Founding Operations Lead

Institute for Responsible Superintelligence Studies

The Institute for Responsible Superintelligence Studies is a new Cambridge/Boston research institute in formation, scientifically led by highly distinguished local faculty, focused on developing principled foundations for safe and responsible advanced AI systems.

The institute is intended to bring together faculty, graduate students, postdocs, and other researchers from MIT, Harvard, Northeastern, and other Boston-area universities and research institutions.

We are looking for a Founding Operations Lead to help turn the scientific vision into a functioning institution.

This is an early-stage role. The institute is not yet operating as an independent 501(c)(3). We are actively evaluating fiscal sponsorship, hosted launch, and standalone nonprofit formation options. A major part of this role will be helping choose and execute the right operational path.

The Role

The Founding Operations Lead will own the practical launch of the institute or first-year pilot. The first priority is to make the organization operational enough by September 1, 2026 for early researchers, postdocs, visitors, and collaborators to have a real place to work and a basic institutional structure around them.

This does not mean personally doing every legal, finance, HR, real estate, and administrative task. It means owning the launch plan, managing vendors and contractors, bringing clear recommendations to the founding team, and making sure important operational work actually moves.

This role may be a good fit for someone who has been a chief of staff, operations lead, early nonprofit operator, research-program manager, startup generalist, institute administrator, or founding executive director type. The exact title and structure can vary with the candidate's seniority and the final launch vehicle.

What You Will Do

- Help determine and execute the right legal and administrative path: fiscal sponsorship, hosted launch, standalone nonprofit, university-adjacent structure, or hybrid path.

- Coordinate vendors and contractors for legal, accounting, payroll, HR, insurance, IT, finance, real estate, and compliance.
- Help secure temporary Cambridge/Kendall-area space where early researchers, postdocs, visitors, and the founding team can work starting around September 1.
- Build a practical first budget and operating plan for funders, collaborators, and early hires.
- Set up basic systems for contracts, payments, reimbursements, travel, workshops, seminars, visitors, food, space logistics, and records.
- Support early hiring and recruiting for researchers, postdocs, fellows, visitors, administrative support, and other operational needs.
- Help prepare grant materials, donor updates, budgets, and other fundraising-support materials.
- Create lightweight internal systems: decision logs, task tracking, board/advisor materials, vendor tracking, onboarding checklists, and operating rhythms.
- Protect the time of the scientific leadership by turning ambiguous operational needs into clear options and executed plans.

What Must Be True By September 1

The first launch goal is not a fully mature permanent institute. The goal is that by September 1, 2026:

- We have chosen a credible legal and administrative path, such as fiscal sponsorship, hosted launch, or standalone nonprofit formation in progress.
- We have an initial budget and operating plan good enough for funders and first hires.
- We have temporary physical space in Cambridge/Kendall where early researchers, postdocs, visitors, and the founding team can work.
- We have a plan underway for longer-term space, even if that space is not ready by September 1.
- We have basic finance, payroll/HR, accounting, legal, insurance, IT, and vendor systems lined up.
- We have a first hiring and onboarding plan for the research and administrative core.
- The scientific team can begin convening people, visitors, seminars, and early projects without personally managing all logistics.

Who We Are Looking For

We are looking for someone unusually good at early-stage execution in ambiguous environments.

Strong candidates will likely have many of these traits:

- High agency: you can move important work forward without waiting for every detail to be specified.
- Strong judgment: you can represent the institute well with funders, researchers, vendors, candidates, universities, and partner organizations.
- Operational range: you can coordinate across legal, finance, HR, hiring, real estate, events, and administration without needing to be the expert in every domain.
- Taste for simple systems: you create enough structure to prevent chaos without overbuilding bureaucracy.
- Comfort with senior academics and scientists: you can work well with world-class researchers while keeping practical work moving.
- Low ego and high ownership: the scientific agenda is led by the research leadership; your job is to make the institution real.
- Calm in ambiguity: you can distinguish urgent must-haves from details that can wait.
- Mission seriousness: you do not need to be an AI safety researcher, but you should care about the responsible development of advanced AI systems and take the intellectual stakes seriously.

Direct nonprofit experience is helpful but not required. AI safety or AI governance experience is helpful but not required. Excellent operational judgment is more important than deep prior familiarity with the field.

What This Is Not

This is not a standard office administrator role. It is also probably not a mature-organization COO role.

The right person should be excited by a founding environment where the legal structure, operational systems, budget, space plan, and hiring process are still being built. You should expect to manage uncertainty, use outside experts, and help the founding team make good decisions quickly.

Reporting And Decision Rights

The role will initially report to the founding leadership, including senior scientific faculty involved in shaping the institute.

The Founding Operations Lead should expect substantial ownership over day-to-day execution, vendor coordination, process design, and operational recommendations. Founder approval will be needed for major budget commitments, legal/entity decisions, key hires, long-term real estate commitments, public-facing materials, and reputationally sensitive decisions.

We expect this person to have regular access to the founding team and enough authority to move quickly within agreed boundaries.

Location

Cambridge/Boston-area strongly preferred. Hybrid work is fine, but this role requires meaningful in-person presence, especially for space, vendors, local relationships, workshops, visitors, and early onboarding.

Start Date

As soon as possible. Ideally within a few weeks of identifying the right person.

Employment Structure

Flexible and dependent on the launch vehicle. The role could begin as a contractor, interim role, employee of a fiscal sponsor or host organization, or employee of a standalone entity once formed.

The role could also evolve into an Executive Director or Head of Operations role depending on the candidate and the institute's path.

Compensation

Compensation will be competitive for a senior founding operator in a mission-driven research organization.

Expected range: $160,000-$230,000 salary equivalent, with flexibility depending on experience, seniority, employment structure, funding, and whether the role begins as a narrower operations lead or a more senior founding executive / interim Executive Director role.

How To Apply

Please send:

- A brief note on why this role is interesting to you.
- Your resume or LinkedIn profile.
- A short description of a messy operational environment you helped make work.

Send materials to: superstudiesinstitute@gmail.com.

Promising candidates may be asked to complete a practical work exercise, such as outlining a first 30-day launch plan for a new Cambridge research institute that needs temporary space, a fiscal sponsor or entity path, vendors, a hiring process, and researcher support by September 1.