Job description – Research Specialist

The Tennessee Education Research Alliance (TERA) is a research-practice partnership between the Tennessee Department of Education and Peabody College at Vanderbilt University. Powered by a top quality longitudinal data set and a commitment with the state to explore key questions of state policy and practice, the Tennessee Education Research Alliance is poised to be a national leader in practice-focused research. TERA represents one of only a few attempts to create a rigorous research consortium aimed squarely at influencing state education policy and practice, a role that becomes ever more important in the current context where states play an increasingly large role in education governance.

The work of the Tennessee Education Research Alliance will aim to directly and immediately inform state policy and practice. The organization will conduct research on questions of greatest urgency to the state and ensure that actionable findings are brought to the attention of policymakers and practitioners to whom they are important.

The Research Specialist will be a critical member of the TERA team and will lead work in at least one of the four key TERA areas listed below. A successful candidate will have strong independent research experience, an entrepreneurial spirit, and a desire to create products that bridge the gap between research and practice.

The Research Specialist will:

- Prepare and publish research syntheses, policy briefs, and other products as needed.
- Work collaboratively to design and carry out research projects.
- Support analysis and creation of products related to research projects as needed.
- Report to the Executive Director and work in partnership with the Faculty Director to create key research products.

Basic Qualifications

Education Required: Master's degree in education, public policy, economics, sociology or related field.

Experience

Required time in field previous to employment: At least two years either prior to or following completion of master’s degree.

Demonstrated evidence of:

- intellectual contribution to research programs,
- knowledge in computer software statistical packages such as Stata, SAS, R, or HLM
- knowledge of standard statistical methods and techniques, and
- ability to translate research findings into language accessible to policymakers and practitioners.

Preferred experience:

- Experience working with school districts, state departments of education, or research-practice
partnerships; managing data and conducting quantitative analyses, such as multilevel and causal modeling, and quasi-experimental methods.

- Past experience as a Research Assistant or a Project Assistant is preferred.

Key Functions and Expected Performances

1. Serve as project lead on development of research projects, and
   a. Lead/Assist with preparation of presentations and reports on research and policy implications to Tennessee Department of Education, other state agencies, non-profit organizations, the Tennessee General Assembly, faculty/staff/students, and researchers.
   b. Lead/Assist with preparation of research syntheses and briefs on topics across the TERA research agenda, especially focused on making connections across research topics and studies.
   c. Assist with manuscript preparation for leading academic journals. Contribute to research so as to merit serving as co-author on research publications, etc.
   d. Assist in writing research grants and contract proposals.

2. Work with Executive Director, Faculty Director, and Research Associates to oversee research projects and perform near to totally independent research.
   a. Manage, plan, design, and implement research projects using existing in-house data, including outlining project vision, building project plans, analyzing data, and presenting findings through written reports and public presentations. This position will not be expected to seek external funding or to be the PI on a project.
   b. Conduct analyses for research project(s) requiring independent interpretation of complex research data.

3. Maintain open communication between TERA and partners within and outside Vanderbilt.
   a. Open contact as needed with principal investigator, collaborating faculty and staff, academic departments and schools, and key university offices.
   b. Open contact as needed with the Tennessee Department of Education, sponsoring agencies and/or cooperating facilities, collaborating professionals, and vendors.
   c. Represent TERA at external meetings and research conferences.

Click here to apply. Interested applicants can contact Erin O’Hara, Executive Director of the Tennessee Education Research Alliance, at erin.c.ohara@vanderbilt.edu for more information.