



Community Message | Updates on Flexible Work, Employee Survey + Compensation

Dear RISD Staff,

Over the past year RISD has embarked on three important initiatives aimed at supporting our staff and ensuring our institution is a best-in-class employer: a flexible and hybrid work program, a staff engagement survey, and a compensation study through Aon. Today I write with updates on our progress.

Future of Work Pilot Recommendations

As we are seeing in higher education and across most business sectors, flexible work modes are likely here to stay and, for many employees, it will be a major consideration in their job choice and satisfaction. Yet, as a place-based institution with a commitment to providing a transformative residential educational experience, we are also committed to ensuring the highest level of service to and engagement with students, faculty and each other. In response, RISD launched a pilot program on September 1, 2021. Over 250 staff out of approximately 700 have worked either in a fully remote or a hybrid capacity during that period. RISD has recently completed its initial assessment of the pilot program and is committed to providing flexible work arrangements on an ongoing basis. What follows below is a summary of the assessment, recommendations and next steps:

1. **RISD will continue to support flexible work arrangements** for its employees, providing the necessary structures and policies to support managers and employees in their work. Flexible work policies will be developed and updated, and assessment of flexible work at RISD will continue on an ongoing basis.
2. **Flexible work arrangements are at the discretion of the manager** with approval from their Cabinet member, and based on an assessment of departmental needs and consultation with employees. An update of work arrangement agreements by managers and employees will be required in the coming months.
3. **RISD will continue to support managers and employees** through training, tools, technology and space. An ongoing set of resources for managers and employees to manage various work modes will be developed by May 1, 2022. Strategies to optimize the use of space on campus and potentially repurpose underutilized space for academic purposes, alongside a technology plan to activate more space for hybrid meetings on campus will be developed by June 30, 2022.

4. **RISD will develop a strong workplace culture** that is inclusive, honors work-life balance, and prioritizes relationship building. RISD will develop a strategy for addressing the culture and practice around being “connected” at all times and creating expectations and standards around disconnecting from work during non-work hours.

Staff Engagement Survey Next Steps

In spring of 2021, RISD partnered with ModernThink to conduct a staff engagement survey to assess progress and gain insights since the last survey in 2016. RISD’s overall completion rate was 59 percent, a result that provides a high degree of confidence that it reflects the staff experience. Most of the results were not surprising. Staff continue to value the unique nature of RISD’s mission, the strong reputation of the institution, the “lively and diverse” community, and the quality/enthusiasm of the student body. You largely appreciate RISD’s response to the pandemic and are hopeful some of the newfound flexibility will extend beyond the pandemic. However, the survey also revealed areas in which we need to improve. Over the winter and spring, staff contributed to focus groups around key areas of concern or improvement. The results, alongside the survey information, were reviewed by a task force directed to provide a set of next steps. These are as follows:

1. **Pay/Career Progression**

Staff continue to report concerns regarding compensation and advancement opportunities, which contributes to a sense of being unappreciated. This dynamic is exacerbated by perceived inequities in the value of their contributions. Planned Actions: RISD has engaged Aon to review the compensation program and job structure for staff (report and recommendations are due fall 2022).

2. **Social Equity and Inclusion**

While there is appreciation for RISD’s social equity and inclusion efforts, there is still important work to be done. For some, the experience of significant positional/hierarchical differences and the perceived primacy of faculty undermine current SEI efforts. Planned Actions: Continued implementation of divisional SEI plans with updates communicated to staff members by fall 2022. Training programs will be delivered to staff participating in search committees beginning summer 2022 with additional programs offered through SEI and Human Resources available each semester beginning in the fall of 2022. The Respect in the Workplace policy was updated and expanded in March 2022 with offerings to strengthen skills related to creating a respectful workplace.

3. **Performance Management**

Staff feel that there is an unclear benefit or impact behind the performance management process, that issues of low performance are not always addressed and they are unsure as to its connection to career growth, professional development or recognition. Staff also feel that there is a lack of consistency in implementation between individuals and departments. Planned Actions: Provide learning and development for managers focused on performance conversations, developing staff through career planning,

mentoring and coaching, and rewarding, recognizing and engaging teams. Begin with back to basic programs for managers offered beginning fall 2022. Review external management development programs with the goal of piloting with a new cohort in the fall of 2022.

4. **Confidence in Senior Leadership/Cross Functional Collaboration**

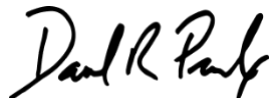
In the face of leadership transition and the pandemic, staff report a need for greater clarity regarding direction and strategy, more timely and transparent communication, and a greater sense that senior leadership truly cares about all members of the RISD community. In addition, though there remains a strong sense of community within many departments, the strength of that camaraderie varies across departments and does not consistently translate to strong cross-functional collaboration or a sense of alignment across RISD. Planned Actions: Cabinet will create intentional spaces for two-way dialogue between senior leadership and staff, such as increased opportunities for small group meetings with Cabinet members, and seek opportunities to acknowledge staff for their contributions. Cabinet will charge a cross functional group of leaders to identify the systems and structures that impede effective cross functional collaborations that encourage and sponsor collaborative efforts and community building opportunities with staff across departments/areas. To begin in 2023.

Compensation Study

RISD has launched a review of the compensation and job structure for staff to create a consistent and modern compensation structure and job framework that is fair, equitable and compliant and enables the recruitment, retention, and reward of RISD employees. The institution's consulting partner for this important project is Aon, who will work as an objective as a third-party advisor. The review process began with a series of interviews with institutional leaders and next steps will include a review of the external market considering our competition for talent in multiple industries, including but not limited to higher education. The project will continue into our next fiscal year, with final recommendations made to the institution in the late summer early fall of 2022.

I want to again take this opportunity to thank each and every one of you for the diligence, hard work and loyalty you have for RISD. I welcome your questions and feedback. Please feel free to stop in to my last Friday office hours as interim president this Friday, March 25 from 2–4 pm.

Sincerely,



Dave Proulx
Interim President