



Search for the General Director Canadian Opera Company

THE OPPORTUNITY

[The Canadian Opera Company](#) (“COC” or “the Company”)—the largest producer of opera in Canada, known globally for the quality of its artistic program—seeks a strategic, ambitious, and collaborative executive to serve as General Director. This is a distinct opportunity to join a preeminent opera company, engage deeply with a committed board and staff, build broader partnerships and support globally, and lead this esteemed organization to even greater renown.

Over the last three decades, the Company has solidified its standing among the world’s great opera companies. It owns and operates the [Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts](#), considered by many to be the finest acoustical theatre for opera in North America, and produces [mainstage works](#) that rival those produced by the great opera companies in Europe. It presents more than 70 free programs annually through the [Free Concert Series](#) and trains the next generation of Canadian artists through the [Ensemble Studio](#). Every year, the Company delivers [a broad array of programs](#) in partnership with community organizations and institutions across Toronto that inspire and engage audiences.

Now, the Company is primed for an inspiring and enterprising General Director to craft a vision for what comes next. Such a vision should be both locally grounded and globally engaged, promoting the clear artistic strength of the Company and connecting it even more profoundly to communities and organizations in Toronto, across Canada, and throughout the world. The General Director will broadcast this vision and serve as a public ambassador to great effect, inspiring existing and potential donors and audiences to support the Company and engaging the public through an ambitious campaign. More fundamentally, the General Director will be a strategic organizational leader, assessing existing structures and frameworks and modifying them to enable greater cohesion, collaboration, and communication among the staff. In their leadership, the General Director will strengthen the artistic, organizational, financial, and reputational standing and impact of the Company.

The COC has retained the national executive search firm Isaacson, Miller to assist in the recruitment of its next General Director. Please direct all applications, inquiries, and nominations to Isaacson, Miller as indicated at the end of this document.

THE CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY

Founded in 1950, the Canadian Opera Company is the largest producer of opera in Canada and one of the largest in North America. Enjoying an international reputation for artistic excellence and creative innovation, the COC attracts the foremost Canadian and international artists. Its diverse repertoire includes local and international collaborations with the world's leading opera companies and festivals, as well as new commissions and productions. The upcoming [2025-2026 mainstage season](#) includes ambitious works by Gounod, Gluck, Verdi, Rossini, Bartok, Schoenberg, and Massenet, and the [Free Concert Series](#) presents approximately 70 concerts to 14,000 community members annually, featuring vocal, instrumental, jazz, and dance performances by both emerging and established contemporary artists in one of Toronto's most breathtaking and intimate spaces.

An incubator for the future of the art form, the Company nurtures Canada's new wave of opera performers and creators with customized training and support. The [Ensemble Studio](#) blends professional working experience with intensive training through an individually tailored program. Since 1980, over 230 Ensemble Studio artists have benefited from unparalleled access to world-class opportunities in the Company and can now be heard on stages across the world.

Canada's first purpose-built opera house, the [Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts](#) is hailed as one of the finest opera houses in the world. The facility has sufficient capacity to allow three complete productions to play in repertory, and the orchestra pit allows for the presentation of the full range of operatic repertoire, including monumental works that require an orchestra of over 100 musicians. The acoustic design of the space has proven attractive to artists from around the world, including conductors, singers, and musicians alike. Owned by the COC, the Four Seasons Centre is the permanent home of the Company and the performance venue for [The National Ballet of Canada](#). In addition, the Company owns the Joey and Toby Tanenbaum Opera Centre, which functions as an administrative and rehearsal space for the Company, and a scene shop.

More broadly, the COC is committed to building future audiences and ongoing partnerships with community organizations and institutions that connect people of all ages and backgrounds with the power of music. Every season, the Company delivers workshops, talks, symposia, behind-the-scenes events, and other educational opportunities that inspire and engage audiences. Last season, the [Community Partnerships & Programs department](#) served more than 13,000 young people and community members, engaged meaningfully with 26 partners, and welcomed 47 schools and community groups into COC spaces.

ROLE OF THE GENERAL DIRECTOR: LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The General Director is the chief executive officer of the COC and reports to the [Board of Directors](#). As such, the General Director provides leadership and vision that ensure the artistic, financial, and organizational success of the Company while heightening the Company's artistic profile and reputation for excellence and innovation locally, nationally, and internationally. Aligned with these ambitions, the

General Director is responsible for managing an operating budget of approximately \$40M, 88 full-time and 170 part-time [administrative and support staff](#), a 40-member [chorus](#), a 56-member core [orchestra](#), and the Company's significant real estate assets.

As the organization's chief executive officer, the General Director works closely with the senior leadership team to oversee all aspects of COC operations, including: artistic planning; strategic direction; budgeting and finance; fundraising; artistic administration; production; marketing and audience development; community engagement; education; public relations; media; collective bargaining negotiations; facilities management; human resources; information technology; and government relations.

As the COC looks to the future, the General Director is expected to address the following interrelated opportunities and challenges as key priorities.

Craft an inspiring and ambitious vision for the Company

Under recent leadership, the COC has built a world-class opera house and developed an artistic profile that position it among the world's finest companies. Additionally, the company is currently engaged in a strategic planning process, which will define emergent challenges and key opportunities. As such, the organization is primed for a visionary General Director to join the Company, learn its history, take stock of its enviable assets, and outline an inspiring and ambitious vision to give life to the developing strategic plan and guide the institution into its next chapter. This vision should be at once artistically bold and culturally responsive, locally grounded and globally engaged, distinctly Canadian and broadly inspiring to Company members, artists, donors, patrons, community partners, and civic leaders alike.

Strengthen the financial position of the Company through fundraising efforts, audience development, and strategic resource allocation

Recent strategic goals—namely building the opera house and developing the artistic program—have been expensive endeavors. The COC Foundation is modest, totaling approximately \$50 million, and annual fundraising efforts total approximately \$10 million. On average, approximately 85% of their seats are filled for each performance, with subscribers accounting for approximately 50% of the audience. It is in a relatively healthy financial position, but greater resources are needed to achieve their ambitions. Despite this, the Company's focus on working efficiently and effectively has allowed its artistic output to regularly outperform the resources available to it.

Recognizing that financial pressures continue to grow, the Company seeks a General Director who will strengthen its financial position. This will include working with the Board and staff to significantly grow fundraising efforts, including launching an ambitious campaign; strategically engaging existing audiences and developing new ones; thinking innovatively to diversify the Company's revenue streams; and allocating existing resources prudently and strategically, thereby maximizing their impact.

Continue the process of amending the organizational structure to encourage collaboration, strengthen communication, and develop a cohesive sense of identity among the Company

The Company is currently in the process of assessing its organizational structure, and the incoming General Director will both benefit from and build upon this work. More specifically, the Company seeks an enterprising leader who will meet the staff, learn what works well and where organizational challenges remain, and work collaboratively to continue the process of clarifying roles and responsibilities, amending the organizational structure to enable people to do their best work, and strengthening communication channels across the Company. The staff seek greater opportunities for collaboration across organizational units at all levels, and they look forward to partnering with the next General Director to determine the shape such organizational developments might take, with the hope that such developments will contribute to a cohesive sense of identity that connects the full Company beyond their individual units.

Develop the Company's reputation and lead civic engagement efforts in Toronto and beyond

As a major cultural institution based in Toronto but with a global reach, the COC operates at all levels from local to global. The Community Partnerships & Programs department serves the city and surrounding region and has meaningfully increased access to the artistic program. The opportunity now exists for the COC to strengthen these efforts strategically and to be a key player in broader civic engagement efforts, connecting meaningfully with other cultural assets and community organizations in and around Toronto, sharing resources to support innovative artistic and cultural efforts, further strengthening the city's rich and diverse cultural scene, and ensuring Toronto remains a compelling base and destination for residents, businesses, and tourists. The General Director will lead the COC's efforts on this front, serving as a vibrant representative and bridge builder in Toronto, throughout Ontario, across Canada, and internationally.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

While no individual is likely to embody all, the successful candidate will bring many of the following professional qualifications and personal characteristics:

- A passion for opera and the COC's mission; the ability to build rapport with and command the respect and support of artists, audiences, donors, colleagues, and the public;
- Proven success as a senior executive of an opera company, performing arts organization, or cultural institution that balances local engagement and international reach;
- Experience developing, articulating, and advancing an ambitious vision for a cultural institution; the vision and presence to increase the visibility, reputation, and impact of such an organization;
- An appetite for and successful track record in revenue development, including fundraising broadly, individual donor cultivation specifically, and audience development; successful capital campaign experience is preferred; experience with government relations;
- Experience leading, serving, and engaging a dedicated Board of Directors;
- Demonstrated success in building meaningful partnerships with diverse constituencies, as well as advancing the values of diversity, equity, inclusivity, belonging, and decolonization;
- A collaborative and transparent leadership style that fosters trust and accountability; the ability to successfully lead a large and diverse staff through complex organizational change;

- Exceptional communication skills, encouraging and facilitating dialogue around challenging issues with grace, humility, and integrity; the ability to strengthen organizational communication efforts;
- Experience building and managing budgets while driving sound financial and policy decisions; the ability to make strategic decisions that are both artistically compelling and financially prudent;
- A sincere interest in and appreciation for the city of Toronto and Canadian culture.

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

This is a permanent, full-time position based in Toronto with a targeted starting salary of approximately \$400,000 CAD commensurate with experience. Residing within daily commutable distance of COC is essential, and relocation support will be provided if necessary.

[Toronto](#) is Canada's largest city and a world leader in business, finance, technology, entertainment, and culture. With a dynamic, majority first-generation population (52.9%), Toronto is one of the most multicultural, ambitious cities in the world. Similarly, the city and environs boast a diverse array of world-renowned cultural institutions, including the [National Ballet of Canada](#), [Shaw Festival Theatre](#), [Stratford Festival](#), [Toronto Symphony Orchestra](#), [Toronto International Film Festival](#), [Royal Ontario Museum](#), [Art Gallery of Ontario](#), [University of Toronto](#), [Ontario College of Art and Design University](#), and one of the world's largest public library systems in the [Toronto Public Library](#). A consortium of arts organization leaders in the Greater Toronto Area regularly meets to collaborate and strategize.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Applications (including a resume/CV and cover letter), inquiries, and nominations should be submitted through the [Isaacson, Miller website](#).

Sarah James, Ben Tobin, Keith Mason, and Siobhan Hanley: Isaacson, Miller

As Canada's largest opera company, the COC deeply values equity and diversity across all levels of the organization and believes in fostering an inclusive, discrimination-free environment that fully supports our team's personal and collective success. We are committed to building a workforce that reflects our community, our city, and our country and, in turn, the COC welcomes applicants from all backgrounds and abilities who share and embrace these values of anti-racism and inclusion.

The COC is committed to providing accommodations for people with disabilities in accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) in all parts of the hiring process. If you require an accommodation, please let us know and we will work with you to meet your needs.