



LEADERSHIP PROFILE

Executive Director

Gateway Early Childhood Alliance

St. Louis, Missouri

We are working to create and sustain an early childhood system that ensures all children and families have access to high-quality early childhood care and education.

The Opportunity

Gateway Early Childhood Alliance (The Alliance) is an intermediary that supports the systems serving providers, families, and children. The Alliance aligns the agenda, improves quality, expands access, and resources the field.

Founded on the belief that every child in St. Louis deserves a fair start, The Alliance is building the connective infrastructure that a fragmented early childhood system has never had. It is now seeking a leader to realize that vision and carry forward a bold plan co-created with a broad set of partners.

The Alliance is ready to transition from a startup into a durable, transformational institution—one that is credible, well-governed, rooted in deep community trust, and able to catalyze wins in early childhood education (ECE). The organization's next chapter includes full independence as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, a diversified and growing funding base, and expanded impact across the St. Louis region.

The incoming Executive Director will not inherit a finished organization; they will help build one. The Alliance is candid about this: it is actively defining its strategy and strengthening board governance and effectiveness, and it is recruiting its next leader while that work is underway. The board is committed to give that leader real support—executive coaching, a board that partners on the transition rather than leaving it to the ED, and a set of foundational documents in active development that the incoming leader will help shape and then step into. What the role requires is a systems leader who can help define and hold the intermediary's lane—serving the system rather than delivering service directly, keep a wide coalition together, raise the funds to sustain the effort, and keep the voices of providers, caregivers, and families at the center of every decision.



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The Organization

The Gateway Early Childhood Alliance works to improve the quality of, and access to, early childhood education across St. Louis. As an intermediary it does not deliver direct service; its work is to align, coordinate, and resource the field so others can serve children well.

The region's challenges are defined and urgent: years of systemic inequity, high costs, high educator turnover, uneven infrastructure, and undefined measures of quality. Access is among the most pressing. Access was especially limited for families with low incomes: only 19% of children estimated to be eligible for childcare subsidies had access to a provider that demonstrated quality-related commitments beyond Missouri's basic licensing requirements.

How the Alliance came to be

The Alliance was born from deep research. In 2014, the landmark [For the Sake of All](#) report identified gaps in early childhood care as a leading driver of health disparities across the region, naming investment in quality early childhood development as one of six core recommendations. Four years later, twenty-two organizational leaders came together to produce [The First Step to Equity](#), a comprehensive assessment of access and affordability in the ECE landscape. A community-led process facilitated by WEPOWER then developed [The Playbook](#) for reimagining ECE from the ground up. Building on that momentum, the Gateway Early Childhood Alliance launched in 2021 to serve as the regional coordinating body for the ECE system.

Early momentum

In its first years, working alongside coalition partners, the Alliance helped move the field forward:

- Contributed to coalition efforts—with partners including WEPOWER and Urban Sprouts—that secured significant new state and local investment in children and families and mobilized community members for Child Advocacy Day at the state capitol.
- Launched the **Nurturing Minds Project**, an in-depth training, coaching, and support program centered on Conscious Discipline, reaching more than 100 childcare professionals across 12 sites in its first year.
- Commissioned the **ECE Workforce Study** in partnership with the University of Missouri-St. Louis, generating critical field data.
- Hosted **state legislative town halls** connecting ECE providers directly with elected officials.

The next leader should understand this coalition as one to be sustained and rebuilt, not a finished structure to be inherited. Central to this role is holding partners together and keeping the field aligned.

What the Alliance does

As an intermediary that aligns funding, coordinates partners, and connects public and philanthropic resources to the field, the Alliance is sharpening the definition of its role and the functions it performs along with the boundaries it holds. That working definition, which the next leader will help finalize with the board, centers on a distinct set of functions:

Stewards the shared agenda –

aligning public and philanthropic funding streams behind a common strategy. Advocacy Day at the state capitol.

Coordinates and fills gaps –

identifying where the system falls short and convening partners to close those gaps.

Connects capital to community –

acting as the matchmaker between the business community and providers—the Alliance stewards regional and national dollars/philanthropic investment.

Tells the story of the field –

building public understanding and accountability for outcomes and equity.

What it is committing not to do: direct service or competing with its own members for program grants. Holding this boundary is core to the Alliance's credibility and its ability to serve the whole field.

Where the Alliance is now

The Alliance is at an inflection point, and it is being transparent with candidates about what is settled and what is still taking shape. The strategic direction, the four-part mandate below, and the intermediary role are broadly agreed; a board-approved theory of change, a defined operating plan, a costed 501(c)(3) transition plan, and the specifics of the governance model are in active development, running concurrently with this search. Rather than wait, the board has chosen to recruit a leader who will help finalize and then execute this work—with coaching and a committed board alongside. The next Executive Director should be prepared to join an organization still in formation, contribute to shaping its foundational plans, and then carry them forward.



The Mandate

Stakeholders have agreed on four clear priorities for the Alliance and its next Executive Director, and the board is now turning that consensus into formal strategy. These are the measures of success for the role:

- **Align and steward the shared agenda.** Shape, hold, and advance a coordinated regional ECE strategy across a diverse set of partners.
- **Improve quality across the field.** Advance the standards, supports, and practices that raise quality for children and educators.
- **Expand access.** Grow the supply of quality, affordable seats for the families who need them most.

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The next Executive Director will lead a fundraising strategy that increases revenue and long-term sustainability through proactive, relationship-centered engagement with donors and funders.

- **Resource the system.** Diversify and grow revenue, including bringing national dollars in and housing them locally, to sustain the work.

Delivering on that charge calls for leadership across the following areas:

Strategic & Systems Leadership

- Define and hold the intermediary's lane, keeping the organization focused on system-level impact.
- Execute and deepen the impact of the Playbook and the Alliance's strategy across the St. Louis ECE ecosystem.
- Steward the organization's relationships, finances, reputation, and influence with judgment and care.
- Cultivate public/private partnerships that strengthen the early childhood ecosystem.

Fundraising & Sustainability

- Lead a fundraising strategy that increases revenue and long-term sustainability through proactive, relationship-centered engagement with donors and funders.
- Identify and pursue local and national grant opportunities and develop collaborative, diversified funding models, engaging the business community as a key partner.

External Affairs, Coalition & Provider Trust

- Serve as the face and voice of the Alliance to community partners, funders, policymakers, and the public.

- Repair and deepen trust with providers, whose confidence is foundational to the Alliance's work, through active listening and follow-through.
- Sustain and rebuild the Alliance's coalition across caregivers, providers, educators, advocates, and partners.

Advocacy

The Alliance supports policy that keeps providers' and families' voices at the center. It does so as an educator and technical expert, providing research, analysis, and system-level insight to inform policy and investment rather than as a partisan campaign organization. The board will confirm, in writing, where campaign-level political advocacy lives relative to partners such as WEPOWER and Kids Win Missouri, so the next leader steps into a clear boundary.

- Keep providers' voices and perspectives at the center of policy and advocacy work.
- Work across political boundaries at the county, city, and state levels to support early childhood education.
- Support the development and implementation of public funding opportunities for the ECE ecosystem.

Board Partnership & Governance

The Alliance is standing up its governance as it moves toward independence. Standing up that structure, and the 501(c)(3) transition itself, is board and interim work, not the ED's to carry alone. The Executive Director partners with the board to:

- Build a trusted, collaborative partnership that enables thoughtful governance, strategic foresight, and effective leadership.



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The ideal candidate is an engaging systems leader with a demonstrated record of results—and someone energized, rather than deterred, by joining an organization mid-build.

- Help shape a high-functioning board engaged in strategy, fundraising, advocacy, and stewardship, while empowering staff to lead day-to-day operations.
- Partner with the board through the transition from fiscal sponsorship under the St. Louis Community Foundation to independent 501(c)(3) status.
- Equip board members to serve as effective ambassadors and champions for early childhood across the region.

The Ideal Candidate

The ideal candidate is an engaging systems leader with a demonstrated record of results—and someone energized, rather than deterred, by joining an organization mid-build. The Alliance is deliberately holding a focused set of true requirements and treating other valuable attributes as preferred or growable, supported by coaching and a committed board. The intent is to hire a strong systems-and-fundraising leader with intermediary experience, not to search for a person who does not exist.

Required – what the leader brings on day one

- **Systems and intermediary experience.** A track record in systems change, backbone, or intermediary work, with roughly five years of systems leadership.
- **Fundraising results.** A demonstrated record of raising significant funds and blending diverse revenue streams.
- **Stakeholder navigation and coalition building.** Expert capacity to navigate diverse stakeholders and communities with authenticity and effectiveness.

- **Financial acumen.** Experience creating and executing budgets and stewarding funds across multiple sources.
- **Communication that inspires.** A listener, speaker, and storyteller who motivate others and can articulate belief in the mission strongly enough to sell it.
- **Strategic thinking and prioritization.** The judgment to set goals, solve problems, and discern real priorities amid competing input.
- **Team leadership.** Proven ability to build and lead high-functioning teams and to manage up and down.
- **Commitment to equity.** A demonstrated record of advancing equity and addressing systemic inequities affecting children and families, in St. Louis or similar communities.
- **Regional credibility and ECE fluency.** The ability to build credibility across the St. Louis region quickly, and a credible working fluency in early childhood education.

Character—integrity, transparency, authenticity, and genuine belief in the mission is essential and will be assessed throughout the search rather than treated as line-item credentials.

Preferred – valuable, and able to grow into the role

- Deep knowledge of the St. Louis and Missouri ECE ecosystem and its key players.
- Established local networks and relationships.
- Policy analysis and legislative knowledge.
- Operations management and organizational development experience.
- Depth in staff management and board development.



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The Relationships

Reports to:	CEO, St. Louis Community Foundation (during fiscal sponsorship)
Strategic direction From:	Gateway Early Childhood Alliance Advisory Board (transitioning to a governing board)
Direct reports:	▪ Director of Communications & Advocacy ▪ Operations Manager ▪ Executive Assistant
Key partners:	▪ ECE providers, educators, and families ▪ Regional coalitions & allies ▪ Funders & supporters, including the business community ▪ Elected & appointed officials

The Location

St. Louis is a city that invites you to put down roots. Home to a rich cultural heartbeat, world-class arts institutions, and vibrant neighborhood festivals, the region offers the kind of community texture that makes early learning come alive.

Historic neighborhoods and a growing innovation ecosystem sit side by side, world-class universities fuel research and collaboration, and one of the most affordable urban lifestyles in the country means leaders can plant deep roots here.

Compensation

The Alliance offers a competitive compensation and benefits package, the starting salary is anticipated at \$125,000 - \$150,000.

For potential consideration or to recommend a prospect, please email

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or call **Terri Kohan** or **Michelle Hall** at 404-262-7392.