



The Shirley Proctor Puller Foundation

Academic Officer Position Announcement November 2025

THE OPPORTUNITY

The Shirley Proctor Puller Foundation is seeking an Academic Officer to serve as its senior academic leader. The next Academic Officer will build upon ten years of success in advancing literacy in the at-risk community of South St. Petersburg and ensure that we maintain high quality, technology-enabled, and results-focused educational programming as we prepare to expand to serve between 400 and 500 unique scholars annually by 2030.

ABOUT THE SHIRLEY PROCTOR PULLER FOUNDATION (SPPF):

The Shirley Proctor Puller Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization with a focus on literacy, leadership and workforce readiness. Our mission is to advance reading, math, and science literacy, helping to close the achievement gap for scholars in the at-risk community of South St. Petersburg, FL. We believe that improving academic achievement helps to break the cycle of generational poverty and enhance economic mobility. Our vision is to change the trajectory of South St. Pete residents by preparing our scholars to compete for careers which provide an opportunity for self-fulfillment and the earning power to sustain their families.

SPPF provides direct educational interventions to scholars from kindergarten through 10th grade. The organization leverages a unique model which relies heavily on regular assessments, certified teachers, and research-based curriculum to advance scholars toward grade level performance.

The SPPF M.A.S.T.R. Kids® (Math, Art, Science, Technology, Reading) Program launched in 2016 as a summer camp designed to reduce summer learning loss, the first in the community to focus on academic enrichment at a low cost for families. Community listening led SPPF to two important differentiators: 1) certified teachers and 2) rigorous outcome measurement. By 2020, SPPF had enough positive outcome data to secure funding for an afterschool session, accelerating achievement gains for scholars. By 2021, SPPF had proven to be adaptable and resilient, with the academic model generating success despite COVID. Community demand grew, funders noticed, and SPPF expanded to a 2nd site. In 2023, SPPF launched the High School M.A.S.T.R. Plan Program to address lower rates of high school graduation in the community. In 2025, again prompted by demand and funder support, SPPF opened a 3rd site. Today, we serve nearly 300 students annually from more than 20 community schools. More than 85% of the scholars served are from low-income households.

Data and measurement are key differentiators for SPPF which have allowed the organization to demonstrate a high level of success and continuous improvement. During the last academic year, 73% of year-round scholars were reading on grade level in July '25 vs. 29% in August '24. 94% of scholars attending our summer program avoided the summer slide with 72% of scholars actually improving their reading performance.

All members of the SPPF team have passion for the mission as well as a desire to develop holistic solutions that create success for children and families in the community. Our culture



The Shirley Proctor Puller Foundation

requires a level of sensitivity that comes with serving an at-risk population which has developed a healthy distrust of all things viewed as a part of “the system.” A significant majority of the community residents, hence the scholars and families served, are African Americans.

POSITION SUMMARY

The Academic Officer is the senior academic leader of SPPF and reports to the Chief Executive Officer. This leader is responsible for ensuring that our academic model is articulated, implemented and regularly tested and improved to accelerate learning for all scholars, moving them to grade level in reading, math, and science and preparing them for the careers of the future.

The Academic Officer is responsible for hiring, leading, and developing 40 – 50 academic staff members across three sites. As the academic staff represents the largest group of employees, the Academic Officer is a significant contributor to overall program quality and culture.

The Academic Officer serves as a member of the Executive and Leadership Teams, is the liaison to the Board’s Education Committee and is the primary representative of SPPF in many interactions with the Pinellas County School District and community organizations where best practices are shared.

The position is based in St. Petersburg, Florida. It is a full-time role requiring that a majority of time is spent on-site or in the community. The role requires the demonstrated ability to build trust and relationships in an economically and culturally similar community.

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES

Strategic Vision and Academic Leadership

- Collaborate with Executive Team Colleagues and Board Members to develop and deliver the 5-year Strategic Plan.
- Continuously reinforce program mission, vision, core values and desired outcomes as well as the necessary role of processes and protocols for everyday use.

Program Development & Implementation

- Oversee the design, delivery, and evaluation of academic programming, ensuring it is responsive and aligned with the needs of the scholars we serve.
- Collaborate with the data team to monitor and improve outcomes at the individual, ability group, teacher, site, and organizational level using data-driven practices and continuous feedback loops.
- Complete academic program planning in advance of each session:
 - Both -- Assign Ability Groups (AG) for teachers and assistants; Ensure teachers have reviewed all student profiles before the start of session and are prepared to manage each scholar appropriately; Ensure workplans are in-place for each AG to advance learning; Select and procure curriculum and train teachers as needed (Reading, Math, and STEM); Assign scholars to Reading Specialists; Create



The Shirley Proctor Puller Foundation

opportunities with Site Operations for site staff to get to know each other with a special eye to ensuring Site Directors understand different teaching styles.

- Summer: select and schedule field trips ensuring as many as possible are approved by the Juvenile Welfare Board to optimize funding; select extracurricular activities and secure vendors; schedule swimming with Parks and Recreation Department; work with Site Operations to develop transportation schedule for activities.
- Work with Lead Teacher(s) to monitor classrooms and provide positive productive feedback aimed at ensuring culture and accelerating learning. Create opportunities for collective learning for the teaching staff and to develop and leverage a library of SPPF best practices for accelerating the learning of scholars.
- Ensure professional training, development and rewards/recognition plans are in place for all teachers and assistants to ensure they are happy, growing, and high performing.
- Collaborate constantly with Site Operations leadership to create an optimal environment for scholars and staff. This is a key differentiator for SPPF.
 - Enable consistency in learning; a safe, welcoming atmosphere, high on love and expectations for success without intense competition or pressure.
 - Support the Operations team in facilitating efficient/orderly movement of scholars between schools and SPPF locations, between classrooms/activities throughout the day, and the transition from school to home.
- Work with key health and wellness partners to ensure positive mental health practices for scholars and staff.
- Ensure compliance with grant requirements and funding agency standards.

External Relations

- Collaborate with Pinellas County Schools to strengthen our partnership with Transformation Zone (TZ) Schools:
 - On-site meetings to recruit from TZ schools – principals, teachers, parents
 - Combined training and/or best practice sharing
 - Data sharing
- Strengthen partnerships with community organizations with a goal of sharing best practices around literacy (e.g. The Juvenile Welfare Board sponsored Out of School Time and Grade Level Reading Campaign) and strengthening families.

Family Support

- Support families in advocating for scholars as needed for special services including learning assessments, ESE plans, mental health diagnostics and support programs.
- Support Site Leadership and Family Liaison to build relationships with families that enable SPPF to support the needs of the whole child.

Operations & Finance

- Facilitate success with licensing by ensuring all Teacher Certifications are up to date, and Assistant transcripts reflect required courses.



The Shirley Proctor Puller Foundation

- Effectively manage the academic budget with assistance from the COO.

POSITION QUALIFICATIONS

- Master's degree in education or other area with Certification in education
- 10+ years professional experience in elementary education
- Demonstrated success in:
 - Developing, implementing and evaluating academic programming;
 - Building relationships with community partners, parents, and other caregivers; and
 - Training and developing academic staff.

DESIRED SKILLS/TRAITS

- Servant Leadership, defined as a leader whose primary goal is to serve others, focusing on the needs, growth, and well-being of team members and the community rather than their own power or ambition, is imperative in this work and especially in this community.
- Strong relationship building, sometimes including followership, is required across the SPPF ecosystem to further our implementations and success.
- Superior communication skills including listening, positive inquiry, written, and verbal communication suitable for a matrixed environment.
- Ability to thrive in a fast-paced, highly collaborative environment with a high-volume workload often requiring prioritization, delegation, and short turnaround times
- Solid technology skills as exemplified by the use of Microsoft 365 (Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Teams, and SharePoint) tools.
- Proficiency in using data use for program evaluation and action/improvement planning
- Ability to learn and leverage key digital tools for ease of data collection, monitoring and communication (e.g. ProCare, i-Ready, Salesforce, Dashboards or other such tools).
- Ability to easily switch between a hands-on and strategic orientation.
- Positive, optimistic, demeanor which exudes respect and inclusiveness.
- Exceptional organization and project management skills and multitasking ability.
- Flexibility in managing across many personalities.

Must pass a Level 2 DCF Background check and demonstrate legal authorization to work in the United States. Ability to accommodate a flexible work schedule during strategic periods of the year including weeknights, weekends and participation at key events.

SALARY & BENEFITS:

- The starting salary range is \$85,000 - \$90,000
- Flexible, family-friendly schedule
- Paid holidays, vacation, sick and personal days
- 401K savings plan with a 2% company match



The Shirley Proctor Puller Foundation

- Health insurance allowance through an Individual Coverage Health Reimbursement Arrangement (ICHRA)

HOW TO APPLY:

Application submissions will be reviewed beginning the week of November 17, 2025. Our timeline for onboarding the Academic Officer is no later than February 2026.

To be considered for this opportunity, please submit your cover letter and resume in one document to Dr. Phildra Swagger, phildra.swagger@sppf.org.