

Position: **Director, Policy-Aligned Research Agenda Building Lab**

Organization: Boston University, Wheelock Educational Policy Center

Anticipated Start Date: January 1, 2026

Term: Three years, with continued commitment contingent upon additional funding

Location: Boston-based hybrid preferred, fully remote considered for right candidate

Salary Range: \$110,000 – 130,000

Apply at: <https://jobs.silkroad.com/BU/External/jobs/316226>

The Wheelock Educational Policy Center at Boston University seeks an entrepreneurial, research-minded, experienced policymaker to serve as the founding director of the Policy-Aligned Research Agenda Building Lab (PARABL). Working closely with WEPC's Executive Director, the director of PARABL will play a crucial role in launching this new initiative and building the systems, protocols and structures to ensure success, scale and sustainability of the vision. The director will have organizational-level impact, shaping WEPC's strategic direction and institutional reputation as PARABL becomes a signature initiative. This role is critical to establishing BU Wheelock as a national leader in bridging the research-policy divide in education. This senior leadership position reports to the Executive Director and will serve as a key member of WEPC's leadership team, contributing to center-wide strategic planning and decision-making.

The Initiative: PARABL

PARABL works directly with education systems leaders (e.g., state chiefs, governors' offices, CEOs of non-profits) to build a roadmap of research questions that are strategically aligned with the pursuit of large-scale systems change in a particular area. This is not program-specific continuous improvement or implementation evaluation research; a policy-aligned research agenda is a strategic tool intended to help policymakers:

1. Make the case for change
2. Know when and how to pivot
3. Solve the right problem
4. Advocate for and/or protect resources
5. Build a solutions-focused narrative

Through the model at PARABL, the BU Wheelock Educational Policy Center team works closely with organization leaders to 1) set a clear purpose for a policy-aligned research agenda, 2) facilitate strategic conversations with and between research scholars and policy experts, 3) assess the feasibility, data viability and costs associated with various approaches and then 3) works to facilitate matches between the client organization and individuals/entities best positioned to carry out the envisioned research.

A research agenda produced through PARABL is a roadmap designed to support policymakers in key decision-making over the long-term of a change effort. It does not guarantee specific results and will require leaders to look hard at data and wrestle with findings. It also holds the most promise for ensuring the necessary backing needed to build momentum for change, focus the conversation, and advocate effectively for scale and sustainability.

The Role: Founding Director

Through our existing partnerships and projects at the Wheelock Educational Policy Center, we have developed various protocols, tools, and examples that serve as proof points of PARABL's potential. We seek a director who will build on this foundation and will: 1) create the routines, processes and systems needed to efficiently, effectively and sustainably operationalize the PARABL model; 2) oversee and serve as lead facilitator of PARABL with client organizations; and 3) lead efforts nationally to generate interest and demand for PARABL. To be successful in this role, we anticipate the ideal candidate:

- **Has experience in a policy-making role** where they were responsible for consequential systems-level decisions. We want someone who understands first-hand the tensions, trade-offs and timelines of choices and strategy in a policy context.
- **Is an expert facilitator, integrator and entrepreneurial innovator.** Each research agenda produced through PARABL will likely look different from the next, we want someone who can plan for and facilitate discussions across policy and research and then produce something (likely that there is no model for) that resonates with both.
- **Has a strong research-orientation** and be able to point to examples of how they have used data and/or research in their own decision-making. With PARABL, we leverage the expertise of researchers in our network and need someone who *values* that knowledge and skill even if they themselves do may not have research training.
- **Is a strategic thinker who gets things done.** We want someone that can see the forest for the trees and simultaneously build a project plan and deliver on dates and details. Especially, in the early build out of PARABL there will be a lot of individual-contributor type work.

Core Responsibilities:

Building and Refining the PARABL Model (40%)

- Design, document, and continuously refine standardized processes, tools, protocols, and templates for policy-aligned research agenda development; adapt model components to serve diverse client contexts and create scalable resources for future growth
- Develop quality assurance mechanisms and metrics to evaluate PARABL's effectiveness and impact; build internal knowledge management systems to capture learnings and best practices
- Establish systems for matching client needs with appropriate researchers and research entities



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- Develop and manage revenue systems, fee-for-service structures, and PARABL operational budget with authority to allocate resources, approve expenditures, forecast revenue, and ensure financial sustainability

External Engagement and Facilitation (35%)

- Serve as lead facilitator and strategic advisor to education leaders developing policy-aligned research agendas; develop vetting process for client fit and conduct needs assessments
- Design and facilitate convenings that bridge policy and research communities; assess feasibility, data availability, and resource requirements for proposed research approaches
- Lead cross-functional collaboration with BU faculty, WEPC research staff, and external research partners; manage project timelines, deliverables, and client relationships to ensure high-quality outcomes
- Exercise independent judgment in complex, ambiguous situations including determining client fit and engagement scope, navigating competing stakeholder priorities, adapting methodology when standard approaches don't apply, and making strategic pivots based on incomplete information
- Build capacity to scale PARABL by recruiting, training, and supervising additional facilitators and project staff; manage performance and professional development of direct reports

Strategic Outreach and Partnership Development (25%)

- Cultivate relationships with education systems leaders, state chiefs, governors' offices, funders, and nonprofit leaders; develop and execute strategic engagement plan to build pipeline of prospective clients
- Represent PARABL at national conferences, convenings, and forums to build visibility and credibility
- Build and maintain partnerships with research institutions, individual scholars, and evaluation firms; identify opportunities to innovate and expand PARABL's approach in an evolving research ecosystem
- Collaborate with WEPC Executive Director to identify and develop funding opportunities; take lead responsibility for articulating PARABL's value proposition through communications materials, case examples, and thought leadership content

Required Qualifications

- Minimum 5 years of professional experience, including at least 3 years in a policy-making role in education or related public sector domain with demonstrated responsibility for systems-level decisions and strategy
- Proven facilitation and project management skills, including ability to convene diverse stakeholders, navigate complex conversations, build consensus, and manage timelines, budgets, and multiple workstreams simultaneously



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- Strong track record of using data and research to inform decision-making, with ability to translate research findings into actionable policy insights
- Excellent written and oral communication skills, with ability to communicate complex ideas clearly to diverse audiences
- Entrepreneurial mindset and comfort with ambiguity, including experience building new programs, processes, or initiatives

Preferred Qualifications:

- Senior leadership experience in a state education agency, governor's office, or large education-focused nonprofit (e.g., deputy commissioner, chief of staff, policy director)
- Direct experience commissioning, overseeing, or partnering with researchers to conduct evaluation or policy research; familiarity with research methodologies (especially quasi-experimental methods) and ability to assess research design quality
- Experience in multiple policy contexts or states; knowledge of current education policy landscape, including major reform efforts, funding mechanisms, and key national organizations
- National networks and relationships with education leaders, researchers, or intermediary organizations; experience presenting at national conferences or writing for publication
- Background in change management or strategic planning in complex organizational environments; grant writing or fundraising experience

The Wheelock Educational Policy Center

The Boston University Wheelock Educational Policy Center (WEPC) exists to empower education leaders with the evidence and insights they need to make better decisions for kids. We focus on conducting and disseminating rigorous and policy relevant research that is context-specific, systems-focused and that unlocks actionable unknowns from large-scale, longitudinal administrative data. Leveraging the expertise of our faculty in both the economics of education and domain-specific content areas like special education, our research has inspired policy action on a number of fronts, including: charters and school choice; teacher recruitment, hiring, evaluation and retention; rigorous coursework and high-standards for the teaching of reading; as well as the services and supports in place for English Learners and students with disabilities. We conduct this research within the context of authentic partnerships maintained by experienced policy leaders who ensure that the work remains grounded in real-world policy and practice. Our unique high-touch approach in facilitating partnerships – jointly developing the research agenda; monthly touch-point meetings; co-constructing implications and next steps – as well as deep networks with other policy and advocacy organizations ensures that our research reaches and informs decision-makers working on all aspects of policy – from legislation to implementation.



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WEPC launched in early 2021 as a key component in Boston University's Wheelock College of Education and Human Development guidestar commitment to "transform the systems that impact learning and human development for a thriving, sustainable, and just future in Boston and beyond." Over the last five years, WEPC has expanded the reach and depth of our partnerships both here in Massachusetts and nationally and now operate robust research agendas across seven different state education agencies and large urban districts. These partnerships have been highly productive; producing more than 30 academic working papers, at least three direct-line policy changes and resulted in media coverage from high-profile outlets including the New York Times, Washington Post, Boston Globe, The 74 Million, and CBS Evening News. In 2022 and 2023 WEPC's research was featured in the 74 Million's annual "Charts that Changed the Way we Look at Education" lists.

More information about the work at the Wheelock Educational Policy Center can be found at:

<https://wheelockpolicycenter.org>

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