



2025 Executive Board Election Candidate

Vice President for Professional Development

Name: Natalie Smith

Title: College Counselor

Institution: TASIS England

Location/Region: United Kingdom/Europe

Member Group: Secondary

Applicant Questions

Explain your motivation for pursuing a leadership role with International ACAC as well as why this position in particular. Highlight how your leadership experience and involvement with the organization make you a strong fit for the role.

International ACAC has provided me with such abundance; an abundance of learning opportunities through webinars and the newsletter, an abundance of joy in the networking I have participated in at conferences, and an abundance of opportunities to learn skills and share information that progresses me throughout my career, that ultimately helps the students I support. Of all of my professional affiliations, I feel International ACAC has given me the most, and when one feels appreciated, it's easy to want to give back. Having only officially been in College Counseling for five years, the myriad of knowledge I have gained as a direct result of being a member encouraged me to run for the VP of Professional Development.

Professional development has the ability to transform lives. As someone who once participated in the NACAC Pre-Conference Institute on Leading a Dynamic College Counseling Office, having had no experience in the field, it provided me with the tools and helped develop my confidence to move out of my comfort zone and transition into a field I was passionate about. PD has changed my life.

As a member of International ACAC, I have taken advantage of Webinar Wednesdays, and have learned everything from the Swedish university system, to how to submit proposals to speak at conferences. As a member of this esteemed organization, I look for ways to share the knowledge I have gained in the field and have spoken as a panelist at two conferences

(Miami and Western) and am hoping for my third in Boston, currently curating a session in defense of professional development budgets for college counselors and the benefits of participating in university fly-in programs.

Having just begun my first year on the Membership Committee, I have learned the membership processes and categories and how we can best serve both new and existing members. Always looking for ways to get involved I am serving on the First Timers' Committee at the Boston Conference, so I can help bridge the gap for our new members and conference go-ers. It is these experiences and that I seek ways to help those in our field, that make me a strong candidate for the VP of Professional Development.

Detail experiences that have equipped you with skills and insights applicable to the position you're applying for, including your leadership philosophy and strategies for effectively managing and leading a volunteer committee, emphasizing communication, collaboration, and recognition, and transferable accomplishments.

I believe an effective leader is someone who facilitates conversation while encouraging everyone to participate equally in the process. By sharing ideas and information openly, everyone feels a sense of buy-in and autonomy, which allows them to lead their projects with confidence and support. This collaborative approach has been the foundation of my leadership style throughout my career.

In one of my previous roles, I was tasked with organizing our annual conference, which involved managing the program, creating session content, and sourcing panelists. The event culminated in a European bus tour for twenty conference participants, a job I would also joyfully undertake as VP of Professional Development. Coordinating a successful conference for 250 attendees was possible only because of the direct support and initiative of my incredible team. As a leader, I developed an operational calendar and task sheet to keep us on track. We met weekly as a team and had one-on-one meetings as needed to check in on progress and ensure deadlines were met. By including everyone's input, we created an event that truly represented diverse viewpoints. In hindsight, it reinforced my belief that when people feel valued and heard, they are more excited about contributing to the mission.

As VP of Professional Development, I would apply this same philosophy to leading a volunteer committee. Managing a group of volunteers across different time zones and backgrounds requires clarity, flexibility, and genuine appreciation. I would prioritize consistent communication. Recognizing each person's unique strengths and celebrating their contributions is essential for maintaining high morale and enthusiasm within the team.

Ultimately, my goal is to foster an environment where every member feels empowered to share their insights and take ownership of their work. By doing so, we can create professional development initiatives that not only meet the diverse needs of our members but also drive meaningful, lasting impact within our community. The philosophy of "everyone counts" is at the heart of how I lead, and I am excited to carry this principle forward as Vice President of Professional Development.

Outline your comprehension of the role you are applying for, specifying priority areas, overall vision and challenges that you would like to address, and innovative solutions you would like to implement, while acknowledging current practices or programs you feel are effective.

I have personally benefited from the professional development opportunities offered by International ACAC, and my vision is to expand and tailor these experiences to better serve members at all stages of their careers. At the same time, I want to ensure that professional development opportunities continue to be relevant and valuable to the organization as a whole.

The Pre-Conference Institute is a cornerstone of International ACAC's offerings, and as someone who has participated in the past, I recognize the need for more programming geared toward advanced professionals. To address this, I want to create program tracks that focus on senior peer-to-peer mentorship, transitioning into consulting work, and building a legacy in the field.

Additionally, I see an opportunity to develop a workshop for the NACAC conference specifically for domestic professionals who are looking to transition into international education. Another area I want to focus on is providing a bridge workshop between college counseling and admissions professionals looking to switch sides of the desk. Many professionals are interested in making this transition but don't always have the resources or network to do so effectively. I would like to create a structured bridge and peer-to-peer mentoring to support those looking to transition between these roles.

International ACAC's webinars are already a strong resource, and I want to build on that momentum by expanding sessions on critical topics, including trends in U.S. admissions and mobility, supporting students in crisis, and advocacy work. These topics are essential to staying informed and proactive in our field.

Overall, my goal is to strengthen and expand International ACAC's professional development initiatives in a way that is dynamic, inclusive, and forward-thinking, ensuring that all members have the tools and support they need to grow and evolve in their careers.

Identify and articulate a critical issue in college admissions for international students that you would like to or have championed, emphasizing its importance and potential impact on the community.

One of the biggest challenges I've championed in international education is affordability and mobility for international students. In my work as Director of the World Leading Schools Association and a member of GSSN, I've seen firsthand how financial barriers and shifting geopolitical landscapes limit opportunities for students seeking higher education abroad whether it be for safety, opportunities, or the potential for beginning a new life abroad, having affordable, viable options available to them is of paramount importance.

As the landscape continues to evolve, our community needs to stay ahead by understanding the options available and educating students and families on non-traditional pathways. One great example is the Prague Consortium, which is hosting the European Institute this year and

offers a robust fly-in program for counselors to explore their institutions. Beyond that, there are incredible, affordable opportunities in Europe, China, South Korea, and beyond, many of which remain underutilized simply due to a lack of awareness.

My goal is to expand professional development opportunities that highlight these pathways, including building partnerships, increasing webinar offerings, and curating resources to showcase affordable options worldwide. By equipping counselors and admissions professionals with the right tools and insights, we can empower students and their families to make informed decisions about their futures. There's so much potential to grow our collective knowledge in this space, and I want to ensure that as an organization, we are leading these conversations in thoughtful ways.

Explain how you would leverage the position to contribute to International ACAC's strategic plan, aligning your goals with the organization's three pillars: enhancing member experience globally, clarifying the international brand, and optimizing internal operations.

As VP for Professional Development, my focus would be on leveraging professional development initiatives to directly support International ACAC's strategic plan.

To enhance the member experience globally, I would expand professional development opportunities that cater to members at all career stages, beginning, intermediate, and advanced ensuring that everyone has access to relevant and impactful training. I would also develop more mentorship opportunities, such as senior peer-to-peer mentorship and transition workshops for professionals moving between counseling and admissions. Additionally, I'd strengthen the accessibility of webinars and training sessions to ensure members from all regions can participate.

In clarifying the international brand, I would use professional development programming to highlight the diverse educational pathways available to students worldwide. By showcasing affordable and emerging higher education destinations such as those in Europe, China, and South Korea, International ACAC can further establish itself as a global leader in international education. I'd also work on creating professional development content that addresses regional trends, geopolitical shifts, and advocacy, ensuring members have the tools to guide students through an evolving landscape. In partnership with our higher education institutions abroad, consider expanding the bus tours to regional forums.

To optimize internal operations, I would ensure that professional development initiatives align with the organization's broader goals by working collaboratively across committees, chairs, and the Executive Board. By streamlining the development of webinars, workshops, and mentorship programs, we can create a more efficient and sustainable model for delivering PD opportunities. Additionally, ensuring fiscal responsibility in programming decisions would align with the organization's commitment to operational efficiency.

Through these efforts, I would contribute to International ACAC's mission of creating a globally connected, well-supported, and informed membership.