



Executive Director, Accreditation and Education
Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND)
Chicago, Illinois

THE SEARCH

The Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND®) and the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (Academy) invite applications and nominations for the Executive Director, Accreditation and Education position. This is a fully virtual role with an anticipated start date of Winter 2027.

Established by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, ACEND serves the public by establishing eligibility requirements and accreditation standards that ensure the quality and continuous improvement of nutrition and dietetics education programs. Programs meeting these standards are accredited by ACEND to prepare students for careers in nutrition and dietetics. Currently, ACEND accredits nearly 600 programs in the United States and internationally. ACEND is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) as the national accrediting agency for programs in nutrition and dietetics.

This role is an exceptional opportunity to lead a highly respected accrediting body for nutrition and dietetics education programs at a pivotal moment in its history. As ACEND prepares to become an independent 501(c)(3) organization by July 2027, the next Executive Director will guide a significant organizational transition, implement new accreditation standards, and help shape the future of nutrition and dietetics education. The next leader will inherit a high-performing team and a respected, well-managed organization with a strong reputation for transparency, responsiveness, and partnership, providing an excellent platform to navigate change and extend ACEND's impact.

The Executive Director serves as ACEND's chief executive officer and provides strategic, operational, and financial leadership for the organization. Reporting to and partnering closely with the ACEND Board, the Executive Director oversees accreditation, governance, external relations, and organizational operations while serving as ACEND's chief ambassador to educational institutions, professional organizations, regulatory bodies, and other key constituents. This leader will ensure the continued strength, integrity, and impact of accreditation in nutrition and dietetics education.

ACEND and the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics have retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive firm, to assist with this important recruitment. Please direct all inquiries, nominations, and applications to the search firm, as indicated at the end of this document.

ABOUT ACEND

ACEND operates at the intersection of education, professional practice, and workforce development. Through engagement with educators, practitioners, students, and institutional leaders, ACEND helps shape the future of the nutrition and dietetics profession by fostering innovation, supporting continuous quality improvement, and responding to evolving healthcare and educational needs. Its work influences the preparation of professionals who serve diverse communities across a wide range of clinical, community, public health, research, food service, and industry settings.

ABOUT THE ACADEMY OF NUTRITION AND DIETETICS

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (Academy) is the world's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals with more than 100,000 credentialed practitioners — registered dietitian nutritionists (RDN), nutrition and dietetics technicians, registered (NDTR), and other dietetics professionals holding undergraduate and advanced degrees in nutrition and dietetics, and students — and is committed to improving the nation's health and advancing the profession of nutrition and dietetics through research, education and advocacy.

2027 TRANSITION FROM THE ACADEMY

ACEND is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE). The USDE is establishing new expectations for accrediting agencies. In response to these requirements, ACEND must become a separate and independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization by July 1, 2027, at which time it will no longer operate as part of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Work is already underway to prepare ACEND for its separation from the Academy and its launch as an independent organization. Current leadership is developing the financial, human resources, technology, policy, and operational structures needed to support a smooth transition, with the goal of ensuring that ACEND is well prepared to operate independently when the next Executive Director begins.

ROLE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Reporting to the ACEND Board, the Executive Director is responsible for directing, planning, developing, and the effective implementation of all functions of ACEND, including standard setting, evaluation and quality improvement of nutrition and dietetics education programs; representing ACEND regionally, nationally and internationally; serving as a resource to public constituents on nutrition and dietetics education questions and issues; providing oversight of ACEND financial and human resources including its \$2.7M budget and 13 full-time staff; planning and directing services to address nutrition and dietetics education issues and assisting in the advancement of education programs. The Executive Director

oversees ACEND staff and has three direct reports: the Senior Strategic Partner of Innovation and Strategy Planning, the Director of Operations and Technology, and the Senior Director of Accreditation.

Major Responsibilities

- Direct ongoing evaluation and revision of the accreditation standards based on trends and higher education and public policy, including design of surveys to collect constituent input
- Identify, monitor, and analyze environmental and programmatic accreditation trends and legislation for impact on nutrition and dietetics education and ACEND policies, procedures, and services
- Direct implementation of new systems, technologies, and procedures to maintain ACEND data and create efficiencies in processes
- Direct development, implementation, and evaluation of procedures to operationalize ACEND policies
- Provide strategic oversight and direct implementation of ACEND's non-accreditation support services that support program directors and students
- Provide support to ACEND committees or work groups appointed by the ACEND Board
- Develop and implement strategies and business plans to meet the ACEND strategic plan
- Direct planning and evaluation of training for program directors and 200+ ACEND program reviewers/site visitors
- Direct and provide consultation on entry-level education and accreditation to nearly 600 nutrition and dietetics education programs, including directors, administrators, faculty/staff, and students
- Direct collection and maintenance of student enrollment and graduation statistics
- Provide consultation to ACEND review teams on accreditation site visits
- Provide consultation to national and international universities considering ACEND recognition
- Negotiate and maintain contracts to support ACEND's work.
- Maintain ACEND's administrative autonomy and recognition by the U.S. Department of Education
- Maintain strong working relationships with other organizations to advance ACEND's purpose (e.g., regional accreditors, Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, and Nutrition and Dietetics Educators and Preceptors)
- Coordinate publication of ACEND standards, newsletters, handbooks, and website information
- Develop and maintain accountability for the ACEND budget (Approximately \$2.7M)
- Act as an authority and communication liaison on ACEND accreditation policy and education issues for internal and external audiences
- Train staff to answer questions from prospective students and the public about nutrition and dietetics education
- Develop informational materials for the public about nutrition and dietetics education

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

To ensure success across all domains, the Executive Director must work collaboratively and creatively with ACEND staff and the board to address the following key opportunities and challenges in support of ACEND's mission:

Lead ACEND Through a Transformative Period of Organizational Independence

As ACEND prepares to become an independent 501(c)(3) organization in 2027, the Executive Director will guide the organization through one of the most significant transitions in its history. Working closely with staff, the board, and external partners, the Executive Director will oversee the development of sustainable administrative and financial operations, including functions previously provided through the Academy. This inflection point presents a unique opportunity to develop financial, HR, technology, policy, and workplace structures tailored to ACEND's needs, strengthening its already excellent work environment and its ability to advance nutrition and dietetics education. Success will require balancing thoughtful change management with operational continuity, ensuring that programs, institutions, and other constituents experience a seamless transition while preserving ACEND's recognition, credibility, and effectiveness.

Navigate a Changing Accreditation Environment

The accreditation landscape is undergoing significant change, with evolving USDE expectations, growing emphasis on risk-based and right-touch regulation, increased attention to student outcomes and return on investment, enrollment pressures, and the potential for greater competition among accreditors. The next Executive Director will have the opportunity to guide ACEND's continued innovation while ensuring that new initiatives remain closely aligned with its core accreditation mission. In this environment, the next Executive Director will need to ensure that ACEND remains agile, responsive, and forward-looking while preserving the quality, consistency, and credibility of its core accreditation work. This will require a leader who understands accreditation and quality assurance, can anticipate regulatory and sector shifts, and can help programs navigate change with clarity, fairness, and appropriate support. As ACEND advances its work, the Executive Director will need to bring strategic discipline, ensuring that new offerings strengthen and grow ACEND's core business without creating mission drift.

Sustain Trust, Credibility, and Strategic Partnerships Across the Profession

The Executive Director will be a visible and trusted ambassador for ACEND, preserving the trust, transparency, and strong communication it has built with program directors, educators, students, institutions, its board, and other constituents. This leader will balance supportive partnership with appropriate accountability and rigor, maintain productive relationships with organizations that support ACEND's mission, and serve as a trusted resource on education and accreditation issues. Through clear communication, thoughtful engagement, and sound decision-making, the Executive Director will strengthen confidence in ACEND's accreditation processes and its role in advancing quality nutrition and dietetics education.

Maintain and Strengthen ACEND's High-Performing, Mission-Driven Team and Culture

One of ACEND's greatest strengths is its committed staff and board, collaborative culture, and shared dedication to students, educators, and the profession. The Executive Director will inherit a talented, experienced team that values inclusiveness, trust, transparency, and mutual support. As ACEND navigates organizational change, this leader will sustain a positive and high-performing virtual culture by supporting personalized staff development, managing workload thoughtfully, fostering communication and cohesion, and ensuring that ACEND's strategic priorities, board direction, and day-to-day work remain well aligned.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The successful candidate must have a doctoral degree, a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN) credential, and significant experience in nutrition and dietetics education and the accreditation process. They must be knowledgeable about current issues in nutrition and dietetics education and accreditation. Other desired qualities and characteristics include:

- At least ten years of increasingly substantive administrative experience in higher education or a nonprofit organization, accreditation, or quality assurance agency for professional education programs
- Demonstrated ability to provide leadership to team efforts, including supervision of staff, and to work collaboratively with constituents (including administrators, practitioners, educators, students)
- Demonstrated ability to think strategically, anticipate emerging trends and challenges in the field, set long-term priorities aligned with ACEND's mission, and translate vision into actionable strategies
- Demonstrated ability to plan and simultaneously direct multiple projects and budgets
- Demonstrated ability to think analytically and creatively to solve problems
- Directs and develops ACEND staff, promoting operational excellence, employee engagement, and a culture of continuous improvement in support of ACEND's accreditation mission.
- Experience in proposal development, grant writing, contract review and interpretation, and professional research publications
- Excellent interpersonal skills and demonstrated ability to communicate effectively orally and in writing
- Experience with and understanding of how organizational boards and committees function
- Proficiency in technology use and applications
- Availability for weekend meetings when needed, and approximately 25% travel time for accreditation-related activities

Research shows that people belonging to structurally marginalized groups often only apply for jobs if they meet 100% of the qualifications. As no one ever meets 100% of the preferred qualifications, we encourage you to apply if you feel that most of the above qualifications reflect your experience and expertise.

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

This is a permanent, full-time, and fully virtual position. The anticipated salary range is \$225,000 - \$260,000 and will be commensurate with experience. Additionally, the Academy offers an excellent benefit package, including medical, dental, vision, LTD, tuition reimbursement and 401k match with immediate vesting.

The Academy provides a comprehensive paid leave program to help support work-life balance. Academy employees accrue paid sick and vacation time throughout the year, with the option to carry over unused time in accordance with Academy policy. Additional leave may also be available for holidays, family emergencies, or other personal circumstances.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

All inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed in confidence to:

Amy Segal, Partner
Arianna Williams, Senior Associate
Amanda Leslie, Senior Search Coordinator
Isaacson, Miller

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/academy-nutrition-and-dietetics-accreditation-council-education-nutrition-and>

Equal Employment Opportunity

ACEND and the Academy are proud to be an Equal Opportunity Employer. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to their protected veteran or disabled status and will not be discriminated against.

Isaacson, Miller, the Academy, and ACEND are committed to creating an inclusive environment and welcome applications from candidates with disabilities. If you have any accommodation or access needs, we are happy to provide reasonable accommodation.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by the client. The material presented in this leadership profile should be relied on for informational purposes only. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information, the source documents and information provided by the client would supersede any conflicting information in this document.