



Search for the President
Friends of the Public Garden
Boston, Massachusetts

THE SEARCH

[Friends of the Public Garden](#) (“the Friends”), a celebrated organization dedicated to preserving three of Boston’s most important greenspaces, seeks a visionary, collegial, and compelling leader to serve as its next President. Working at the intersection of greenspace conservation, advocacy, arts and culture, and education, the Friends is a nonprofit organization that collaborates closely with the City of Boston to steward the Boston Common, Public Garden, and Commonwealth Avenue Mall. Reporting to the organization’s Board of Directors, the next President of the Friends will have the opportunity to usher the organization into its next era of impact, influence, and organizational maturity.

The Friends is one of the oldest public-private partnerships in the country, with tremendous resources and a half-century record of preserving and restoring some of Boston’s most beloved greenspaces. Founded in 1970, the organization has grown from a devoted cadre of neighborhood volunteers into a professional organization that partners closely with the Parks Department to protect and enhance these three parks. Over the course of their history, the Friends has also sought to promote the fundamental idea that all citizens belong in and deserve access to greenspace. In partnership with the Board and a dedicated team of nine along with the benefit of a \$29 million endowment, the next President will oversee an annual operating budget of \$3.6 million and a capital budget of \$1.9 million. Providing strategic vision and inspirational leadership will be paramount as the Friends continues to build momentum.

The next President will possess a passion for protecting urban greenspaces, experience in building and strengthening partnerships with governmental, non-profit, and corporate entities, and deft interpersonal and communication skills. In support of the Friends’ mission, the President will cultivate and maintain strong working relationships with key partners including elected officials and other key government agencies, as well as neighborhood civic organizations. The President will be a compelling storyteller and relationship builder, serving as the face of the organization at local, regional, and national levels. Additionally, they will bring a superb leadership skill set including operational sophistication, a successful fundraising track record, an inclusive and accessible approach to diversifying visitorship, a nuanced understanding of Board governance, and a natural inclination toward collaboration and community engagement.

ABOUT FRIENDS OF THE PUBLIC GARDEN

History & Mission

As one of the oldest public-private partnerships in the nation, the Friends' mission is to renew, care for, and advocate for the Boston Common, Public Garden, and Commonwealth Avenue Mall. By the late 1960s, when the conditions of Boston's parks had deteriorated, a dedicated group of parks and horticulture enthusiasts gathered to address the deplorable conditions of the Public Garden, which suffered from insufficient funding from the City, low expectations by residents, neglect, and vandalism. In the spring of 1970, the Beacon Hill Civic Association and the Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay decided that a separate organization was needed to protect and restore the Garden. Henry Lee, one of the Garden's most staunch supporters, was chosen as the volunteer president and served in that role with distinction for forty-one years. A stalwart of the organization until his recent passing at age 99, [Henry Lee's leadership and legacy](#) remain a guiding force to the organization to this day.

While the initial focus of the organization was the Public Garden, today the Friends' mission includes all three of downtown Boston's greenspaces, all of which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and are designated as City of Boston landmarks. The Friends has vigilantly dedicated itself to advocating for these parks and in the last decade, successfully expanded its mission from vital park care to include educational programming and building new public and private partnerships, many of which have led the Friends to advocate on behalf of access to greenspaces citywide and farther afield.

The Parks

[The Boston Common](#), founded in 1634, is the oldest public park in America. Its fifty acres attract millions of people every year, both Boston residents and out-of-town visitors. The Common is an integral part of the city. It is situated on the traditional homelands of the Massachusetts Nation, who lived and thrived for hundreds of generations on the land, marshlands, and waterways now known as Boston. From Colonial times to the present day, the Common has been at the center of American history. It has witnessed executions, sermons, protests, and celebrations, and it has hosted famous visitors from Generals Washington and Lafayette to Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. and Pope John Paul II. In Colonial times, the Common served as a meeting place, pasture, and military training field. Bostonians in the nineteenth century added tree-lined malls and paths, and following the Civil War, monuments and fountains were installed. The twentieth century saw victory gardens, troop entertainment, rallies for civil rights and against the Vietnam War, and the first papal mass in North America. Today, the Common remains a green retreat reminiscent of its storied past while serving as a place for relaxation, recreation, protests, and events, large and small.

[The Public Garden](#) is the more groomed and formal younger cousin to the casual and boisterous Boston Common. As the first public botanical garden in America, the Public Garden's form, plantings, and statuary evoke its Victorian heritage. This green and flowering oasis has become a Boston landmark; no visit to Boston is complete without a stroll in the Public Garden and a trip on one of its famed Swan Boats. The Garden is truly a people's park, and citizens have always played an extraordinary role in protecting and

preserving it. Accessible to everyone, the Public Garden is often the site of weddings, impromptu jazz concerts, and photo shoots for special occasions. Observing the Garden on a peaceful summer's day with the trees in leaf, the flower beds bright with color, and the Swan Boats tracing their tranquil course around the serpentine pond, you would never think of it as a civic battleground. However, it has been an ongoing struggle to secure these 24 acres of reclaimed land as a source of tranquil beauty to be enjoyed by all.

The [Commonwealth Avenue Mall](#), a grand allée of shade trees, forms the central axis of the Back Bay, connecting the Public Garden to the Back Bay Fens' green spine. Inspired by Parisian boulevards and designed by Arthur Gilman, the Mall was created between 1858 and the 1870s under the Back Bay Development Plan. From its inception, the Mall has been a vital amenity for both residents and visitors. Winston Churchill once praised it as "the grandest boulevard in North America." Originally planted with American and European elm trees, the Mall today is a mixture of hardy, large-scale shade trees. While statues were not part of Gilman's original plan, they have become a focal point. Today, the trees, statues, benches, and walkways are all important elements of the Mall. From December to April each year, the Friends are proud stewards of the Mall's Holiday Lights display, which stretches from Arlington Street all the way to Kenmore Square.

Programming

While not a part of its initial mission, today, the organization provides robust programming and events that have expanded its reach across the three parks and the greater city. Educational programming includes the adorable and family-friendly [Duckling Day](#) and [Making History on the Common](#), an interactive experience for Boston Public School students to understand the often untold stories of the people and events that make up the history of the Boston Common. Events around the calendar bring the community together to celebrate the three parks, including the Backyard Bash on the Boston Common and fundraising events such as The Green and White Gala and the Summer and Winter parties. In totality, across all events and daily use, the Parks host roughly seven million visitors annually.

Philanthropy & Finances

A strong history of individual philanthropic giving, conservative endowment draws, and astute investing and fiscal oversight have kept the Friends on durable financial footing. The Friends boasts a sizeable endowment of approximately \$29 million, while the organization runs an annual operating budget of around \$3.6 million and an additional capital budget of \$1.9 million. The support for and dedication to these iconic spaces are represented by the 3,000 "Friends" of the Public Garden who count themselves as members, hailing from 131 communities across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and 31 additional states. Annually, the Friends also raises about \$2 million from approximately 1,600 donors.

Strategic Planning

Under the leadership of outgoing president Elizabeth Vizza and the Board of Directors, Friends of the Public Garden has been guided by its current five-year strategic plan, which will see the organization through 2025. Created during a time of global uncertainty, the five overarching goals, objectives, and key performance indicators of the strategic plan included:

1. Build a diverse and inclusive organization.
2. Increase public engagement with the Parks, the organization and its work, and the impact it has on the Parks.
3. Increase organizational capacity to support the execution of operational goals.
4. Use innovation and the latest science to apply best care practices for all three Parks.
5. Undertake and accomplish high-profile projects, excellently.

While the COVID pandemic shifted some of the priorities of the strategic plan, the organization is still on track to accomplish a number of its 50th Anniversary projects and additional initiatives, including: the launch of the [Henry Lee Fund for Boston Parks](#), adding custom-designed lighting to six statues along the Commonwealth Avenue Mall, the installation of [Janet Zweig's *What Do We Have in Common*](#), the soon to be celebrated reopening of both the [restored Child Fountains](#) and the Public Garden Arlington Street entrance. Finally, the ongoing and decades long struggle to protect the parks from the encroaching shadows of real estate developments has led the organization to work towards institutionalizing an innovative tool, [the Sunshine Model](#), to define where additional development might least infringe on sunshine across the three parks.

With Vizza's retirement on the horizon, this is a natural moment of transition wherein launching a strategic planning exercise and building on Vizza's legacy will be among the new President's first opportunities. Having joined the Friends in 2009 as the organization's third official employee, Vizza has worked tirelessly to expand the organization in all dimensions. Vizza has ably led the Friends, having strengthened its operations, secured new funding sources, and built a team of professionals to further the organization's mission and further its evolution into a sophisticated nonprofit operation. Most recently, through her advocacy, Vizza established a formal agreement for parks care with the City of Boston and the Boston Parks and Recreation Department, thus solidifying the Friends' ongoing partnership in stewarding these important greenspaces into the future.

ROLE OF THE PRESIDENT

Reporting to [the Board of Directors](#), the President sets the strategic and day-to-day direction of the organization by managing the staff, working closely with volunteer leadership, and developing and maintaining strong relationships with the organization's public partners, elected officials, and allied greenspace nonprofits. The President is responsible for setting goals, carrying out the organization's annual work plan, and ensuring that all Friends programs are well-managed and efficiently executed. In partnership with the finance manager, the President is also responsible for the astute fiscal management of the organization's annual operating budget (\$3.6 million) and capital budget (\$1.9 million). The next President will also oversee a strong team on nine with four direct reports: Director of Capital Projects and Parks Care, Finance Manager, Vice President of Advancement and External Affairs, and Executive Administrator.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

Develop and articulate an ambitious vision for the Friends of the Public Garden

The next President will join the Friends at an auspicious time as the current strategic plan is entering its final year, allowing the new leader to determine the organization's next strategic goals and priorities. The operational and financial growth that the Friends has seen in recent years is astounding, and now, its organizational maturity and structure are at a critical inflection point. Under the savvy leadership of the next President, efforts to solidify internal processes and policies and archive institutional knowledge will be critical in successfully focusing the staff, Board, and all other stakeholders on a new strategic vision. With an eye toward the future, the President will identify ways to better serve and connect with local communities, non-profit organizations, industry, government, and the city's other greenspaces. The President will convene and animate conversations that will lead to a clear new vision. Opportunities for the next chapter in the organization's story are even more important and promising in the context of the generational expansion occurring in Boston, demographically and economically. If well-crafted and executed successfully, the President's vision will amplify the organization's reputation and profile as an integral part of the stewardship and city-wide impact of all three parks.

Grow and diversify Friends' philanthropic donor base

Friends of the Public Garden's finances are in good health, owing to careful management, conservative draws from its endowment, and significant support through individual giving. Looking to the future, maintaining the organization's ambitious mission and support of the parks will require a more diverse donor base. Currently, The Green and White Gala is the single largest annual fundraising event, but there are many other ways to [support the Friends](#) through philanthropy, including membership, monthly giving, and tree and bench sponsorship. The next President will bring an appetite and flair for donor cultivation and solicitation, experience with successful capital campaigns, and a keen understanding of individual and institutional donor interest. Corporate and foundational philanthropic support are areas where the Friends has long striven to see growth, and the next President must have an astute and strategic approach to tapping into these markets.

Lead and develop a high-performing team and ensure ongoing organizational excellence

The Friends' small yet mighty staff is driven by its passion for the organization's mission. It is an intergenerational staff with a mix of tenures; fostering their development, fulfillment, and retention will be crucial to the ongoing success of the organization. The President will evince a full understanding of their work, ensure organizational cohesion, and communicate effectively. Deft and attentive internal leadership is a priority for the new President, who will be expected to identify opportunities for team-building and professional development. They will be an accessible and engaged leader, delegating ably and leveraging teamwide subject matter expertise. The Friends' next leader will also bring a sophisticated approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and ample attention to internal climate and culture.

Although Friends of the Public Garden was founded more than 50 years ago, its maturation into a professionally staffed organization is more nascent; thus, much of the organization's institutional

knowledge and expertise lies with its more tenured staff and longtime Board members. As a new round of strategic planning gets underway, the next President must assess the current organizational structure to leverage and best support the team of experts while also optimizing staffing for the goals ahead. With stronger internal functionality and role clarity, the President will cultivate an environment where staff can thrive and work towards larger organizational strategic goals.

Serve as chief ambassador of the Friends to introduce the Parks to new audiences

As free public greenspaces, the parks play an integral role in the City of Boston. The next President of the Friends should be an enthusiastic leader excited to embrace and support a broad and increasingly diverse audience for the parks, with an emphasis on access and inclusion. The President will be a fierce advocate and ambassador for the parks with the aim of increasing partnerships with other non-profit organizations and diversifying the visitorship of these three parks. Boston is a city of neighborhoods, and while honoring the neighborhood and civic associations that the Friends was born out of (Back Bay and Beacon Hill), the next President will be a champion of equity and inclusivity to remind audiences that these parks are for all community members to enjoy. The Friends will seek to extend their reach further into Boston's outer and more diverse neighborhoods through programming, community building, and communications. The Friends' vision is to make the parks more welcoming and accessible to all. The new President will work hand-in-hand with the organization's external affairs and communications staff to share the history, programming, and accessibility of the parks across the neighborhoods of Boston. Seeking more opportunities to initiate partnerships and collaborations with civic groups and leaders, cultural institutions, and corporate entities across Boston will be a critical opportunity for the next President.

Sustain and continually reinvest in crucial alliances and partnerships with the City of Boston

Although the Friends relies heavily on private support, all three parks sit on public land and require close and continuing partnership with the City of Boston to serve its organizational mission. The next President must maintain a commitment to reliable, straightforward, and continual engagement with the full range of stakeholders, including state and local elected and appointed officials, neighborhood leaders, business owners, contractors, and non-profit leaders. Friends of the Public Garden plays a vital role in the stewardship of the parks and works closely with the City of Boston's Parks and Recreation Department to provide and fund the best possible professional care for the collection of mature trees, turf, sculptures, and fountains. While there is a unified commitment among stakeholders to the continuing success and positive impact of the Common, the Public Garden, and the Mall, there are many competing interests and differing perspectives along the way to that shared destination. To that end, the next President will be a stalwart advocate and diplomat while partnering with the City of Boston and its workforce, continuing to build a strong relationship among these entities. The President will ensure continued enthusiasm for the mission of the Friends, and encourage shared forward progression on the [Boston Common Master Plan](#), an aspirational framework for exciting and substantive change to this culturally significant public place.

Liaise with the Board of Directors

The Friends is fortunate to be supported by a dedicated Board of Directors comprised of 23 active and engaged individuals committed to the organization's mission. Serving as a critical bridge between the

Friends' staff and the Board of Directors, the President must engage actively with the Board and successfully communicate its vision to the staff responsible for implementation. To that end, the next President will understand the need for a strong governance structure and will help the Board evolve its role and understand how to most effectively partner with staff as the organization continues to mature. In partnership with the Board Chair, the President will assess the Board's committee structures and how they might better align with a more mature and professional organization. The President will also continue to drive conversations around DEI as it relates to Board recruitment and the impact that a diverse Board can have as the Friends reaches across the neighborhoods of Boston.

QUALIFICATIONS & PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

The Friends seeks a proven, passionate, and collegial leader to serve as its next President. Research demonstrates that people belonging to structurally and historically marginalized groups often only apply for jobs if they meet all qualifications; while no single candidate will possess all ideal attributes, we urge you to apply if you bring many of the following experiences and qualities:

- *Leadership experience:* Demonstrated success in conceiving and implementing innovative approaches that increase organizational effectiveness. A record of dynamic partnership with a committed Board of Directors. Accomplished executive management, including the formulation and implementation of organizational strategies, processes, and procedures.
- *Commitment to mission:* Comfortable leading an interdisciplinary organization that spans greenspace care, arts and culture, education, and the civic sector. While a record of public park or greenspace leadership is a plus, it is not a requirement for consideration. Familiarity with place-based leadership in an urban setting is strongly preferred, and a passion for greenspaces and the people who visit them, is paramount.
- *Financial and business acumen:* A keen understanding of finances, including balancing organizational priorities and resources is required. Ability to communicate financial decisions to the Board, staff, and broader community. A track record of using data to guide decision-making.
- *Substantial fundraising experience:* A record of bold and effective fundraising for organizations of comparable size and ambition. An understanding of capital campaigns, including how to execute them and bring them to a successful close. A successful track record establishing corporate and foundational philanthropy. Experience developing robust networks and engaging members for individual giving.
- *Administrative experience:* Demonstrated success in attracting, retaining, and mentoring a staff of similar size. Collegiality and an orientation toward teamwork and partnership. Humility to leverage and learn from experts on staff. A genuine commitment to and track record in diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, access, and social justice.

- *Outstanding communication skills:* Superb written and oral communication skills. Political savvy and a compelling public presence. An ability to engage individuals and groups internally and externally and establish key partnerships and collaborations.
- *Personal qualities:* Integrity, dependability, and steadiness. The ability to lead all members of an organization with fairness, humility, compassion, and trust. Personal and professional drive, persistence, resilience, and optimism.

COMPENSATION & LOCATION

The Friends' office is located in the historic Beacon Hill neighborhood of Boston, directly abutting the Public Garden and a short walk to the Boston Common and the Commonwealth Avenue Mall. Currently operating on a hybrid, in-office/remote work model, the next President must reside within a commutable distance of the Friends' office. The projected salary range for this position is \$205K to \$225K.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, & NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and resumes with cover letters should be sent via the [Isaacson, Miller website](#). Electronic submission of materials is strongly encouraged.

Carrie Alexander, Karen McPhedran, Stephen Kalogeras, and Marlyn Desire
Isaacson, Miller

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