner diversity and the needs of traditionally underserved students and students “in the margins,” who inspire and inform the design of solutions that work more effectively for everyone. As such, CAST’s mission is to “transform education design and practice until learning has no limits.”

The twin pandemics of COVID-19 and racial injustice have further positioned CAST to meet the moment of catalyzed, mainstream digital education, learning loss, and equity. CAST’s next CEO should be hungry and prepared to activate and scale the organization’s work with urgency and extend it further to better encompass issues of race, culture and equity, all while maintaining quality of offerings and integrity of mission.

Given CAST’s stability both financially and culturally, the organization now has an opportunity for substantial growth and dramatic increase in UDL’s reach and impact globally. CAST has significantly increased the breadth of its offerings in the past few years and has expanded into statewide implementation of UDL practices, workforce development, adult learning, and more. As the organization looks to the future, there is continued opportunity for expansion both in terms of increased penetration in the traditional education sphere and additional growth into adjacent areas. With these goals comes an opportunity to diversify funding sources, build new partnerships, and find new methods for sharing CAST’s story with audiences around the world. This amplification of UDL’s impact also must come with amplification of the research and evidence behind its design and success.

In the past, CAST’s innovation has earned it a reputation as “the tip of the spear” in the UDL landscape. Moving forward, it is critical that the organization continue to be a thought leader and a barrier breaker for all learners including those who do not have access to conventional pathways to success. CAST must continue to define and evangelize UDL at the policy level, while aligning scaled implementation with impact data that confirms its efficacy at the student level and educator level. There has never been greater demand for UDL, and CAST is in search of a CEO who knows how to lead an organization that can change the world.

Our Client

CAST was founded in 1984 by a small group of education innovators to explore ways of using new technologies to provide better educational experiences to students with disabilities. They experimented with the key quality of digital media—its flexibility—to design software, applications and websites that

could be adjusted for each learner’s strengths and needs. Since its founding, CAST has pioneered the field of UDL by linking emerging technologies with learning research to design and implement new tools and teaching approaches; providing extensive professional development to teachers and education leaders; publishing articles and books on UDL; collaborating with numerous disability-related organizations to advance federal and state policies; and consulting and partnering with publishers, universities, technology companies, and others to ensure that the UDL framework brings about real change on the ground.

Over its first decade, CAST’s work yielded a new understanding of how to improve education by addressing the systemic inadequacies of schools, especially in the area of curriculum and instruction, rather than “fixing” individual students. This culminated in CAST defining the Universal Design for Learning principles, which call for providing:

- Multiple means of representation to give learners various ways of acquiring information and knowledge.
- Multiple means of expression to provide learners alternatives for demonstrating what they know.
- Multiple means of engagement to tap into learners' interests, challenge them appropriately, and motivate them to learn.

Using these principles as a framework, along with specific guidelines derived from them, teachers, curriculum developers, educational technology developers, administrators, and policy leaders all ensure that their products and practices are effective and equally accessible for all students.

Through strategic collaborations, CAST is seeding the education field with UDL-based solutions to find ways of improving learning opportunities for all individuals. CAST has worked with leading companies (Google, Scholastic, Intel, Pearson, and more), funders (New Profit, Bill & Melinda Gates, George Lucas Education Foundation, National Science Foundation, and more), and government institutions (U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Labor, National Science Foundation, etc.). In March 2019, CAST expanded its capabilities through its merger with UDL Implementation and Research Network (UDL-IRN), a non-profit that supports the scaled implementation and research related to Universal Design for Learning. The combined entity has even greater resources and strengths in identifying and developing models, tools, research, and practices designed to foster effective UDL implementation in educational environments.

In the last few years, UDL has been featured in legislation including: the Every Student Succeeds Act from the U.S. Congress, the Higher Education Opportunity Act, the Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act, the National Education Technology Plan, the Department of Education’s Guidelines for Technology Developers, and in many state and local policies. Recently, many other countries have sought consultation from CAST as they begin to implement UDL practices. Additionally, the organization has won numerous awards—including a Computerworld/Collabera Award for Educational Innovation, the Codie Award, recognition as a “Champion of Change” at the White House, and more—for its computer-based literacy programs and for developing Bobby, the first web accessibility assessment tool.

Located just outside of Boston, CAST has a budget of \$12 million and a team made up of 54 talented employees, including world-class educators, learning scientists, instructional designers, literacy experts, policy analysts, UX and graphic designers, and software engineers.

The Role

CAST seeks an outstanding and visionary executive with a proven record in financial and programmatic growth to assume overall responsibility for the leadership and management of the organization. Reporting to the Board of Directors, the CEO will be an exceptional leader with unusually strong strategic acumen, intellectual breadth, commitment to mission, operational knowledge, and practical experience engaging with nonprofits, governments, and businesses.

The next CEO must work with the Board and staff to chart a course for dramatic growth and impact, all while embracing CAST's rich history, integrity of program offerings, and unyielding commitment to equity and access. This entrepreneurial attitude and laser focus on growth must be balanced with commitment to financial stability and sustainability. Additionally, CAST's next CEO must continue to prioritize internal culture while leading through change. They will be skilled at hiring, developing, retaining, and leading a diverse, talented, and results-oriented team. Leading by example, they will continue to professionalize the organization while maintaining commitment to collaboration, collegiality, and inclusivity.

Externally, the CEO must be a strong and credible ambassador who can build effective partnerships and alliances with important constituencies, including government agencies, foundations, corporations, other research organizations, educators, scientists, policy-makers, and individual donors. They must navigate effectively in the local, national, and international arenas, and at the highest levels of civil society, business, science, academia, and philanthropy. They must provide the vision, business acumen and management skill to amplify CAST's visibility and brand in the service of delivering UDL to all learners. As a public spokesperson for the organization, this leader also must be a tireless advocate for equity, which has long been at CAST's and UDL's core.

The CEO will:

- Drive short and long-term strategic planning in partnership with the Board and the staff.
- Serve as an evangelist for UDL; grow the organization and dramatically increase its reach and impact.
- Preserve the integrity and excellence of CAST's R&D, ensuring that the core research opportunities anticipate and inform the future of learning.
- Amplify CAST's story and brand while also drawing attention to the evidence-based practices behind UDL.
- Ensure UDL principles are grounded in equity, diversity, and inclusion to promote systemic changes in learning environments that result in greater accessibility and student success.
- Ensure CAST continues to diversify its staff, Board, and advisors so as to ensure its expertise and experience reflect and serve a diverse constituency in authentic, equitable, impactful, and empowering ways.

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- Prioritize the diversification of revenue and funding streams; bring a creative, entrepreneurial orientation and business acumen.
 - Set priorities, clarify organizational strategy, and make difficult decisions around resource allocation when necessary.
 - Develop and lead strategic partnerships with constituents in various arenas including other nonprofits, the private sector, academia, and more; help CAST act as a convenor and “meta thought leader” around UDL and its power to enact change.
 - Provide leadership for systemic change initiatives in schools, school districts and state departments of education to further the implementation of UDL and the documentation and assessment of its effectiveness in advancing student understanding and performance.
 - Uncover and seize new and untapped opportunities, and position the organization to pursue those opportunities.
 - Lead and motivate diverse, high performing teams; foster collaboration and inclusivity while increasing the organization’s professional maturity.
 - Develop annual operating and financial plans for the organization that will balance long-term goals with short-term revenue, cash flow and operating margin objectives.
 - Lead CAST into a new era to realize the full promise of UDL both as a science and a practice.

Candidate Profile

CAST seeks a talented, strategic, imaginative, and inspirational leader, with hands-on business experience. Although expertise in UDL is not required, they must be passionate about the mission of CAST and exhibit a strong intellectual curiosity about equitable access and learning. They must possess the significant business, management and leadership skills that will be necessary to strategically lead the organization through a time of continued evolution.

The successful candidate must have a track record of success leading an innovative enterprise with a diverse constituency and broad public interest. They will bring a grasp of the forces and trends that will shape the future of learning, schooling, and work, even as they are rapidly changing. Experience in education and/or education technology with a strong growth orientation could be highly useful. Ideally, the successful candidate will bring an appreciation for design thinking, its implementation at an organizational level, and its implementation across the systems CAST intends to impact. They must be able to examine the challenges of a changing post pandemic world and develop and implement a vision for how UDL can reach ever more people to spark and sustain a revolution in learning.

They must be able to lead CAST’s staff in ascertaining the most effective avenues for CAST to deliver product and content while maintaining commitment to quality and access. Working productively and transparently in partnership with the Board of Directors, they will work tirelessly to maximize CAST’s impact in a world which has never been more in need of UDL.

In terms of the performance and personal competencies required for the position, we highlight the following:

Transformative Strategic Vision

- Energetic, innovative thinker with the ability to collaboratively build and execute a vision for the future; ability to lead through change while maintaining organizational integrity, quality of offerings, and internal culture.
- Able to break down silos and unite all constituencies under a common vision so that all members of CAST can operate as one.
- Sets compelling and ambitious, yet realistic, goals to achieve continuous evolution and positive change for CAST. Pursues long-term visionary goals in tandem with short-term results; nimble and willing to pivot when necessary.
- Possesses excellent judgment – shows wisdom in making decisions, balancing a variety of factors to achieve optimal outcome. Relies upon CAST’s core values, goals and strategies when making decisions. Is capable of making difficult decisions around strategic priorities; knows when to invest and when to conserve resources.

Business and Organizational Acumen

- Entrepreneurial vigor in creating sustainable business models, evaluating financial opportunities, and optimizing the enterprise aspects of the organization's platforms, products, and publications.
- Creative leader who can “see around the corner” as it pertains to new and emerging technology.
- Experienced leader and manager of human capital and organizations; ability to speak directly and ensure accountability.
- Committed to and experienced in enhancing the diversity of staff, partners and constituencies.
- Digital literacy to leverage and deploy cutting-edge innovations that will drive CAST's communications, marketing, and broad public engagement with UDL.
- Ability to catalyze a cohesive, connected, and strategically coordinated organization across all institutional units.

Inspirational Leadership

- Direct, effective communicator and genuine listener who can unify different internal and external teams and the Board of Directors.
- Skilled at developing and leading a diverse, motivated, and collaborative team; promotes a creative and results-oriented spirit.
- Outstanding ability to respect, relate to and communicate with people at all levels; understands the experiences, values and motivators of others; has a transparent, open and authentic style.
- Balances confidence with self-awareness and humility; possesses a sense of humor; has the strength and confidence to delegate effectively while leading broadly.

Communications and Fundraising

- Able to convey a sense of excitement about CAST’s story, purpose, and ability for impact.
- Able to advocate passionately around issues of equity and access for all.
- Maintains and grows a supportive and exciting intellectual environment while raising the resources to invest in the execution of CAST’s vision.
- Thinks creatively and pragmatically about avenues for diversification of funding sources.

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- Builds relationships with a wide range of important constituencies including educators, policy-makers, ed-tech collaborators, business leaders, and more; is able to leverage partnerships effectively to accomplish goals of CAST.
 - Demonstrates excellent negotiating skills to ensure that CAST's own brand is celebrated and amplified.

Intellectual Curiosity and Passion for Mission

- Either deep knowledge of UDL or a genuine interest in learning about the framework and its dramatic potential for impact.
- Direct and demonstrated experience with mission-driven, systemic change work, particularly as it relates to education, workforce development, or other adjacent arenas.
- Unquestionable integrity and authenticity; leads by example and serves as a tireless advocate for inclusion and equitable access to learning.
- Passionate about CAST's civil rights mission to ensure equitable access to learning.
- Committed to embedding equity as a more visible component of CAST's core identity, while being ready, willing, and able to lead the way.
- Understands and deeply values CAST's position as an organization that can change the world through UDL.

Contact

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