



# Smithsonian

Search for the Sant Chair in Marine Science  
National Museum of Natural History  
Smithsonian Institution  
Washington, District of Columbia

## THE SEARCH

The Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History (NMNH or Museum) invites applications and nominations for the Sant Chair in Marine Science (Sant Chair). The NMNH is a science-based museum within the Smithsonian Institution's complex of museums and research organizations. With over 148 million specimens and objects, the Museum's National Collection is the largest natural history collection globally and represents over 90 percent of the holdings of the Smithsonian. NMNH sees more than four million visitors a year, making it one of the most visited, and esteemed, natural history museums in the world.

To maximize its impact, NMNH has established the Ocean Science Center (OSC), a thematic umbrella for consolidating and synthesizing NMNH's marine research expertise, and for fostering collaboration among its scientific, communications, exhibits, and educational assets. The OSC aims to amplify NMNH ocean-research strengths as they relate to current ocean issues, including highlighting the broader significance of its foundational collections and field-based science, and developing communication strategies to share its impactful work with target audiences. With more than 70 ocean researchers, NMNH ocean science covers a breadth of natural-science disciplines, including biodiversity, systematics, evolution, ecology, natural-products chemistry, paleobiology, geology and geobiology, maritime archaeology, ethnology, and biological anthropology.

NMNH seeks an accomplished researcher to lead the OSC as the Sant Chair in Marine Science, who will be a strategic, visionary, and collaborative leader with excellent communication skills. The Sant Chair will collaborate closely with colleagues across the entire Museum and Smithsonian—exhibitions, education, outreach, operations, and development—to ensure the overall success of the OSC. The Sant Chair will articulate and advance a cohesive NMNH ocean science strategy with respect to research and education, and provide leadership, facilitate integrative programs and research, and enhance communication across the NMNH ocean-science portfolio and across the other Smithsonian science units also conducting marine research.

The Smithsonian Institution has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in conducting this important search and to help identify outstanding candidates. All inquiries, applications, and nominations for this opportunity should be directed to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

## THE OCEAN SCIENCE CENTER

### Research

The Ocean Science Center (OSC) utilizes NMNH's broad marine research expertise to expand its understanding of the ocean and contribute to building knowledge, tools, and pathways to conserve it. NMNH has a long history of conducting ocean-related scientific research that has helped form the foundation of global ocean knowledge. NMNH currently has more than 70 resident [researchers](#) (permanent, retired, and affiliated-agency staff; postdoctoral and graduate fellows; and contractors) engaged in collections- and/or field-based ocean science across a breadth of natural-science disciplines. They reside in the Anthropology, Botany, Invertebrate Zoology, Mineral Sciences, Paleobiology, and Vertebrate Zoology departments as well as the Marine Station at Fort Pierce, FL. Additionally, the museum hosts numerous visiting researchers from around the globe who come to NMNH to incorporate study of its marine collections into their research projects.

Much of this work is anchored in NMNH's superb and constantly expanding marine collections comprising more than 35 million objects that provide an unparalleled record of the ocean from deep time to the present. Every department at NMNH builds and cares for its collections, which are often referred to as "Libraries of Life."

In addition to the museum on the National Mall in Washington, DC, and the Museum Support Center in Suitland, MD (which houses many of the Museum's marine collections), NMNH has lab and field facilities from the tropics to the Arctic.

- [Smithsonian Marine Station at Fort Pierce, FL](#)
- [Carrie Bow Cay, Belize](#)
- [Arctic Studies Center Alaska Office](#)

### Education

Diffusion of knowledge is half of the Smithsonian Institution's mission. The Ocean Science Center is part of a public museum (Washington, DC) and a public marine-ecosystems aquarium (Fort Pierce, FL) supported by talented exhibit, communication, education, and outreach professionals who help distribute natural-history knowledge, including NMNH ocean science.

- [The Ocean Portal](#): The Ocean Portal is part of the Smithsonian Institution's Ocean Initiative. Together with the National Museum of Natural History's Sant Ocean Hall and the Ocean Science Center, the Ocean Portal supports the Smithsonian's mission to increase the public's understanding and stewardship of the Ocean.
- [The Sant Ocean Hall](#): The Sant Ocean Hall is the National Museum of Natural History's largest exhibit, providing visitors with a unique and breathtaking introduction to the majesty of the ocean. The hall's combination of 674 marine specimens and models, high-definition video, and the newest technology allows visitors to explore the ocean's past, present, and future.

- [Smithsonian Exhibit at the St. Lucie County Aquarium](#): The Smithsonian Marine Ecosystems Exhibit at the St. Lucie County Aquarium is dedicated to educating the general public and school groups about the critical need to preserve the diversity and complexity of Florida's marine environments.
- [Academic Opportunities](#): NMNH is dedicated to training the next generations of ocean scientists and is home to a broad spectrum of diverse opportunities for students and scholars interested in enriching their natural history pursuits through participation in academic programs, appointments, research visits, and formal affiliation.

## ROLE OF THE SANT CHAIR IN MARINE SCIENCE

The role of the Sant Chair in Marine Science is located within the Office of the Associate Director and [Chief Scientist](#). The Sant Chair will articulate and advance a cohesive ocean science strategy with respect to research and education, and provide leadership, facilitate integration, stimulate new multi-investigator collaborations, and enhance communication across the NMNH ocean science portfolio, including the Smithsonian Marine Station and marine science from across the NMNH and the Smithsonian Institution. The Sant Chair will be seen as a major force and an international leader in marine science and will provide institutional leadership in broader national and international marine science programs.

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE SANT CHAIR IN MARINE SCIENCE

To succeed in this role, the Sant Chair will build upon a strong foundation and address a number of key opportunities and challenges, including but not limited to:

### **Provide vision and strategic leadership for NMNH's Ocean Science Center**

Building on the existing assets of the research and collections programs, the Sant Chair will lead all constituencies in a continuing discussion about the future of ocean science at NMNH and throughout the Smithsonian Institution. The Sant Chair must drive an aspirational vision for the OSC that encompasses leadership in research, education, and conservation; additionally, they must ensure that the vision engages and inspires staff and community supporters and that OSC activities are consistent with the strategic implementation of that vision. The Sant Chair will promote innovative research directions that establish NMNH as a leader in addressing a wide range of questions in ocean science, and align OSC strategy with the ocean science research and programs across the Smithsonian Institution.

### **Serve as a key voice and advocate for ocean science within the Smithsonian and beyond**

The Sant Chair will participate in a variety of ocean-related activities, programs, and organizations in the international scientific community and will serve as a professional consultant and expert advisor in their field to other bureaus and government agencies, national and international organizations, colleagues, writers, educational institutions, museums, universities, research foundations, scientific societies, and the public. The Sant Chair will represent NMNH on related marine SI initiatives, as well as national and international efforts, interagency working groups, and partnerships such as the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. As requested, they will serve on science panels, committees, and workshops at professional international, government, and non-government levels, representing their own discipline, the Secretary of the Smithsonian, as well as the US government.

### **Exemplify and drive visionary, interdisciplinary research**

The Sant Chair will initiate, develop, and participate in research programs and fieldwork related to their own area of expertise and the expertise of the NMNH. They will engage in fieldwork in all parts of the world, with the potential focus on enhancing the National Collections and/or undertaking research using the resources of the National Collections. The Sant Chair will oversee the preparation of major synthetic research products of exceptional scope and originality in high profile venues with major impact within and across disciplines; additionally, they will contribute to the strategic long-term growth and/or improvement of collections. The Sant Chair will collaborate with researchers of other institutions to encourage studies of interest and to promote the increase and diffusion of knowledge in marine sciences; developing collaborative relationships with other marine scientists within NMNH and SI will be essential.

### **Provide leadership in operational management, resource allocation, and fundraising**

The Sant Chair will be an astute manager who both leads a team and collaborates closely with leaders of program units and program staff. The Sant Chair will maintain efficient and effective systems that support the work of the OSC, encourage efficient and impactful collaboration, and make certain the work of the OSC is coordinated and integrated across departments. The Sant Chair will also work with the appropriate individuals across NMNH, SI, and other government and non-federal organizations to review and give input on the relevant budgets on a regular basis and determine resource allocation and spending. The Sant Chair will support NMNH and SI's fundraising strategy by independently seeking and attracting additional funding from sources within the Smithsonian, as well as private and public organizations externally.

## **QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS**

The successful candidate will be a highly accomplished researcher with a PhD or equivalent degree in a relevant discipline. While no one person will embody all of these, the successful candidate will bring many of the following professional qualifications, skills, experiences, and personal qualities:

- A record of distinguished scholarship and extramurally funded research in their area of specialization and wide recognition as a national and international authority and leader in their field.
- Ability to advise Smithsonian leadership on national and international scientific matters in ocean science.
- An appreciation of the importance of collections-driven approaches to marine science research.
- The ability to effectively manage organizational change while working in a collaborative environment.
- The ability to be a spokesperson and an international ambassador for marine science while also communicating effectively to a lay audience.
- A collegial approach and a demonstrated ability to work effectively across all levels of a large, complex organization, and to engage a broad range of individuals and constituencies.
- Vision and proven ability to develop strategic plans and initiatives that are innovative and encourage high-quality science; experience in or the capacity to develop and communicate interdisciplinary science programs.
- An entrepreneurial mindset to seek out new opportunities and emerging funding sources.

- Strong interpersonal and communication skills; the capacity to build, maintain, and foster excellent internal and external relationships, and work in collaborative teams.
- Unimpeachable integrity and the highest standards of ethical behavior.

## COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

The salary range for this role is \$150,160 - \$225,700, depending on experience and Institution policy. It is expected that the Sant Chair in Marine Science will live within a commutable distance of Washington, DC.

## APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website for the search: <http://imsearch.com/open-searches/smithsonian-national-museum-natural-history/marine-science>. Electronic submission of materials is strongly encouraged.

Pam Pezzoli, Partner  
Alexandra Lolavar, Senior Associate  
Melissa Barravecchio, Senior Search Coordinator  
Rachel Banderob, Senior Search Coordinator  
Isaacson, Miller

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## ABOUT THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

*“an establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge...” -James Smithson, 1826*

Founded in 1846, the Smithsonian Institution is the world’s largest museum, education, and research complex, with 21 museums, nine research centers, five educational units, and the National Zoo. The Smithsonian employs more than 6,700 committed professionals, including renowned scientists and scholars, and a comparable number of highly motivated volunteers, interns, fellows, research associates, and visiting artists and scientists. The Smithsonian’s vast collections hold more than 154 million objects and specimens, and the Smithsonian annually attracts more than 17 million visitors to its museums, and 150 million to its websites.

Every day the Institution continues to shape the future by preserving heritage, discovering new knowledge, and sharing its resources with the world. Under the leadership of the Secretary, the Smithsonian advances its core values of discovery, creativity, excellence, integrity, and service. Through unparalleled collections and research capabilities, and the insight and creativity fostered through art, history, and culture, the Smithsonian strives to provide Americans and the world with the tools and information they need to forge [Our Shared Future](#).

## ABOUT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

### History

When the U.S. National Museum building, now known as the National Museum of Natural History, opened its doors in 1910, it housed art, culture, history, and natural history collections. The Museum’s early collections included the artifacts and specimens from the United States Exploring Expedition (1838-1842) and collections from the great surveys of the American West in the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s.

In 1957, the U.S. National Museum created two administrative subdivisions: the Museum of Natural History (MNH) and the Museum of History and Technology. The U.S. National Museum was eliminated as an administrative entity in 1967, and MNH became a separate administrative unit. On March 24, 1969, the Museum was renamed the National Museum of Natural History to reflect its focus on the anthropology and natural history collections.

By the 1980s, the Museum was again running out of space for its growing collections and in 1983, the Museum Support Center (MSC) opened in Suitland, Maryland, to store collections and provide laboratories for collections conservation and analytical research.

### Today

Today, the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) cares for artifacts and specimens both in the Museum on the Mall and at the Museum Support Center. The main building on the National Mall in Washington, DC contains 1.32 million square feet of space overall and 325,000 square feet of exhibition and public space. Altogether the Museum is the size of 18 football fields and houses over 1,600 staff, research associates, fellows, interns, and volunteers. With a growing network of interactive websites, the

Museum is transforming itself into a hub for national and international electronic education, accessible to anyone with access to the internet.

The NMNH had an operating budget of \$154.5 million in fiscal year 2024, based on \$121.6 million in funding from the federal government (both in direct appropriations and support from the central Smithsonian Institution); \$7.6 million in government grants and other contracts; and \$13.7 million in endowment income. In FY24, new gifts and private grants totaled \$80.6 million. As of April 30, 2025, the National Museum of Natural History had endowed funds of \$331 million.

## **Research**

Over 450 individuals make up NMNH's science community, including staff scientists, resident research associates, pre- and post-doctoral fellows, long-term visiting researchers from other institutions, scientists employed by affiliated agencies, and non-resident research associates and collaborators. NMNH also mentors students through science-based internships and works with volunteers who contribute their time and talents toward its scientific endeavors.

The scientific research staff is organized into seven departments: [anthropology](#), [botany](#), [entomology](#), [invertebrate zoology](#), [mineral sciences](#), [paleobiology](#), and [vertebrate zoology](#).

In 2024, the Museum's scientific staff authored 661 scholarly publications and contributed to the discovery and description of 122 new species.

## **Collections**

NMNH's collections are a key point of distinction and a tremendous resource for the Museum's scientific staff. The Museum holds more than 148 million objects and specimens, representing over 90 percent of the Smithsonian Institution's collections and making it the largest natural history collection in the world. Approximately half of the collection is maintained at the Smithsonian's Museum Support Center in Suitland, MD, which provides state-of-the-art conditions for storage and conservation of collections as well as a library and advanced analytical research facilities.

## **Education**

The Museum offers a variety of educational programs for audiences of all ages. Visitors can engage onsite and online with scientists, collections, and research that happens in the lab and in the field. Interactive educational activities are offered in Q?rius, The Coralyn W. Whitney Science Education Center, which provides innovative learning spaces for teens, educators, and families. The space inspires young visitors to explore their world through a scientific lens by directly interacting with scientists and more than 6,000 specimens, including bones, minerals, and fossils. There are more than 300 free K-12 online teaching resources, and free school programs for K-12 student groups are available on weekday mornings (by reservation), as well.