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## The National Association for Urban Debate Leagues

*An Invitation to Apply for the Position of*

### Executive Director

#### Search Summary

The National Association for Urban Debate Leagues (“NAUDL”), a not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving educational outcomes for students in urban schools by encouraging debate as an effective means of scholastic achievement, is seeking an exceptional leader to serve as the NAUDL’s Executive Director, following the untimely death of its previous Executive Director in late 2009. By building, strengthening and networking Urban Debate Leagues (“UDLs”), the NAUDL expands opportunities for urban youth that produce dramatic, positive, cost-effective results.

The NAUDL currently connects 24 existing UDLs, eight (8) of which it helped create in the past three years. The NAUDL intends to expand these numbers in the next few years in pursuit of its simple and compelling mission to **“facilitate participation in organized debate activities for as many urban students as possible.”** The school systems in which the NAUDL has created public-private partnerships and invested its resources have student populations that are overwhelmingly students of color (87%) and low-

income (78%). The positive effects of debate on scholastic achievement of these disadvantaged young people are substantial, *e.g.*, published, peer-reviewed research demonstrates that African American male students raised their grade-point-averages by 50% of a letter grade and were 70% more likely to graduate from high-school than their otherwise-comparable, non-debating peers. Comparable results have been documented for every other gender and racial group, and will soon be published.

The NAUDL and its next Executive Director will have the opportunity to leverage these powerful results to develop debating programs in cities where UDLs do not yet exist, and to help those existing UDLs reach more students more effectively. The NAUDL offers an outstanding opportunity for a leader who has the capacity to raise resources, forge a powerful alliance among education reformers and the organization's existing supporters, and nurture the growth of urban debate as a means for tremendous scholastic achievement in cities across the nation. The successful candidate will have demonstrated experience and acumen in organizational development and leadership, a passion for social justice and education reform to benefit urban youth, and superior communication skills. The next NAUDL Executive Director will have the opportunity and responsibility to promote and brand the NAUDL as an essential and valuable player in advancing the urban debate agenda, while respecting and collaborating with leaders in both the education community and the universe of fervent debate veterans, coaches and admirers to bring the substantial benefits of urban debate to students in America's cities.

This Invitation describes the NAUDL and its programs in greater detail and sets forth the challenges and opportunities that make the position of Executive Director so unique and compelling for a leader wishing to make a real difference in developing and attaining the aspirations of urban students. The NAUDL Board of Directors has engaged the national, executive search firm, Isaacson, Miller, to help the Board and the NAUDL Search Committee with this important search. All inquiries, nominations, and applications should be sent to Isaacson, Miller at the address and in the manner indicated at the end of this document. All inquiries will be held in strict confidence.

### The NAUDL

Founded in 2004, the NAUDL is an Illinois not-for-profit corporation with offices in downtown Chicago, a five-person staff and an annual budget of approximately \$1 million. Over half of the annual operating budget is contributed by individuals, including the NAUDL's active, 19-member national Board of Directors.

In advancing its mission to facilitate participation in organized debate activities for as many urban students as possible, the NAUDL pursues three core strategies – building new urban debate leagues (UDLs) where none exists; strengthening and expanding existing UDLs to broaden access and ensure success; and connecting these UDLs in a vibrant, mutually-supportive network.

The NAUDL's approach to building Leagues is a thoughtful, five-year process that establishes the new UDL on a solid footing. During this start-up phase the NAUDL

invests considerable financial, human and knowledge capital to get the new UDL off the ground. A local advisory board leads each UDL. The board shoulders the financial, programmatic and political responsibility of establishing a well functioning UDL in that city. The start-up UDL is structured around a tripartite, public-private partnership among the NAUDL, the local UDL (which, until separately incorporated, functions as a project of the NAUDL) and the local public school system. Each local advisory board hires its own League Director to manage the UDL's day-to-day operations. The cities where the NAUDL has recently or is currently helping to build new UDLs are: Birmingham, Dallas, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, Memphis, Nashville, Oakland/Bay Area, St Louis and Tampa.

In strengthening and expanding UDLs the NAUDL applies its financial, human and programmatic resources to grow existing UDLs, so as to provide more debate opportunities to more and more students. The NAUDL also works with existing UDLs to address specific problems. These challenges vary in scope and kind, and the NAUDL responds to the challenges as needed and determined by the NAUDL and the UDL. As the NAUDL matures, its experiences in helping UDLs expand their reach, strengthen their programs and enhance their capacity will add ever-increasing value to the UDL network.

This leads to the third strategic initiative offered by the NAUDL. Connecting UDLs into a coherent and mutually-supportive network is critical to the long-term success of urban debate in America. UDLs can and should learn from and support each other. Promising practices that emerge in one city can and should be shared and adapted throughout the network. Accordingly, the NAUDL's networking efforts foster innovation and leverage experience. And, as a collective UDLs become more powerful advocates. They collect and share data that reinforce their major contribution to urban educational achievement, and that make the establishment of new UDLs more likely. They showcase their teams and their programs in competitive debates, like the Chase Urban Debate National Championship, and in collaborative workshops. They combine to sponsor debates that attract national funders from the corporate and philanthropic communities, and that provide a platform for broadcasting the message about the value of urban debate. The NAUDL brings structure and permanence to the national UDL movement.

### The Value of Debate in Educational Achievement

The evidence that debate works to advance educational achievement for disadvantaged students is relatively recent, ever-increasing, and very compelling. (The Appendix at the end of this document lists several sources of research on the value of urban debate in educational outcomes). In the next several years, evaluations with the NAUDL's encouragement and support will result in even more persuasive evidence of the value of urban debate leagues. Armed with this growing body of peer-reviewed evidence, the next NAUDL Executive Director will have the opportunity to advance the urban debate movement. Moreover, compared to other educational reform projects, debate is cost-effective. Using tools, facilities and personnel already in place in all middle and high schools, debate leverages these resources into measurable results.

*UDLs increase the number of students graduating from high schools who are “college- and career-ready.”*

- Students who join an urban debate team are 42% more likely to graduate high school than their non-debating peers (77% vs. 54%).
- Debaters have higher GPAs (.20 points or 20% of a letter grade).
- After just one year of debate, students’ ability to read for accuracy increased more than three grade levels, and students’ ability to read for fluency and comprehension increased more than two grade levels.
- ACT scores experienced a 15 percentile increase for both reading and English after just two years in debate.
- Debaters are 34% (English) and 74% (Reading) more likely to achieve the ACT college readiness benchmark after just two years in debate.

*UDLs improve secondary literacy.* As experts in teaching secondary literacy, debate coaches in the classroom work with students to extract and evaluate arguments advanced by a text, compare and contrast it against previously read texts, and incorporate the ideas of other texts into a broader understanding of a subject. Coaches also direct competitive debate teams that provide an academically rigorous after-school, year-round opportunity for students to develop these skills.

*UDLs train a new generation of diverse leaders.* Debate provides the tools youth need to succeed as business executives, law partners, and tenured faculty. A survey by the National Forensic League shows that 64% of Members of Congress competed in debate or speech in high school. Urban debate gives students the skills they need for success in college and careers, and debate coaches instill in students a civic education that motivates and enables them to assume leadership.

### The Potential Impact of the NAUDL on Urban Debate and Education in America

The positive impact of debate has been recognized for decades. Many non-urban public school districts, elite private schools and parochial schools support debate programs. However, where debate could have the greatest impact – in urban, under-achieving school systems – the resources and will have been too often absent. Without the NAUDL’s building, strengthening and connecting UDLs, debate opportunities for urban kids will be far fewer than they could be. Together with the NAUDL the UDLs advocate for debate with school officials, orchestrate political pressure on school boards and mayors, train the coaches, organize competitions and workshops, and provide financial and human resources. The important and unique role for an association of these UDLs belongs, primarily, to the NAUDL.

The NAUDL’s potential impact in creating and leading a movement for robust, broad-based UDLs throughout the U.S., and by extension for fundamental education reform to close the achievement gap for poor students and children of color in this country, is enormous. For such a young and relatively small organization, NAUDL has already secured an important foothold, and its potential to advance urban debate presents an

attractive opportunity for an exceptional leader. That is why finding a leader who can as Executive Director address these challenges is so critical. The NAUDL exists to take the success of Urban Debate Leagues to scale. Five years from now, that will be the metric that defines the extent of the NAUDL's success.

### Opportunities and Challenges for the Executive Director of the NAUDL

For the next five-year period, the NAUDL will face four (4) important and exciting challenges. The Board of Directors of the NAUDL is seeking a new Executive Director who has had actual experience in successfully meeting similar or analogous challenges and who is able and willing to apply these experiences and skills to lead the NAUDL as it pursues the mission, strategies and opportunities described above. Within the next three to five years, working closely with the NAUDL Board and Staff, a successful Executive Director of the NAUDL will have substantially met these challenges and opportunities.

### *Defining the Unique and Valuable Role of the NAUDL among Key Constituencies.*

Like other national associations, the NAUDL needs to define the relationship between itself and its constituent parts, in this case, the UDLs, which the NAUDL builds, supports and connects. The definition of responsibilities, relationships and roles among local service providers like the UDLs and the NAUDL has evolved organically and now needs clarification. Managing the expectations on both sides of the relationship is critically important, so that the NAUDL adds value, and is seen as adding value, to both the individual urban debate leagues and *vice versa*. The goal is to create a healthy symbiotic relationship wherein the NAUDL is the single largest supporter of UDLs and the UDLs likewise foster the development and strength of the NAUDL.

The NAUDL also has to meet the challenge of clarifying its role within the larger debating community beyond the UDLs and within the ranks of high school and college debate coaches, former debaters, forensic champions and communications professionals. The universe of people and institutions that embrace the value of debate on education, civic engagement and public policy-making can play a pivotal part in helping the NAUDL fulfill its mission to facilitate debate participation for urban students. The next Executive Director of the NAUDL should have the capacity to reach out to even more of these potential supporters. The goal is to turn outward and enlist the support of non-urban debate communities for the work of the NAUDL and for the expansion of urban debate across America. A subsidiary and significant objective of this goal is to ensure that urban debate for low-income students is integrated into this larger universe and to find pathways for urban students to apply their skills in and passion for debate.

The NAUDL also needs to connect with the education reform movement in this country and to define urban debate as an ingredient essential to close the achievement gap and provide meaningful college and career opportunities for all students. Enormous resources from government at all levels and from foundations, businesses and individuals have been and will continue to be allocated to educational reform and improvement. Urban debate leagues have much to offer and the challenge for the NAUDL is to make sure that

the policy-makers and the resource allocators understand the value of and need for urban debate opportunities. The goal is to put urban debate leagues on the recommendation list of education reform leaders, and to work with academia, foundations and governments to measure and document the impact of urban debate on educational outcomes.

These “definitional challenges” call for a leader who has met these challenges before and has transferable skills in building relationships that advantage all parties. The NAUDL needs a leader who can find “win-win scenarios” and has the ability and inclination to reach outward and marshal resources and support from new and potentially unlikely allies.

### ***Strengthening the Internal Management of the NAUDL***

The Executive Director of the NAUDL must have the experience and capacity to solidify internal management processes and systems. Board members and Staff members need to understand their roles and responsibilities; the organization needs to enable them to be successful in fulfilling those roles and responsibilities; and members of the NAUDL team need to align and move the organization and its mission forward. The goal here is, of course, to use the financial, human, political and knowledge resources of the NAUDL to maximum advantage. While the priorities for the next Executive Director are externally focused, he or she cannot be successful unless the internal operations of the NAUDL are running smoothly.

Experience in working with an energetic, high profile, entrepreneurial Board of Directors, comprised of successful attorneys, business leaders and non-profit executives, is very important and will serve the Board members and the NAUDL extremely well.

### ***Building Resources and Diversifying the NAUDL’s Fund-Raising Base***

As, and to the extent that, the next Executive Director successfully defines the role of the NAUDL and strengthens its internal management systems, he or she will be well prepared to face the important challenge of increasing the NAUDL’s revenues and expanding its donor base. This is the principal challenge for the leader of any non-profit organization, but especially so for a young organization like the NAUDL, which has heretofore relied substantially on the generosity of its Board members and their individual and corporate contacts in the debate universe. In order to attain its mission, the NAUDL needs to grow and diversify its funding streams.

The good news, of course, is that there’s a lot of money that foundations, individuals and governments are eager to contribute to improve educational outcomes and to narrow the achievement gap among urban youth. The even better news is that the NAUDL can make a compelling case that urban debate leagues provide a significant and cost-effective solution. What is needed is an Executive Director who can articulate and persuasively deliver this case to the resource-allocators and decision-makers. The NAUDL Board of Directors is looking for an Executive Director who has a demonstrated ability to raise funding from a variety of sources and who has grown an organization substantially.

The goal here is to double the revenues in the next three years and to double it again five years out, and to have these funds come in a more balanced way from government, individual and foundation sources. The NAUDL seeks an individual who has a track-record of successful fund-raising, has the ability and disposition to build relationships with funders and partners, and who is, or can become, a fearless and passionate promoter of urban debate among the funding community.

### ***Leading a National Movement to Expand Urban Debate in America***

The fourth challenge and opportunity for the NAUDL and its next Executive Director is to provide leadership for a movement whose goal is to expand urban debate – to make it accessible to as many urban students as possible. Leadership does not necessarily mean a dominant or exclusive role for the NAUDL. Instead, leadership can be provided by building the constituency of supporters in the legal, business, academic and government sectors. Leadership may also involve giving rather than taking, i.e., directing financial and human resources to UDLs where they can do the most good. In this case, leadership may entail promoting local representatives to make the case for urban debate in their cities. Leadership undoubtedly means some measure of broadcasting and articulation of the value of urban debate. Leadership generally means providing opportunities for service. And leadership always means developing the capacity of staff, volunteers, coaches, national and local board members, partners, and others to succeed.

The next Executive Director of the NAUDL should be an individual who understands and has experienced both the benefits and burdens of leadership. The goal is to communicate a compelling vision that attracts adherents from the government, philanthropic, educational, debate and civic engagement sectors to support and expand quality urban debate leagues in America.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of the Executive Director**

The following functions are the principal responsibilities and roles for the Executive Director:

- Providing day-to-day internal management, including advising the Board on improvements for efficient internal operations
- Ensuring that all programs, policies, systems and services are in alignment
- Implementing the organization's strategic and annual plans
- Overseeing all financial and accounting activities, including creating and monitoring an annual organization budget and preparing periodic reports to the Board on the financial status of the organization, including legal and regulatory compliance, and collaborating with the relevant Board Committees and independent auditor to develop accurate and timely public audits for the organization.
- Overseeing all internal communications
- Planning Board and senior staff meetings and providing agendas and necessary materials

- Developing a comprehensive understanding of the organization's programs and examining opportunities and prospects for future growth
- Overseeing all human resource policies and procedures and ensuring a respectful and efficient workplace
- Engaging and overseeing all contracted agents for the organization including lawyers, recruiters, bankers, real estate brokers, marketing consultants, public relations professionals, meeting planners, et al.
- Developing strategic partnerships with the NAUDL's allies and cohorts
- Implementing special projects as assigned by the Board

### Required Experience and Qualifications

Although it is unlikely that any one individual will bring all of the qualifications and experiences listed below, the successful candidate will have many of the following attributes:

- Commitment to the ideals, values and mission of the NAUDL
- BA/BS required; MBA, JD, MPP, or equivalent preferred
- Minimum 10 years' experience in business, national association, or nonprofit management with minimum of 3 years in a senior leadership role that includes financial oversight
- Experience as a high school and/or college debater is desirable but not required
- Experience in partnering with a nonprofit Board of Directors
- Successful experience enhancing the capacity of an organization, sharing senior management responsibilities, team-building, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and accountability, and implementing financial control systems
- Financial acumen, including a demonstrated ability to prepare and analyze budgets and financial statements, especially for 501-c-3 organizations
- Integrity, dependability and demonstrated excellence in work product
- Ability to translate mission, strategies and goals into day-to-day operational objectives
- Superior oral and written communications skills
- Ability to engage in strategic planning and implementation
- Strong interpersonal skills; trustworthy; relationship-builder
- Experience in inclusive and team-building decision-making
- Exceptional facilitation and negotiating skills

### Application Procedure

The NAUDL is an equal opportunity employer committed to inclusive hiring and dedicated to diversity. Reasonable accommodations will be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions of the job.

Applications, nominations and inquiries should be sent to the following electronic mailbox: [3996@imsearch.com](mailto:3996@imsearch.com). Electronic submission of materials is required.

All applications should include a resume and a substantive cover letter that responds to the challenges cited above.

Please address your nominations and inquiries to:

Tim McFeeley, Vice President  
or  
Gail Gregory, Managing Associate  
Isaacson, Miller  
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Urban Debate Research and Evaluation:  
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