

# LA CASA DE DON PEDRO

EMPOWER AND REVITALIZE

**President and Chief Executive Officer**  
Newark, New Jersey

## THE SEARCH

La Casa de Don Pedro (La Casa) seeks a President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) who will further their mission to foster empowerment, cultivate self-sufficiency, and promote community revitalization across historically underserved communities in and around Newark, NJ. Through a wide variety of education and economic development strategies, neighborhood revitalization initiatives, and family stabilization programs, La Casa works to ensure that all of Greater Newark's diverse residents engage in and benefit from the region's growing prosperity.

Founded 49 years ago as a grassroots activist organization committed to supporting Newark's Puerto Rican and broader Latinx community, La Casa has since evolved into an expansive multi-service agency. The organization remains grounded in its history, and continues to serve and advocate for a diverse demographic profile that includes the largest proportion of Latinx residents in New Jersey, as well as a significant African American community. La Casa provides multidimensional services to more than 50,000 people annually in the following areas: early childhood development (primarily via Head Start); youth educational, cultural, and recreational programs; youth and family counseling; health initiatives; HIV/AIDS prevention and services; workforce development and job placement; affordable homeownership development and counseling; community development and organizing; lead remediation and abatement; and home energy conservation and assistance.

Their extensive roster of initiatives operates through five divisions: Early Childhood Education; Community Improvement; Youth, Family, and Health Services; Personal Development; and Community and Economic Development. The organization has a FY2020 budget of \$25 million; employs over 280 staff, including a management team of seven; and is governed by an 18-member board of directors.

The President and CEO will share the organization's grandest aspiration: to create a thriving Newark in which all people, regardless of identity (especially race), socioeconomic level, and immigration status have the opportunities and resources to achieve their full potential. The next leader will work closely with staff and board to assess La Casa's current programmatic offerings and will think strategically about the appropriate mix of services that will ensure a stable and prosperous future. It is also expected that this individual will ensure that the internal infrastructure is befitting of an organization of La Casa's size and that their finances are appropriately diversified to assure both stability and flexibility. The President and CEO will prioritize the development of staff and the cultivation of the board, encouraging a robust internal culture, while also maintaining and building relationships with external partners throughout the state.

The next President and CEO will be an accomplished leader with considerable skill as a team builder, facilitator, collaborator, and convener with colleagues, peer civic institutions, and philanthropic partners. The successful candidate will bring demonstrated experience successfully leading an organization or unit that is similar to La Casa in its complexity, programs and services, and funding model. The President and

CEO will be politically astute and mindful of both broad strategy and the intricacies of specific initiatives. Experience working closely with and advocating on behalf of historically marginalized, urban, low-income communities of color is essential. The President and CEO's key attributes will include transparency, integrity, accountability, diplomacy, creativity, empathy, self-awareness, and a willingness to challenge and to learn. They will be an accomplished fundraiser with experience developing diversified funding streams. Proficiency in Spanish is strongly preferred.

La Casa de Don Pedro has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in this search. All inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed in strict confidence to the firm as indicated at the end of this document.

## **LA CASA DE DON PEDRO**

La Casa was founded in 1972 in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement to reverse the trajectory of social, cultural, political, and economic dislocation and marginalization of Newark's Puerto Rican and broader Latinx community. The organization was named in honor of Puerto Rican nationalist Don Pedro Albizu Campos, who advocated the twin virtues of self-sufficiency and civic empowerment. Today, La Casa is the only comprehensive service and advocacy agency in Newark that focuses on Latinx residents and is without question one of the city's anchor institutions. It is also the largest Latinx-based organization in the state of New Jersey. Their geographic heart remains in Newark's North Ward, but their services extend across the city and into adjacent communities in Essex and Union County.

La Casa has experienced rapid growth over the past several years, due in large part to being awarded a significant percentage of Newark's federal Head Start programs in 2016. While childcare and early education have always been an important part of La Casa's portfolio, it is now their largest department. It will be important for the incoming President and CEO to ensure that La Casa's identity as a multifaceted community development organization is maintained and that new programming ventures are part of its strategic vision.

Despite the myriad challenges facing La Casa during the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization has adapted and remains stable both in terms of finances and staff retention. La Casa pivoted to an all-virtual teaching model for their Early Childhood Education division; successfully modified their approach to Energy Assistance, Weatherization, and Lead programs; and is providing specialized rental assistance and increased housing counseling and outreach services. La Casa was also awarded a \$462,000 grant under New Jersey's COVID-19 Small Business Assistance Program, which permits the organization to provide relief funds in Newark's Lower Broadway commercial corridor.

## **PROGRAMS AND SERVICES**

The organization offers comprehensive and proven solutions that address social determinants of health, providing safety, stability, tools, resources, and opportunities that enrich people's lives and build social capital. La Casa meets people where they are and is adaptive to their physical, cultural, and psycho-social needs. They offer the following programs and services:

### **Early Childhood Education**

La Casa has been providing high-quality education and care to young children since their founding and is historically one of the biggest providers of childcare in Newark. Working in collaboration with Newark

Public Schools and the federal Head Start program, La Casa provides free care to income-eligible families across ten early childhood centers located in all of the city's wards. The organization currently educates and supports more than 600 expectant mothers, infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, with the goal of providing nurturing, educational, and culturally sensitive programming. Two of La Casa's three preschool centers, in partnership with Newark Public Schools, are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

### **Community Improvement**

Each year, La Casa provides energy assistance to an average of 15,000 households. The organization's Home Energy Conservation (weatherization) program improves the energy efficiency of low-income families' homes; their Senior Citizens Cooling and Heating Program assists low-income seniors in addressing their heating and cooling needs; and their Lead Remediation and Abatement Program helps families remove lead hazards in their homes freely and safely. Financial assistance is provided through the federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Universal Service Fund (USF) programs provided by NJ's Public Utility Board.

### **Youth, Family, and Health Services**

By providing a multitude of social services, La Casa's goal is to engage, empower, and inspire families so they are able to access all that is available, move forward with their personal goals, and become self-sufficient. La Casa provides individual, family, and group counseling and manages two Family Success Centers that serve hundreds of residents each year. La Casa also provides a series of healthcare services, including education and screening, HIV/AIDS services, and women's health services, and runs the Healthy Living Initiative, which offers programs on heart disease prevention, exercise, and healthy eating. La Casa also provides youth-specific services, including education, recreation, arts, and advocacy programs, as well as after school enrichment and summer programs.

### **Personal Development**

La Casa offers a range of formal educational programs for adults that create pathways for educational advancement and professional development. All of La Casa's adult education programs share job training opportunities with partners in Greater Newark, and various career training and job placement schemes are regularly available to residents. La Casa is currently offering job preparation in technology and home health aide training; however, their programs will continue to evolve as the organization embarks on new partnerships and strengthens relationships with employers looking to hire. La Casa also provides educational programming for out-of-school youth ages 16-24, High School Equivalency testing in English and Spanish, and English as a Second Language and career training through the Women's Resource Center.

The organization also provides immigration services that empower individuals who have recently arrived in the United States with orientation, education, support, and accredited immigration legal assistance. Between 2016 and 2019, La Casa provided more than 600 clients with immigration legal services, including screenings, consultations, and the annual completion of petitions and applications.

### **Community and Economic Development**

As a HUD-Certified Housing Counseling Agency, La Casa is committed to creating affordable homeownership opportunities, helping families navigate through the homeownership process, and

helping them retain their homes when they are facing troubles. La Casa also provides financial capability counseling and builds and sells quality, affordable homes for first-time homebuyers through the Don Pedro Development Corporation.

In addition to their own community development work, La Casa is engaged in advocacy efforts to improve the overall quality of life for residents. La Casa focuses this work on Newark's Lower Broadway neighborhood, working with partners to address social, racial, and environmental justice efforts and systemic issues that exist in public safety, education, business development, and other areas. Most recently, La Casa worked with the Newark Public Safety Collaborative to identify property crime and violent crime occurring within close proximity to community centers. Eviction and foreclosure protection and environmental justice legislation are also among La Casa's recent advocacy efforts.

## **ORGANIZATION, FINANCE, AND GOVERNANCE**

La Casa has a FY2020 budget of \$25.5 million and a staff of over 280. Most of their staff grew up in Newark or comparable communities and faced similar challenges to those faced by the organization's constituents, while others have had significant community-based experience. Reporting to the President and CEO are the Chief Financial Officer (currently vacant with interim in place); the Director of Program and Fund Development; and the division Directors of Community and Economic Development; Community Improvement; Early Childhood Education; Personal Development; and Youth, Family, and Health Services. La Casa's next President and CEO will have the opportunity to strengthen the organization's financial structure through the hiring of a new CFO.

Eighty percent of La Casa's budget comes from government grants, 14% from other grants and contributions, and the remaining 6% from sources such as fee for service, special events, and gain on the sale of property. Sixty-four percent of the program budget is directed towards Early Childhood Education; 14% towards Community Improvement; 13% towards Youth, Family, and Health Services; 6% towards Personal Development; and 3% towards Community and Economic Development.

The organization is governed by an 18-member board of directors that meets five to six times annually. Board committees include: Executive, Finance and Asset Management, Governance, and Resource Development and Marketing. Board members are reflective of the community La Casa serves and are drawn from a range of fields and backgrounds, which enables them to provide expertise to the organization's various service lines.

## **LEADERSHIP TRANSITION**

Raymond "Ray" Ocasio is La Casa's current Executive Director and the third in their history. Ray became Executive Director in 1998, bringing with him several decades of experience in organizational and housing development and community building activities, both domestically and internationally. Ray and the board of directors are conducting a smooth transition process in advance of his departure in 2021.

Under Ray's leadership, La Casa has experienced tremendous growth and consolidation of their programs and advocacy activities. Through his targeted, comprehensive, and integrated strategy, La Casa has added vigor to their community development work. He has also significantly raised La Casa's profile through his membership in and leadership of multiple local, state, regional, and national committees and coalitions. La Casa has achieved significant success and impact during Ray's tenure and is now considered among the leading comprehensive community-based social services and development organizations in New Jersey.

## **NEWARK**

Newark is the seat of Essex County and the largest city in New Jersey, with a population of over 280,000. The city has a tradition of robust engagement in social and racial justice movements which continues to this day. Residents are resilient, care deeply about their neighborhoods, and continue to enrich the city with their vibrant and diverse cultural identities that make Newark unique.

Ras J. Baraka is the 40<sup>th</sup> and current Mayor of Newark and is recognized nationally as a thought leader in urban revitalization. Under Mayor Baraka's administration, Newark has succeeded in reducing crime to its lowest levels in five decades, addressed housing affordability while maintaining steady growth, lowered unemployment, and regained local control of schools after more than two decades of state control. In 2017, the city passed the Inclusionary Zoning for Affordable Housing ordinance, which requires developers creating or rehabilitating housing projects of more than 30 units to set aside 20% of them as affordable housing. Mayor Baraka's administration also established the Equitable Growth Advisory Commission, which consists of experts drawn from the city's academic, business, and non-profit sectors to ensure that development policies and projects incorporate the principle of equitable growth. La Casa has been involved in both of these landmark initiatives.

## **OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE NEXT PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**

### ***Stabilize, enhance, and expand upon La Casa's programs and services.***

In conjunction with board, staff, and community partners, La Casa's next President and CEO will engage in continual strategic decision making to meet the ever-changing needs of Greater Newark's residents. La Casa will capitalize on programmatic opportunities that contribute to their mission and financial sustainability as they emerge, while expanding at a sustainable rate. The organization will improve capacity to effectively provide comprehensive, wraparound services to its constituents and will think strategically about potential expansion into new program areas, such as nutrition and homeless services, as well as geographic expansion.

Over the next several years, as outlined in their 2020-2024 Strategic Plan, La Casa will encourage development and improvement across all service lines. The organization will ensure that children served develop improved social-emotional, developmental, and educational skills that will provide them with a strong foundation. La Casa will also ensure that adults are offered clearly defined educational opportunities, certifications, and careers that lead to life-sustaining wages and increased opportunities. In addition, the capacity of their immigration legal services program will be increased in order to meet growing community needs. Given the crises triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, La Casa is paying particular attention to bolstering education and family support services and the scope and quality of its workforce development programs.

La Casa aims to build a community infrastructure in Greater Newark that nurtures a welcoming, desirable, and vibrant quality of life for people of diverse cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds. In conjunction with staff, board, residents, and community leaders, the President and CEO will identify and promote advocacy positions that cut across multiple sectors in which La Casa is involved. La Casa will also help to develop resident leaders, support small business development, address health and safety concerns, improve and preserve existing housing stock, and support the development of new housing options that foster equitable development. The organization will continue to enable households and individuals to

have comfortable, safe, affordable, and energy efficient homes, and will support financial stability through the provision of quality financial wellness and housing counseling services.

***Ensure La Casa's current and future financial stability.***

La Casa's fiscal sustainability will be a priority for the incoming President and CEO. With their substantial Head Start portfolio, the organization is primarily government funded. While this source of funding has provided stability during the COVID-19 pandemic, in the future La Casa aims to increase non-governmental income streams in order to grow their unrestricted asset base. The President and CEO will work closely with the board and staff to increase access to new networks of donors and funders; strengthen individual donor development, cultivation, and stewardship activities; and expand the capacity of the organization's fundraising, communications, and marketing functions. La Casa has received consistent support, including sizable, unrestricted donations from several philanthropic entities. The organization aims to solicit additional support from local, regional, and national foundations, individuals, and corporations.

***Raise La Casa's visibility and grow and develop key strategic partnerships.***

The President and CEO will build upon La Casa's distinct impact, history, and brand to enhance their influence in Greater Newark's social services and community development landscape. The organization intends to accomplish this by strengthening La Casa's position as a thought leader and expert in the field; increasing collaboration between program and development staff on client marketing and outreach efforts; leveraging the board's energy and resources; and regularly soliciting community feedback. The next leader will also deepen partnerships with peer agencies, and continue to participate in local, regional, and statewide coalitions and networks as La Casa's representative.

***Strengthen La Casa's organizational infrastructure.***

To keep pace with their growth and to create truly integrated programs and services, La Casa plans to strengthen operational systems and processes. The President and CEO will introduce clear policies and procedures appropriate for an organization of La Casa's scope and complexity. La Casa will improve their financial management capacity and systems, as well as its IT systems and methods of data collection. This will inform program evaluation, design, and development and will help persuasively communicate the organization's impact, both internally and externally. They also intend to make critical investments in their space and facilities to enhance workflow and improve staff and clientele experience.

***Attract, retain, and cultivate a committed and talented staff and board.***

The incoming President and CEO will effectively lead La Casa's current team of highly dedicated professionals and will make necessary additions to staff and structure that appropriately reflect the organization's size and diversity of programs. La Casa will also develop the rewards, benefits, and professional development opportunities made available to employees and will establish a leadership and training pipeline to advance their next generation of managers and directors. The President and CEO will build a collegial, respectful, and transparent relationship with the board of directors and will ensure that staff and board diversity continue to reflect the communities La Casa serves.

## QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

The next President and CEO will reflect La Casa's core values of community advocacy, responsibility (civic, personal, and fiscal), education, safe housing, diversity, creativity, and cultural responsiveness. They will also bring many of the following qualifications, professional experiences, and personal attributes:

- Demonstrated success in leading a complex community-based organization or entity, preferably with a variety of programs and service lines;
- Expertise in translating a vision and strategy into a practical plan with concrete methods of implementation and measures of anticipated outcomes;
- Grounded experience working with and advocating on behalf of historically marginalized communities, specifically Latinx, urban, and low-income communities, through a sophisticated racial and social justice lens;
- Experience working productively and diplomatically with a diversity of groups who have different, and at times conflicting, priorities, from community organizers and nonprofit leaders to government officials, funders, and business leaders;
- Experience with financial oversight, including budgeting, planning, and reporting, and a deep understanding of and substantial experience with diverse funding streams (government, philanthropic, corporate, individual, etc.); fundraising aptitude at regional and national levels;
- Demonstrated ability to guide, support, and leverage staff expertise and capacity; success in nurturing a healthy, dynamic, inclusive, and equitable work environment;
- Experience working with a governing board, or analogous experience;
- Involvement in and understanding of grassroots advocacy and organizing that is in service of social justice and anti-racist movements;
- Knowledge of the community development and social services landscape in Newark and Essex County, or experience with analogous communities;
- An approach to leadership that is inspiring, authentic, collaborative, and accountable;
- An entrepreneurial and creative spirit and the ability to be strategically nimble and adaptable;
- Excellent written and oral communication skills;
- Proficiency in Spanish is strongly preferred.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO APPLY

La Casa de Don Pedro has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in this search. Inquiries, nominations, and applications should be submitted to:

**Monroe "Bud" Moseley, Partner**  
**Donna Cramer, Principal**  
**Tatiana Oberkoetter, Senior Associate**  
[www.imsearch.com/7785](http://www.imsearch.com/7785)

*La Casa de Don Pedro is an equal opportunity employer. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, genetics, disability, age, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by law.*