

VISITATION ACADEMY

CHIEF ADVANCEMENT OFFICER

Start Date: July 2027

Visitation Academy

St. Louis, Missouri | visitationacademy.org

Carney Sandoe & Associates

MISSION STATEMENT

Visitation Academy is a community that exists to educate children and young women and to receive and share Jesus as Mary did in her visitation to Elizabeth.

In an environment which values excellence in scholarship, spirituality, leadership, and service, this Visitation Community encourages students to develop their unique gifts.

As students learn to “Live Jesus” with gentleness, humility, joy, and freedom, they are prepared to continue to grow and to respond to others, the Church, and the global community.

At a Glance

1833
established

608
total enrollment

15%
students of color

88
total faculty and staff

76%
faculty with advanced degrees

7:1
student-faculty ratio



OVERVIEW

Founded in 1833, Visitation Academy is an independent Catholic school in St. Louis, Missouri, sponsored by the Visitation Sisters and rooted in the spirituality of St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane de Chantal. The Academy enrolls 608 students across a coeducational Montessori program for Toddlers through Kindergarten and an all-girls program for Grades 1–12, spanning Lower, Middle, and Upper Schools. Grounded in the Salesian Little Virtues of gentleness, humility, joy, and freedom, Visitation seeks to educate young people to “Live Jesus” through lives of faith, leadership, service, and intellectual curiosity.





With strong enrollment, growing philanthropic support, and significant investment in programs and facilities, Visitation is entering an important period of institutional momentum. Recent milestones include the successful completion of the $17.5 million Spirit of Annecy Campaign, the opening of a new Middle School, and the expansion of Fellowships and experiential learning opportunities. Enrollment is growing in both the Lower School and the Middle School, tuition assistance is well funded, and the Academy's endowment stands at $42 million. From the preschool Montessori program through the Upper School, " Be who you are and be that well that you may give glory to the Divine Artist whose handiwork you are" drives Visitation Academy's academic and spiritual philosophy. Visitation Academy is *"a private Catholic school where students thrive in an environment that allows them to BE: challenged academically, stimulated creatively, encouraged athletically, inspired personally, supported emotionally, filled spiritually, and appreciated and loved for their unique, authentic selves."*

Now, Visitation Academy seeks an accomplished, strategic, and highly relational leader to serve as its next Chief Advancement Officer at a moment of opportunity and renewed institutional momentum. Building on the success of the Spirit of Annecy Campaign, significant investments in its academic programs and facilities, and a deeply committed community, the Academy is ready to advance an ambitious philanthropic agenda. Reporting directly to the Head of School, and serving on the senior leadership team, the CAO will provide vision and direction for fundraising, marketing and communications, and constituent engagement, working closely with trustees, school leaders, parents, and alumnae. The next CAO will inherit a capable and dedicated team and will be expected to lead by example as a visible, energetic fundraiser and ambassador. The opportunity calls for a leader who can pair sophisticated advancement practices and sound financial judgment with a deep appreciation for Visitation's Catholic and Salesian mission, its traditions, and the enduring relationships that distinguish its community.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Visitation Academy's next Chief Advancement Officer will arrive at an important moment of institutional strength and possibility. The successful $17.5 million Spirit of Annecy Campaign and recent investments in the student experience have demonstrated the community's generosity and confidence in the Academy's future. At the same time, significant priorities remain, including improvements to the Upper School, Chapel, athletic facilities, and other campus infrastructure, as well as continued endowment growth. The next CAO will work with the Head of School and trustees to clarify and sequence these priorities, build a persuasive case for support, and prepare the Academy for its next major fundraising initiative. Success will require a leader who can turn broad institutional aspirations into an actionable philanthropic strategy and who is comfortable personally cultivating and soliciting significant gifts.

The next CAO will inherit a talented, collaborative advancement team whose members value mutual trust, professional independence, and a supportive working environment. Preserving these strengths while encouraging thoughtful change will be essential. The Academy seeks a leader who can strengthen the discipline and reach of major-gift fundraising; establish clear prospect identification, portfolio management, solicitation, and stewardship practices; and use data and technology to inform decisions and measure progress. Annual giving and signature community events provide an important base of support, while planned giving and deeper engagement of alumnae, including younger graduates, offer meaningful opportunities for growth. The CAO will assess the alignment of staffing and resources with these ambitions, champion professional development, and create a shared understanding of priorities and accountability across the department.



A further opportunity is to connect Visitation's compelling educational story more closely with enrollment, constituent engagement, and philanthropy. Its Catholic and Salesian traditions, commitment to educating girls, strong academic program, and distinctive sense of family offer a powerful foundation for outreach. In a competitive St. Louis school environment, the CAO will work with Admissions and other colleagues to continue to develop a proactive and integrated approach to marketing, communications, and community relations. Parents and alumnae are eager for clear communication about institutional goals, transparent decision-making, and meaningful opportunities to participate. The successful candidate will listen carefully to this community while introducing fresh ideas and helping communicate the impact of philanthropy with clarity, warmth, and conviction.

The role also offers an opportunity to deepen the partnership between advancement leadership, the Head of School, and the Board of Trustees. With a reenergized Advancement Committee and evolving leadership across the Academy, the next CAO will help clarify volunteer roles, strengthen trustee engagement in fundraising, and bring financial fluency and sound judgment to conversations about priorities and resources. The Head of School values capable colleagues who take ownership of their work, exercise initiative, and translate ideas into results. The CAO must therefore be a confident and independent strategic partner as well as a collaborative colleague who earns trust, communicates openly, and implements change with sensitivity to the Academy's culture.

Above all, Visitation seeks an unapologetic fundraiser who is also a gracious, authentic, and approachable community leader. The successful candidate will enjoy meeting people, asking for support, celebrating the Academy's mission, and being a visible presence at school events and throughout the St. Louis community. The ability to embrace the spirit of Salesian leadership, respect the contributions of a long-serving predecessor, and empower a dedicated team will be as important as technical fundraising expertise. For a leader who brings energy, imagination, and a genuine belief in the transformative power of girls' education, this is a distinctive opportunity to help guide Visitation into its next chapter.

Experience in independent schools, Catholic or other faith-based education, higher education, healthcare, or sophisticated nonprofit organizations is desirable. Candidates who bring substantial fundraising leadership, campaign experience, and an authentic commitment to Visitation's mission are encouraged to apply.



$1.8M
financial aid awarded

25%
students receiving aid

$42M
endowment

$16M
annual operating budget

31 acres
campus size

QUALIFICATIONS AND PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES



Professional Qualifications

- Significant, progressively responsible experience in advancement and fundraising, including senior-level leadership within an independent school, college or university, or comparable nonprofit institution. Experience in Catholic or other faith-based education is highly desirable.
- Demonstrated success in cultivating, soliciting, and securing major and principal gifts, with the confidence and experience to serve as a lead fundraiser and to engage institutional leadership and trustees in significant philanthropic relationships.
- Substantial experience in capital or comprehensive campaigns, including campaign planning, major-gift strategy, volunteer engagement, and the development of compelling cases for support.
- Proven ability to strengthen annual giving, expand donor participation, and build a sustainable pipeline of philanthropic support through effective prospect identification, cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship.
- Experience developing and implementing strategies for alumnae engagement, including cultivating meaningful relationships across generations and encouraging a lifelong commitment to the institution.
- Familiarity with planned giving, endowment fundraising, and contemporary charitable giving vehicles and strategies, including donor-advised funds and deferred gifts.
- Demonstrated success leading, mentoring, and developing advancement professionals, with the ability to establish clear priorities, delegate effectively, evaluate staffing needs, and foster accountability and professional growth.
- Strong strategic planning, financial management, and analytical skills, including experience developing budgets, setting ambitious but achievable fundraising goals, assessing performance, and using data to guide decision-making.
- Thorough understanding of contemporary advancement practices and technology, including constituent relationship management systems, prospect research, portfolio management, moves management, and donor stewardship.
- Experience working collaboratively with marketing and communications professionals to articulate a compelling institutional narrative, strengthen constituent engagement, and communicate philanthropic priorities effectively.
- Demonstrated ability to partner effectively with a Head of School or comparable institutional leader, Board of Trustees, and advancement committees, including supporting volunteer leadership and helping establish clear fundraising priorities and responsibilities.
- Excellent written, verbal, and interpersonal communication skills, with the ability to represent the School persuasively and authentically to donors, alumnae, parents, trustees, and the wider community.
- An understanding of the competitive independent school environment in St. Louis and the relationship between advancement, enrollment, institutional reputation, and long-term financial sustainability.



Personal Attributes

- **Mission-centered and values-driven:** A leader who understands, embraces, and can compellingly articulate Visitation's Catholic identity, Salesian charism, and commitment to educating young women.
- **An accomplished and enthusiastic fundraiser:** A confident, energetic, and persistent relationship builder who genuinely enjoys engaging prospective donors, making the case for philanthropy, and asking for significant gifts.
- **Strategic and forward-thinking:** An institutional thinker who can envision new possibilities, establish clear priorities, and translate ambitious ideas into thoughtful, actionable plans.
- **Innovative and open-minded:** A creative professional who brings fresh perspectives, questions established practices constructively, and is willing to explore new approaches while respecting the School's traditions and culture.
- **Confident and self-directed:** A proactive leader who exercises sound judgment, takes ownership of responsibilities, and has the initiative and organizational discipline to move important projects forward.
- **Collaborative and empowering:** A generous colleague and effective manager who trusts and respects the expertise of others, encourages shared problem-solving, and creates opportunities for staff members to grow and succeed.
- **Emotionally intelligent and relational:** A perceptive, approachable, and engaging individual who listens carefully, understands differing perspectives, and builds authentic, lasting relationships across the School community.
- **An exceptional communicator:** A persuasive and articulate ambassador who can tell Visitation's story with clarity, warmth, and conviction while communicating openly and transparently with colleagues and constituents.
- **Diplomatic and courageous:** A leader who can introduce change thoughtfully, navigate complex institutional relationships, and address difficult questions with sensitivity, confidence, and integrity.
- **Respectful of tradition and eager for progress:** Someone who appreciates Visitation's distinctive history and deeply rooted sense of community while recognizing the opportunities presented by new leadership and evolving institutional aspirations.
- **Visible and community-minded:** An enthusiastic participant in school life who enjoys connecting with students, faculty, parents, alumnae, and volunteers and understands that meaningful philanthropy grows from genuine relationships.
- **Warm, gracious, and grounded:** A leader whose humility, kindness, good humor, and personal authenticity are complemented by high standards, professional ambition, and a strong commitment to results.
- **A trusted strategic partner:** A thoughtful, capable colleague who can establish a productive relationship with the Head of School, work confidently with trustees, and contribute meaningfully to the School's broader institutional leadership.

LEARN MORE

- School Website
- School History
- School Profile
- About St. Louis, Missouri





TO APPLY

Interested and qualified candidates are invited to contact the consultants in confidence. Candidates will ultimately need to submit the following materials as separate PDF documents:

- A cover letter expressing their interest in this particular position;
- A current résumé;
- A list of five professional references with name, relationship, phone number, and email address of each (references will not be contacted without the candidate's permission) to:

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Carney Sandoe & ASSOCIATES