

South Dakota Defense Institute (SDDI)

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

Location: Rapid City, SD

Position Summary

The Chief Executive Officer is the senior executive responsible for building and positioning SDDI as South Dakota's primary catalyst for defense-sector growth. This entrepreneurial leader will expand the state's defense industrial base by attracting federal defense work and investment, recruiting and growing defense-related companies, commercializing technology, and creating high-value jobs.

The CEO should bring strong business acumen, preferably demonstrated through successfully creating and/or scaling a company, market, or industry cluster. Military leadership experience or substantial experience working with the Department of War or defense industrial base is also preferred. The CEO will identify a focused set of areas where South Dakota can establish a distinctive national position and convert that strategy into measurable results, leveraging assets such as Ellsworth Air Force Base, open terrain, a business-friendly environment, and the state's university and technical-school system.

Essential Duties and Responsibilities

- Develop and execute SDDI's strategic vision, annual operating plan, and defense-industry growth strategy; assess South Dakota's capabilities, competitive advantages, market gaps, and emerging federal defense priorities.
- Identify defense and national security sectors where South Dakota can establish a competitive position, including opportunities such as unmanned and autonomous systems, high-altitude platforms, cybersecurity, advanced manufacturing, testing and evaluation, and other emerging capabilities.
- Make business development a central function by maintaining a qualified pipeline of federal opportunities, defense companies, investment prospects, expansion projects, and strategic partnerships.
- Secure funding for SDDI and help partner organizations pursue federal contracts, grants, cooperative agreements, research funding, and other investment; recruit defense-related companies and help existing South Dakota businesses enter or expand within the defense supply chain.
- Build relationships with the Department of War, military installations, prime contractors, federal program offices, laboratories, investors, research institutions, elected officials, economic-development organizations, universities, technical colleges, and other key partners.
- Advance technology commercialization by connecting university, military, private-sector, and entrepreneurial technologies with testing, validation, customers, capital, federal programs, and commercialization resources.
- Work with partners to identify and advance the infrastructure, workforce, regulatory, capital, and partnership requirements needed to establish new defense capabilities, facilities, testing environments, production capacity, and industry clusters in South Dakota.
- Serve as SDDI's primary spokesperson and advocate; represent the organization at federal, military, industry, legislative, economic development, and technology meetings and advocate for policies and investments that strengthen South Dakota's competitiveness.
- Strengthen the defense workforce and industry ecosystem by aligning employer needs with education and workforce organizations; maintain an assessment of the state's defense industrial base, supply chain, workforce, research assets, and growth opportunities.
- Build SDDI's organizational capacity, staff, systems, and culture; oversee the budget and fiscal controls; and diversify sustainable revenue through grants, contracts, sponsorships, partnerships, and private support.

- Work closely with the Board of Directors to establish priorities and measurable goals, provide transparent financial and performance reporting, and clearly distinguish organizational activity from measurable outcomes.

Qualifications

Required

- Bachelor's degree in business, economics, engineering, public administration, military studies, technology, economic development, or a related field or equivalent relevant professional experience.
- At least 10 years of progressively responsible leadership experience with significant responsibility for business development, market development, organizational growth, or economic development.
- Demonstrated success building or scaling a company, business unit, market, industry cluster, commercialization initiative, economic development effort, or military organization or program, with measurable results in business growth, federal contracting, investment attraction, resource acquisition, or mission execution.
- Strong business development, financial management, team leadership, strategic partnership, communication, presentation, and relationship-building skills, with experience working across government, private industry, economic development, research, or defense-related organizations, including direct responsibility for budgets, people, and execution.
- Willingness to reside in or relocate to the Rapid City, South Dakota area.
- Ability and willingness to travel extensively throughout South Dakota, nationally, and internationally.

Preferred

- Master's degree in a related field.
- Military service or substantial experience with the Department of War, military services, or defense industrial base.
- Experience with federal acquisition, defense procurement, grants and contracts, technology commercialization, startup development, company recruitment, advanced manufacturing, industry clusters, or university-industry partnerships.
- Experience working with a board of directors and supporting effective governance.
- TS-SCI Clearance Eligible.

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

- Entrepreneurial leadership, business development discipline, strategic market analysis, negotiation, and the ability to prioritize opportunities and convert them into executed projects.
- Understanding of the defense industrial base, federal funding and acquisition environment, and the business, workforce, technology, and infrastructure factors that drive industry growth.
- Strong financial and organizational acumen, political awareness, diplomacy, integrity, sound judgment, and the ability to align diverse stakeholders around shared priorities and commitments and move them from discussion to execution.

Performance Expectations

The CEO will be evaluated against Board-approved annual targets and multi-year strategic objectives emphasizing measurable economic and defense-industry outcomes, including:

- Federal defense and national-security dollars secured; contracts, grants, cooperative agreements, and funded projects won or materially advanced.
- Defense-related companies recruited or expanded, South Dakota companies entering the defense supply chain, high-value jobs created or retained, and private capital investment attracted with a documented contribution from SDDI.

- Technologies commercialized or advanced toward federal adoption and new defense capabilities, facilities, testing environments, production capacity, or industry clusters established with a documented contribution from SDDI.
- A qualified business-development pipeline converted into executed projects, growth of SDDI's sustainable revenue base, organizational financial health, and achievement of Board-approved milestones.

Reporting Relationship and Compensation

- The CEO reports directly to the SDDI Board of Directors and is responsible for implementing Board-approved policies, strategic priorities, and performance objectives. Within Board-approved policies and budget, the CEO has day-to-day responsibility for SDDI's operations and staff.
- Compensation: SDDI offers a competitive executive compensation package, with an anticipated base salary of \$150,000 - \$200,000; depending on the successful candidate's experience, qualifications, and demonstrated leadership capabilities.
- Submit a resume and letter of interest highlighting relevant leadership experience and measurable results to Admin@SDDI.us. For best consideration, please submit application by October 15, 2026. The posting will remain open until filled.