



UNIVERSITY OF WEST FLORIDA

# Presidential Search

January 15, 2026

The Honorable Alan Levine, Chair  
Florida Board of Governors  
325 West Gaines Street, Suite 1614  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Chair Levine,

On behalf of the University of West Florida Board of Trustees, it is my privilege to formally present President-elect Manny Diaz, Jr., to the Florida Board of Governors for confirmation as the seventh President of the University of West Florida (UWF).

Following the appointment of Manny Diaz, Jr., as Interim President of UWF in May 2025, the University initiated its Presidential Search by retaining the services of Funk and Associates to support the process. Funk and Associates has conducted more than 400 searches for college and university Chancellors and Presidents.

Formed in August 2025, the Presidential Search Committee (PSC) was led by UWF Trustee Zack Smith. The 15-member Presidential Search Committee included representation from the Florida Board of Governors; current and former UWF Trustees and Foundation board members; the current Faculty Chair and current Student Government President, as well as UWF graduates and other distinguished members of the business community and military.

The PSC conducted a comprehensive process in accordance with state law and Florida Board of Governors regulations by developing the position profile, engaging stakeholders, marketing the position opening, screening the most qualified applicants, and conducting in-person interviews before recommending a finalist to the UWF Board of Trustees for consideration. I extend my gratitude to the Search Committee members for devoting a generous amount of their time and expertise to embrace this important duty.

On December 10, 2025, UWF hosted two public forums with Presidential Search Finalist Manny Diaz Jr. These forums were publicly noticed and open to both the campus community and the general public. Participants attended in-person, and virtually, and all were able to offer input throughout the forums.

The UWF Board of Trustees met on January 8, 2026, and voted to select Manny Diaz, Jr., as President Elect for recommendation to the Florida Board of Governors for confirmation. This affirmative vote by the full twelve BOT members was eleven in favor with one opposed. A draft presidential employment



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contract was also reviewed at the meeting and received a unanimous approval vote from the twelve member Board of Trustees.

Manny Diaz Jr. is a lifelong educator and experienced executive. Raised in a working-class family in Hialeah, he has always been passionate about learning and teaching. He began his career teaching social studies and coaching baseball in Miami-Dade County Public Schools, later serving as an assistant principal and then chief operating officer at Doral College. He subsequently served in the Florida Legislature and is Florida's first Hispanic Commissioner of Education, where he also sat on the State University System of Florida Board of Governors. He holds a bachelor's degree from St. Thomas University, a master's in educational leadership from Nova Southeastern University, and completed executive study at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Since July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025, when he officially took office, Interim President Diaz has worked with great vigor and a steady hand – showing his commitment to the university. Guided by UWF Trustees, UWF's Strategic Plan, as well as the Board of Governor's Metrics and 2030 Strategic Plans, he engaged immediately to ensure UWF was on target, while also injecting unprecedented momentum. Diaz quickly engaged with students, faculty, staff, and the broader community to support an enhanced student experience. He also met with faculty and staff to hear about their efforts and needs to educate and support the student body. Diaz demonstrated from his first day as Interim President that he is laser focused on maintaining strategic relationships and building new ones, engaging with federal and state government leaders, and strategically managing the university's budget, as well as bolstering fundraising efforts. He has proven to be the catalyst for UWF to continue to succeed, grow and deepen its impact.

On behalf of the UWF Board of Trustees, I am pleased to request that the Board of Governors, at its next scheduled meeting, consider and confirm President-elect Manny Diaz, Jr., as the seventh President of the University of West Florida. Enclosed with this letter you will find a detailed description of the selection process and criteria, additional information about President-Elect Diaz, and a copy of the employment agreement for consideration in the confirmation process as mandated by Florida Board of Governors Regulation 1.002.

We look forward to working with you as we write UWF's next chapter—bold, collaborative, and future-focused.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca Matthews". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rebecca" and last name "Matthews" clearly distinguishable.

Rebecca Matthews  
Chair, University of West Florida Board of Trustees