



STUDENT FREEDOM INITIATIVE

HONORING THE PAST, GUIDING OUR FUTURE.



Chief Development Officer Washington, DC

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HUMAN CAPITAL

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About Student Freedom Initiative

Student Freedom Initiative's vision is to reduce the wealth gap through the lens of education.

Student Freedom Initiative® (“SFI”) was founded in 2020 following the gift of Robert F. Smith, Philanthropist and Founder, Chairman, and CEO of Vista Equity Partners, to the graduating class at Morehouse College in 2019. While Robert’s initial gift was to the 400 men at this Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in Atlanta, GA, his goal was to provide a scalable solution to the \$1.7 trillion student loan debt crisis, 43 million of whom have an average student loan debt balance of \$38,000.

With HBCUs comprising 3% of the colleges and graduating 13% of all Black students, 100% of Black VPOTUS, 85% of Black Doctors, 80% of Black federal judges, 75% of Black Veterinarians, 75% of Black Military officers, 75% of Black PhDs, 50% of Black engineers, 50% of Black pharmacists, 50% of Black attorneys, 46% of Black business executives, and 40% of Black dentists, Robert initiated SFI at nine (9) HBCUs but always intended to expand to Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), Asian American Native America and Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISI), and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). As of December 2024 SFI reaches ~250,000 students at 72 Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) in 22 states, District of Columbia, and US Virgin Islands.



Mission, Vision, & Values

SFI is a national nonprofit advancing a bold vision: closing the wealth gap through the power of education. SFI helps students attending participating institutions gain freedom in their professional and life choices by increasing social and economic mobility through a student-centered, evidence-based, holistic, and collaborative model.

SFI delivers its mission through four integrated pillars:

- Undergraduate (and Graduate) Student Freedom Loan (SFL), which is a commercial alternative to the Parent PLUS (and Grad PLUS) loan for students who meet eligibility requirements
- Student Internships & Professional Certification(s)
- Student Wrap Around Services (e.g., Emergency Grants, Completion Grants, Financial Literacy)
- Institutional Transformation Projects (e.g., Living Spaces, Cyber Security)

These pillars are strengthened by strategic partners who contribute expertise, in-kind support, and philanthropic capital to help SFI deliver measurable impact and long-term change. SFI's work is guided by six core values: reliability, excellence, determination, integrity, collaboration, and leadership.



The Opportunity

The **Chief Development Officer (CDO)** will serve as the organization's senior fundraising executive and strategic leader, responsible for advancing a comprehensive development program and ultimately planning and directing a \$100 million capital campaign. Reporting to the President and Chief Executive Officer and serving on the executive leadership team, the CDO will provide strategic oversight for fundraising, donor engagement, campaign management, philanthropic partnerships, and advancement initiatives.

Responsibilities include:

- Lead the planning and execution of a multi-phase fundraising campaign to secure transformational investments.
- Advance the organization's mission, expand organizational capacity, and strengthen long-term sustainability through philanthropy.
- Partner closely with the Board of Directors, campaign volunteers, donors, foundations, corporations, and community leaders.
- Foster and promote a strong culture of philanthropy across the organization.
- Position the organization for continued growth, visibility, and community impact.
- Secure principle and major gifts from individuals, foundation, and corporate donors.
- Lead complex capital and comprehensive fundraising campaigns.
- Build, manage, and strengthen high-performing advancement and fundraising programs.
- Leverage philanthropic, corporate, and community networks to expand fundraising opportunities.
- Cultivate strategic partnerships that support organizational goals and funding priorities.
- Identify, engage, and attract new donors and investors capable of making transformational contributions.
- Serve as the organization's chief ambassador for philanthropy and donor engagement.
- Develop and implement fundraising strategies that increase philanthropic investment.
- Strengthen donor relationships, engagement, stewardship, and long-term loyalty.
- Management and supervision of the development team, including the Associate Director of Fundraising.
- Advance the organization's vision and mission through effective fundraising leadership and external relationship management.



The Opportunities

The **Chief Development Officer (CDO)** will have the chance to capitalize on the major opportunities below to grow support for the Student Freedom Initiative's mission.

Opportunities:

- Elimination of the Graduate PLUS program, effective July 1, 2026, creating a demand for the Graduate Student Freedom Loan (GSFL).
- Increased student financial need resulting from federal student loan borrowing limits, combined with barriers to accessing Parent PLUS and private education loans, including co-signer requirements, origination fees, credit score criteria, and higher annual percentage rates (APRs).
- Direct correlation between the Graduate Student Freedom Loan (GSFL) and health outcomes in its pilot program (Doctors of Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, and Veterinary Medicine).
- The potential ability of select financial institutions to leverage CRA credits to fund elements of the SFI program(s).
- The implementation and use of standardized infrastructure (Salesforce, Power BI, Instrumentl, SharePoint) to research, collect, store, aggregate, and present program outcome data that resonates with donor segments.



The Candidate

Experience and qualifications:

- Extensive progressive fundraising, advancement, or development leadership experience, preferably in a nonprofit, higher education, mission-driven, or campaign-intensive environment.
- Demonstrated record of securing principal and major gifts, managing complex donor relationships, leading large-scale campaigns, and building high-performing advancement programs.
- Demonstrated ability to steward, deepen, and grow donor relationships across multiple segments while developing new sources of philanthropic investment.
- Ability to engage and inspire transformational donors around ambitious mission, impact, and campaign goals.
- An established network of philanthropic, corporate, foundation, family office, and community relationships relevant to SFI's mission and growth strategy.
- Executive presence, strong communication, and sound judgment.
- Team leadership, including cross-functional collaboration.
- Operational rigor and execution excellence.
- Investment in and alignment with SFI's mission.

Preferred Skills and Competences:

- Strategic thinking and financial acumen as a fundraiser.
- Experience leading complex capital/comprehensive funding campaigns.



Application Link:

<https://driwaterstonehc.com/position/student-freedom-initiative/>

Salary: \$200,000

Location: Washington, DC

Equal-opportunity Employer

Student Freedom Initiative is an equal opportunity employer and is committed to diversity and inclusion in the workplace. We prohibit discrimination and harassment of any kind based on race, color, sex, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, genetic information, pregnancy, or any other protected characteristic as outlined by federal, state, or local laws.

DRiWaterstone has been exclusively retained for this engagement. All first-round interviews for this position will take place via video conference with DRiWaterstone.

About DRiWaterstone

DRiWaterstone is a boutique executive search firm recognized by Forbes magazine as one of the leading executive recruiting firms in the U.S. With a focus on purpose and mission-driven organizations, we provide executive search and strategic consulting services to help regional, national, and international clients grow, thrive, and excel.