



Chief Scientific Officer
W. M. Keck Foundation
Los Angeles, California

THE SEARCH

The W. M. Keck Foundation, one of the nation's largest and most impactful philanthropic organizations, seeks a dynamic, collaborative, and strategic leader to serve as its inaugural Chief Scientific Officer (CSO). This is an extraordinary opportunity for a seasoned big-picture thinker with a broad interdisciplinary understanding of physical and life sciences and the research funding landscape, and experience in peer-reviewed grant-making, to join a highly collaborative team dedicated to supporting pioneering discoveries in scientific and medical research.

William Myron Keck, founder of The Superior Oil Company, established the W. M. Keck Foundation in 1954 with a vision to provide far-reaching benefits for humanity. Today, the Foundation supports medical and scientific research nationally and local institutions through its Southern California and undergraduate program. Keck Foundation grantees have gone on to receive other competitive funding and win the most prestigious awards. The Foundation prides itself on identifying talent early and making "risky" scientific bets that prove transformational. Nine Foundation grantees have won the Nobel Prize.

The CSO will be a vital partner in advancing the Foundation's bold goals. The CSO will work closely with the Foundation's President, Co-Chairs and Co-Chief Executive Officers, its Board of Directors, and scientific advisors. In recommending grants, the CSO must think broadly across scientific disciplines and take risks. The Foundation's program staff work in a relatively flat structure, which enables individuals to significantly influence the future of the Foundation and its grant work. Through effective communication, collaboration, and leadership skills, the CSO will directly impact critical, groundbreaking research across fields—a unique opportunity in the world of philanthropy.

The CSO will address the following opportunities and challenges:

- Support Leadership and the Board in defining the Keck Foundation's scientific vision for the next decade and beyond.
- Communicate and translate complex scientific research clearly to a variety of Foundation stakeholders.
- Lead, mentor, and inspire the team while streamlining operational processes.
- Serve as a compelling external ambassador of the Foundation.

The W. M. Keck Foundation search committee, with the assistance of Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, prepared this document to provide background information, detail the key opportunities and challenges related to the position, and list the desired qualifications and characteristics of the CSO. Please direct all confidential applications, inquiries, and nominations to the parties listed at the conclusion of this document.

ABOUT THE W. M. KECK FOUNDATION

The Keck Foundation, with assets of approximately \$1.7 billion, is known for supporting complex, yet deeply necessary, scientific advancement. Through its [larger multi-year projects](#), the Foundation has catalyzed groundbreaking scientific discovery, such as the development of the twin Keck Observatory telescopes, and interdisciplinary collaboration, such as the National Academies Keck Futures Initiative and the Keck Institute for Space Studies. Beyond these larger projects in research technology, infrastructure and cross-disciplinary thinking, the Keck Foundation regularly awards applicants scientific and medical research grants ranging from \$1 million to \$2 million and periodically makes unsolicited \$3-5 million research grants. In recent years, the Keck Foundation has funded annually about 25 to 30 projects at research institutions in the United States. Abstracts of funded projects can be found at: <https://www.wmkeck.org/our-focus-research/#focus-abstracts-research>.

The Foundation also supports the fabric of Los Angeles: the arts, culture, education, and health and community services. Recent grants in the Foundation's [Southern California portfolio](#) include funding for nonprofits' capacity-building in youth social and emotional development, education pipelines for early childhood care providers, for health care work at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Hospital in South Los Angeles and Compton Community Health Professions Partnership.

To learn more about the W. M. Keck Foundation, please visit: <http://www.wmkeck.org/>.

THE ROLE OF THE CHIEF SCIENTIFIC OFFICER

The Foundation's Research Program seeks to benefit humanity by supporting medical and scientific research. The CSO will lead four senior program directors who represent these areas. The CSO, with program staff, will evaluate research proposals from universities and other nonprofit research institutes in the United States and work closely with Leadership to recommend scientific research proposals to the Board. This requires a strong ability to communicate sciences to a variety of stakeholders in a clear and compelling manner, as well as significant time analyzing, writing, editing, reviewing, and mentoring program directors. The CSO will analyze proposals, write recommendations and review the team's initial writing and draft recommendations.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE CHIEF SCIENTIFIC OFFICER

To be successful, the CSO will address the following key opportunities and challenges:

Support Leadership and the Board in defining the Keck Foundation's scientific vision for the next decade and beyond

In active consultation with the Co-CEOs, President, and program team, the CSO will build on the Foundation's scientific vision and help define the path forward. This person will bring an interdisciplinary mindset to the role, ensuring that the program team is working toward common goals while remaining at the forefront of cutting-edge research. With the 2023 passing of Chairman Robert Day, the organization is at an inflection point, and the CSO will help the next generation of leadership define the Foundation's scientific voice.

Communicate and translate complex scientific research clearly and effectively to a variety of Foundation stakeholders

The CSO has the distinct opportunity to lead the senior program directors as the team presents to the full Board of Directors two times a year and the Committee of Program Chairs four times a year, with more frequent informal discussions. The CSO must possess the ability to distill complex research proposals and findings to committees and to the full Board—both in verbal and written formats—while explaining the merits of grant seekers' work and elevating and advocating for the Foundation's research priorities.

Lead, mentor, and inspire the team while streamlining operational processes

The CSO will lead a team of senior program directors in evaluating research proposals, modeling good scientific judgement and sophisticated evaluation skills. The Foundation maintains a lean staff structure, and the CSO and each program director is expected to be an excellent written and oral communicator and effective collaborator. The CSO will help drive consensus while articulating why certain science is important to pursue. The CSO will mentor and counsel each program director in these efforts by providing

leadership, financial stewardship, and facilitating team discussions while identifying and selecting grantees and articulating the broader vision and goals for the Foundation's future work. The CSO will look for opportunities to improve on the existing evaluation system, streamlining processes as needed. The CSO must have a hands-on and detail-oriented approach, with the ability to helicopter up and strategize when necessary.

Serve as a compelling external ambassador of the Foundation

The CSO has a strong presence in the field, regionally and nationally. As a representative of the Foundation, the CSO will travel for professional society meetings and national conferences and will interact with a variety of partners and stakeholders, from grant seekers and grantees to other funders and governmental agencies. The CSO serves as a compelling external ambassador and is tasked with elevating the Foundation's prominence and influence.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The CSO will be an outstanding scientist with a doctoral degree who has a significant record of basic research and scholarship. The CSO must have demonstrated the ability to communicate and articulate science and research to a diverse set of stakeholders. It is important that the CSO has a solid understanding of grant-making that involves peer reviews, grant applications, and the changing funding landscape on a national level. The CSO must be able to collaborate non-hierarchically, have in-depth experience with academic research across disciplines, and have knowledge of foundation, board, university, and government efforts in basic scientific research.

The Foundation is open to candidates with a variety of professional backgrounds and expects that the new CSO will bring many of the following skills, experiences, and personal qualities, understanding that no single candidate will have all the ideal qualifications:

- Doctorate in a physical or life sciences field;
- Proven scientific understanding of multiple physical and life sciences disciplines;
- Experience in basic science research;
- Excellent leadership and management skills and ability to manage and mentor a team and oversee day-to-day operations;
- Successful track record obtaining public and private funding;
- Experience assessing peer-reviewed grant applications;
- Experience participating in interdisciplinary projects;
- Superior written and verbal communication skills, effective with both internal and external constituencies;
- Experience exemplifying, bolstering, and promoting a culture of inclusive excellence;
- Strong ethics, humility, and high integrity; and

- Strong interpersonal skills with an inclusive approach to collaborating with colleagues.

LOCATION

The W. M. Keck Foundation is in Los Angeles, California. Home to pioneering academic and research institutions in the nation's West, including the California Institute of Technology; the University of Southern California; the University of California, Los Angeles; and several California State Universities, the city is a hub for innovation. Los Angeles is also known for its commitment to the arts, from its iconic film industry and music scene to its breathtaking civic art and world-class museums. A city with one of the most diverse populations on the planet, LA's residents come from a wide variety of linguistic, ethnic, national, and religious backgrounds. Angelenos take pride in their sports teams, warm beaches, and proximity to mountain ranges and desert escapes. To learn more about Los Angeles, please see <https://www.discoverlosangeles.com/>.

COMPENSATION

The anticipated annual compensation range for this position is \$400-450,000. This range takes into account the numerous factors considered in making compensation decisions, including experience, skills, knowledge, abilities, education, licensure and certifications, and other business and organizational needs. The Foundation offers a hybrid in-person/remote model for its employees and provides generous health and 401(k) match benefits. Salary offers are determined based on final candidate qualifications and experience.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, as well as application packets (CV and cover letter) should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website for the search: <https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/keck-foundation/chief-scientific-officer>

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The W. M. Keck Foundation is an equal opportunity employer and makes employment decisions based on merit. Foundation policy prohibits unlawful discrimination based on race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, pregnancy, national origin, ancestry, citizenship, age, marital status, physical disability, mental disability, military service, legally protected medical condition, or any other consideration made unlawful by federal, state, or local laws.