



## **REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS for EXECUTIVE SEARCH SERVICES**

### **National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA)**

**Proposal Due Date and Time: October 28, 2022 at 4:00 P.M. MOUNTAIN TIME**

**DATE OF ISSUE:** October 13, 2022

#### **PURPOSE**

This Request for Proposals (RFP) is issued by the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements hereinafter referred to as NC-SARA for the purpose of seeking an executive search firm to assist in identifying and retaining a high level executive, who will serve as its President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO). See Section 2 for proposed scope of work.

#### **BACKGROUND**

NC-SARA is a Colorado-based, 501(c)(3), non-profit organization that provides a voluntary, regional approach to state oversight of postsecondary distance education. NC-SARA, in collaboration with the four Regional Compacts, was established to develop and implement an effective and efficient reciprocal state level authorization process for postsecondary distance education. Its mission is to provide broad access to postsecondary education opportunities to students across the country, to increase the quality and value of higher learning credentials earned via distance education, and to assure students are well served in a rapidly changing education landscape.

It supports and collaborates with the regional higher education compacts, postsecondary institutions, accreditors, consumer protection organizations, and the state and federal governments in fostering access to effective distance education programs.

NC-SARA serves as the coordinating body for the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA). SARA is an agreement between member states, territories, and the District of Columbia that establishes reciprocity between willing states that accept each other's authorization of accredited institutions to operate in their states to offer distance educational services beyond state boundaries. Both state membership and institutional participation are voluntary.

SARA was implemented by and now operates through a partnership of five entities; the four regional education compacts – New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE), Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC), Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) – and NC-SARA. As the coordinating body, NC-SARA works to ensure that SARA remains a nationwide initiative (rather than four regional initiatives).

Begun in late 2013, its members now include 49 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. Over 2,300 colleges and universities currently participate with annual institutional renewal rates above 98 percent, impacting nearly six million students enrolled exclusively in distance education at SARA participating institutions as of fall 2020.

The NC-SARA office is located in Boulder, Colorado, adjacent to the State Higher Education Policy Center, which houses the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO), and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS). Sixteen staff (including the President) work in the Boulder office.

SARA is funded by annual fees collected by NC-SARA from participating institutions; states pay no direct fees to join SARA. NC-SARA distributes institutional fee revenues to the five partnership entities. NC-SARA is in a strong financial position, funded completely by institutional fees, and has a competitive employee benefits program.

NC-SARA is governed by a 17 to 24-member Board of Directors composed of experts in higher education, state leadership, and distance education who each may serve up to two three year terms. As is the case with many nonprofit boards, the Board of Directors approves policy changes and is focused on supporting the nonprofit's work to improve students' access to quality postsecondary distance education opportunities. A list of members of the board can be viewed here. <https://nc-sara.org/nc-saras-board-directors>

The President and CEO of NC-SARA will be expected to frequently engage with the compacts, SARA State Portal Entities (SPES), institutional higher education leaders, federal agency staff, and the leaders of numerous higher education organizations. The ability to build a working consensus among divergent stakeholders in the execution of SARA is a critically necessary skill. Providing facilitation of the policy development process and policy interpretation is a principal responsibility of the position. Significant travel is required.

Additional information about NC-SARA is available on its website: [www.nc-sara.org](http://www.nc-sara.org).

## **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The Contractor will use its industry resources to identify potential candidates for the position of President and CEO of NC-SARA, assist in the development of the position prospectus, facilitate the collection and initial culling of candidates, review of candidates by the Search Committee, assistance with interviews and the election of the preferred candidate by the Board.

## **TERM OF CONTRACT**

The term of any contract resulting from this RFP shall begin on or about **December 1, 2022** and is anticipated to end on or about **March 2023**. Contractors are invited to propose follow-up services in keeping with their normal procedures. The first responsibility of the selected contractor will be to meet virtually with the NC-SARA Search Committee in December 2022 to discuss the qualifications desired by the Board for this position and create the prospectus document.

## **SCHEDULE OF EVENTS FOR SELECTION OF SEARCH FIRM**

- RFP release: general announcement and notification sent to selected contractors by October 14, 2022
- Proposer inquiries submitted by October 19, 2022
- Proposer inquiries responded to by October 26, 2022
- Deadline for receipt of proposals October 28, 2022
- Interviews weeks of November 14 and/or 28
- Notice of Intent to award announcement approximately the beginning of December 2022
- Contract execution on or about December 1, 2022

**Note: See full timeline projection below. NC-SARA reserves the right to revise this schedule if necessary..**

## **PROPOSAL SUBMITTAL**

Firms or individuals interested in providing services requested under this RFP must submit an electronic version (as an email attachment or other means) on or before 4:00 PM Mountain Time, October 28, 2022. Please send electronic proposals to the RFP Coordinator:

### **RFP Coordinator:**

Dr. Melanie Booth, Vice President, Educational Programs and Communications

### **Street Address:**

NC-SARA  
3005 Center Green Drive, Suite 130  
Boulder, CO 80301

**Phone:** (303) 848-3288

**Email:** [mbooth@nc-sara.org](mailto:mbooth@nc-sara.org)

## **PROPOSAL CONTENT**

Proposals should include the following:

1. Overview of the firm's or individual's experience in searches within higher education associations, non-profit entities active in higher education, higher education institutions, system- or state-level higher education organizations, and/or related organizations.
2. Description of the firm's or individual's approach to such searches, including steps taken to ensure understanding of the needs of the organization, the challenges and opportunities of the position, and related matters.
3. Biographical material for the search consultants who would carry out the search for the next NC-SARA President and CEO.
4. Any special qualifications of the firm or individual related to this particular search.
5. Commitment to the proposed search timeline.
6. A proposed budget for the search, including costs for management, advertising, travel, etc.
7. Four references, with complete contact information, in relation to similar searches conducted within the past three years.

## **CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION, TRADE SECRETS, AND PROPRIETARY INFORMATION**

All financial, statistical, personal, technical and other data and information relating to NC-SARA'S operation which are designated confidential by NC-SARA and made available to the contractor in order to carry out this contract, or which become available to the contractor in carrying out this contract, shall be protected by the contractor from unauthorized use and disclosure.

Under no circumstance shall the contractor discuss and/or release information to the media, or any other organization, concerning this project without prior expressed written approval of NC-SARA.

## **PROPOSER INQUIRES**

Questions regarding this RFP should be submitted to the RFP Coordinator. NC-SARA will consider written inquiries and requests for clarification of the content of this RFP received from potential Proposers. Written inquiries must be received by 4:00 p.m. Mountain Time on October 19, 2022. NC-SARA shall reserve the right to modify the RFP should a change be identified that is in the best interest of NC-SARA.

Official responses to all questions submitted by potential proposers will be distributed via email by October 26, 2022. The RFP Coordinator will respond to proposers' questions on behalf of NC-SARA.

### **NOTICE OF INTENT TO AWARD**

After selection of the successful Proposer, NC-SARA will notify the successful Proposer and proceed to negotiate terms for the final contract. Unsuccessful Proposers will be notified in writing accordingly.

### **CONTRACT AWARD AND EXECUTION**

NC-SARA and the selected Proposer shall enter into a contract for the provision of search services.

### **PROPOSED SCOPE OF WORK**

The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) is seeking to hire an executive search firm to assist in identifying and retaining a President and CEO.

The scope of work requested for the search is outlined below:

#### **A. Action Plan and Budget**

The Contractor will submit an action plan and timeline for accomplishing the specified scope of work to be completed by March 2023. See timeline below for reference. May be adjusted by NC-SARA as needed.

#### **B. Research: Prospectus, ad copy and placement of ads**

The Contractor will assist in the development of a position prospectus and use its resources to identify relevant higher education and industry sources where a highly-qualified, diverse candidate pool is likely to be found, and will place advertisements in appropriate venues soliciting applications for the position. The copy of the advertisements must be approved in advance by NC-SARA.

#### **C. Prospect Identification**

The Contractor will contact sources and prospects to encourage interest in the position and identify individuals who meet the position specifications and who will uphold and execute NC-SARA's mission. The Contractor shall report the progress of this process to NC-SARA's search committee by the agreed upon timeline.

#### **D. Presentation of Prospects**

The Contractor will present the names and information about the most promising prospects to NC-SARA for review by the agreed upon timeline. NC-SARA and the Contractor will mutually agree on the number of prospects NC-SARA will review. That number shall not be less than three (3) unless specifically approved by NC-SARA. NC-SARA will select from those names the prospects it would like the Contractor to interview.

#### E. Prospect Interviews and Evaluation

The Contractor will interview the selected prospects and evaluate each prospect's management ability, technical competency, fit with NC-SARA's values and culture, and other desired leadership characteristics. The Contractor will report the results of each interview to NC-SARA by the agreed upon timeline.

#### F. Client Interviews

The Contractor will schedule with the search committee, when requested, offsite interviews with selected prospects. After these interviews are completed, the finalists, not to be less than three (3) in number unless specifically allowed by NC-SARA, will be selected by the search committee and invited to interviews with the committee. Prior to any such interviews, the Contractor will brief the search committee about each candidate. The Contractor will also make each candidate fully aware of the requirements of the position if requested by the search committee.

#### G. Referencing and Background Investigations of Finalists

The Contractor will, and the Search Committee may, contact individuals who are capable of providing insights about the finalists' qualifications. The collective comments made by these references will be reviewed with NC-SARA. A background investigation will be conducted to include academic degree verification, employment record, driving record, credit record, criminal record, and civil suits record.

## NC-SARA Executive Director Search Timeline

**Note:** NC-SARA reserves the right to amend the timeline as needed.

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| RFP release: general announcement and notification sent to selected contractors   | October 14, 2022   |
| Proposer inquiries submitted by   | October 19, 2022   |
| Proposer inquiries responded to by  | October 26, 2022   |
| Deadline for receipt of proposals   | October 28, 2022   |
| Proposer interviews weeks of  | November 14 and/or 28  |
| Notice of Intent to award contract  | Early December 2022  |
| Contract execution  | On or about December 1, 2022                                       |
| Initial Meeting with Search Committee   | Early December 2022  |
| Research: Preparation of position prospectus, ad copy and placement of ads  | TBD- proposer add suggested timeline to be completed by March 2023 |
| Prospect Identification   | TBD- proposer add suggested timeline to be completed by March 2023 |
| Presentation of Prospects   | TBD- proposer add suggested timeline to be completed by March 2023 |
| Prospect Interviews and Evaluation:<br>1. Search Committee Review of semi-finalists   | TBD- proposer add suggested timeline to be completed by March 2023 |
| Prospect Interviews and Evaluation:<br>2. Contractor interview of semi-finalists  | TBD- proposer add suggested timeline to be completed by March 2023 |
| Prospect Interviews and Evaluation:<br>3. Search committee review of finalists and prepares recommendation for NC-SARA Board action | TBD- proposer add suggested timeline                               |
| Prospect Interviews and Evaluation:<br>4. NC-SARA Board interview of finalists  | <b>March 2023</b>  |