Position Specification

Michigan State University

Director, MSU Museum
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Our Client

Michigan State University has been advancing the common good with uncommon will for more than 150 years. Founded in 1855 as the nation’s first land-grant university, Michigan State University (MSU) enrolls over 52,000 undergraduate, graduate, and professional students in its 17 colleges. MSU is known internationally as a major public research university with global reach and extraordinary impact. With more than 200 academic programs, many nationally ranked, MSU attracts scholars worldwide and students from all 50 states and approximately 130 countries. The 5,200-acre campus is located in East Lansing, three miles from the state capitol, 80 miles from Detroit, 210 miles from Chicago, and 90 miles from the shores of Lake Michigan.

The MSU Museum is one of the earliest established museums in the nation and has continued to preserve collections and serve learners since its opening on campus in 1857. As the science and culture museum at Michigan State University, the MSU Museum "is committed to understanding, interpreting, and respecting natural and cultural diversity through education, exhibitions, research, and the building and stewardship of collections that focus on Michigan and its relationship to the Great Lakes, and the world beyond."

The MSU Museum is a public steward for nearly one million objects and specimens in Anthropology, Natural Science, Folk Arts, and History from around the world. The collections provide the foundation for research, education, and outreach both locally and internationally. The MSU Museum is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums and was the first in the state to receive Smithsonian affiliate status. It is a CITES-registered scientific institution and a partner with the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs.

The Museum cultivates and maintains interdisciplinary linkages across campus, particularly in college-based programs in the sciences, arts and humanities, and international studies. The Museum also reaches a broad and diverse audience through traveling exhibits, festivals, citizen-scholar projects, digital humanities projects, online collections and innovative local, statewide, national, and global partnerships. For example, the MSU Museum serves as the home of the Michigan Traditional Arts Program, a statewide program in partnership with Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs.

Administratively at Michigan State University, the MSU Museum operates within the Office of the Provost, through the Office of University Outreach and Engagement. The Museum shares faculty and academic staff appointments, and coordinates with numerous colleges and other administrative units. For example, Museum curators, researchers, and public programmers work closely with the Residential College for Arts and Humanities, the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, the College of Education, James Madison College, College of Natural Science, International Studies and Programs and other units on campus where its collections and resources intersect with teaching and research missions.
The Role

Reporting to the Associate Provost for University Outreach and Engagement at Michigan State University, the Director is the leader of the MSU Museum. He/she is responsible for forging the Museum’s strategic vision in collaboration with staff and key stakeholders; ensuring its financial health; creating a healthy, respectful and inclusive work environment; establishing an administrative structure appropriate to a university museum with public engagement responsibilities; overseeing the stewardship of diverse collections; promoting, integrating, and strengthening the research, education, and public outreach missions; and furthering its exhibitions program.

The Director will take the lead in working with staff and key stakeholders to develop and implement a new strategic plan for the MSU Museum that charts a bold vision for the institution and its role on campus, builds upon and continues to support the Museum’s current strengths, and identifies new opportunities for programmatic growth and financial sustainability. Aspects of this plan will in all likelihood include: the ongoing production of significant exhibits and programs that engage faculty and students and attract visitors, continuing to build proactive and collaborative relationships with diverse departments and units across the University and with partners outside the University, and significantly strengthening the Museum’s fundraising activities. Importantly, while the “front of house” will require ongoing change and investment, the MSU Museum’s focus in the future will also need to include upgrading “back of house” operations in the form of infrastructure, technology, exhibition support, space for preservation and research, and other priorities that contribute to the Museum’s success.

The Director will encourage the creation of a sound and balanced approach to exhibitions, education, and programming that draws upon the collective talents of the Museum’s staff and highlights the diversity and strengths of the collections so as to continue to expand, intrigue, and engage the audiences across campus. Moreover, he/she will work with staff to bolster the Museum’s reputation as an inclusive, accessible, engaging, and welcoming cultural and scientific destination for learning.

The Director must be a champion of fundraising on behalf of the Museum, identifying strategic priorities for endowments, infrastructure improvements, exhibitions, acquisitions, and programs. He/she will work with faculty and staff in support of research, deepening its relevance to University goals, as well as expanding the synergies with MSU’s educational mission.

In leading the Museum, the Director benefits from the advice and counsel of members of the administration as well as a Community Advisory Council and Academic Advisory Committee. He/she represents the MSU Museum within the greater East Lansing cultural and civic arena. The Director must also collaborate with departmental leadership and faculty across MSU’s colleges, with the leaders of other organizations on campus, and with senior administrators across the University in support of research and teaching. He/she must assure that the Museum is at the forefront in identifying and successfully responding to opportunities, and be committed to proactively forging cooperative and interdisciplinary partnerships with the institutions. The Director is the Museum’s primary spokesperson before internal and external audiences alike.

The Director is responsible for the Museum’s personnel (a staff of 30) and the financial management of a budget of approximately $2.6 million, in an era when meeting financial goals for museums, including fundraising targets, is challenging across the board.
Candidate Profile

The Director of the MSU Museum must have outstanding leadership abilities, with experience in a senior role at a museum or similarly complex organization. The successful candidate must have excellent organizational and strategic skills, a demonstrated ability to build teamwork and manage people effectively, a record of fostering inclusive, welcoming work environments, a record of fundraising from private and public sources, and an understanding of museum operations and collections. In addition, he/she will have academic expertise ideally in a subject related to the MSU Museum’s collections. The ability and inclination to collaborate effectively with faculty and academic administrators is essential.

The Director must also be an enthusiastic fundraiser, highly knowledgeable in financial matters and committed to augmenting the Museum’s financial resources. Given that the Director represents the Museum across and beyond the University, he/she must enjoy operating in the public arena, speaking in a variety of public settings, and be highly adept at building creative alliances. Furthermore, he/she must have an international orientation.

In terms of the performance and personal competencies required for the position, we would highlight the following:

- **Strategic Vision.** The Director will have a passion for the strengths and assets of the MSU Museum coupled with the objectivity, flexibility, experience, and leadership skills to pursue transformational change. The candidate will be able to guide and substantially contribute to the continued articulation of the identity, values, mission, and strategy for the MSU Museum, particularly through the Museum’s curatorial, research, and programming efforts. He/she will have the creativity and vision to construct nuanced plans and objectives that will bring to life an inspirational future for the Museum. The candidate will have a track record of enhancing the broader learning experience, innovation, accessibility and diversity in his/her past organizations.

- **Building Relationships and Using Influence:** The Director will exhibit a consensus-seeking but decisive approach that enables him or her to deliver solutions in difficult situations. He/she will be able to persuasively communicate the Museum’s direction and strategy both internally and externally, and will assure effective communication among the Museum’s stakeholders. He/she will demonstrate an expansive knowledge of the key issues affecting the institution’s work and an ability to develop a productive and mutually fulfilling relationship with staff, faculty curators, university administrators, and donors, and based on a collaborative, stimulating approach, tempered by good judgment.

- **Management of Teams and Resources:** The Director will be able to translate over-arching goals into clear objectives for staff and other members of the Museum community. He/she will foster a culture of collaboration, mutual respect, and teamwork. This person will have the ability to counsel and coach the staff for success; he/she will respect, encourage, and celebrate the talents of that team while also holding each accountable to mutually agreed-upon goals. The successful candidate will demonstrate extensive experience attracting, retaining, and motivating top talent. Additionally, he/she will approach the financial oversight of the MSU Museum with dispassion and balance, with an even-handed and reasoned approach to budgetary decision-making based on a clear understanding of the strategic objectives of the organization.
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Directo

Resource Development: The Director will have a track record of success cultivating donors and the ability to build strong and lasting strategic partnerships to scale impact. He/she will have an ability to resonate with a diverse range of funding sources including individual donors, foundations, corporations, and government funders. Further, he/she will engage his or her professional network to strengthen the MSU Museum’s funding base, including the endowment, in partnership with the Community Advisory Council and University development team.

Interpersonal Acumen and Character: The successful candidate will possess a spirit of entrepreneurship, innovation, and creative problem-solving. He/she will have the ability to inspire, and will bring high energy, charisma, focus, and drive to his or her work on campus. The Director will have a strong work ethic and willingness to lead by example, and will have demonstrated sound judgment and confidence, combined with humility and a focus on personal development and continued learning. MSU is deeply committed to fostering a diverse and inclusive campus community, and the Director will be looked to for his/her support of the University in its efforts to advance these core value of inclusiveness. Finally, a sense of humor always helps!

MSU is an affirmative action, equal opportunity employer. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability status, protected veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by law.

Contact

The MSU Museum has engaged Russell Reynolds Associates exclusively for this search. Interested candidates are encouraged to contact either Katherine Armstrong or Laurie Nash. Please submit a CV and Letter of Interest electronically to MSUmuseum@russellreynolds.com.

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