



Smithsonian

Libraries and Archives

Director, Smithsonian Libraries and Archives

Smithsonian Institution

Washington, District of Columbia

THE SEARCH

The Smithsonian Institution invites nominations and applications for the position of Director of the Smithsonian Libraries and Archives (SLA). This is a leadership opportunity at the helm of one of the world's most respected cultural and research organizations.

Reporting to the Under Secretary for Science and Research, the Director serves as the leader of SLA, responsible for the strategic planning, development, and management of its programs, people, and resources. This role oversees a talented team of more than 110 professionals, including archivists, librarians, IT specialists, conservators, and administrative staff, and manages a complex organizational budget with multiple funding sources, including Federal appropriations and a variety of non-appropriated funds, like gifts, grants, and central Trust fund support.

The Smithsonian Libraries and Archives serve both the public and the other units of the Smithsonian.

The Smithsonian seeks a visionary digital leader and proven operating manager who can guide SLA into its next chapter of innovation, accessibility, and global impact. The Director will be charged with modernizing the organization's infrastructure, expanding its reach, and deepening its relevance to Smithsonian research units and museum scholars, educators, and the public.

The Director of the Smithsonian Libraries and Archives will lead the organization through a period of strategic transformation, shaping its digital future while preserving its scholarly legacy. This includes modernizing infrastructure, expanding access to collections and research, deepening its relationships with Smithsonian units, and fostering national and global partnerships. The Director will also play a critical role in resource stewardship, fundraising, and thought leadership, positioning SLA as a model for innovation, collaboration, and public engagement in the library and archival fields.

This role offers a unique opportunity to lead transformative change within an institution internationally recognized for its cultural and research contributions, aligning digital innovation and public service.

Isaacson, Miller, a national executive retained search firm, is assisting the Smithsonian Libraries and Archives with this recruitment. All inquiries, applications, and nominations for this opportunity should be directed to the search firm, as indicated at the end of this document.

ABOUT THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

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](#).

SMITHSONIAN LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES

The Smithsonian Libraries and Archives (SLA) is the official repository of all permanently valuable institutional records that document the organization, policies, and programs of the Smithsonian. The unit was formed in 2020 after a merger of the Smithsonian Libraries and the Smithsonian Institution Archives. The SLA plays a multifaceted and strategic role within the Smithsonian Institution, serving as both a research infrastructure and a public educational resource. With a network of specialized libraries and a robust archival system, it supports the Smithsonian's museums, research centers, and broader scholarly community by providing access to over 2.8 million volumes, 44,000 cubic feet of archival records, nearly 3 million photographic images, and over 500 TB of digital materials. SLA shares its collections with Smithsonian staff and the public through its website, social media, publications, and public programs such as exhibitions and lectures.

Its core functions include research support, collections and archival stewardship, digitization and access, education and outreach, and collaborations. Its twenty libraries contain deep research material in the fields of art, design, history, culture, and science, with over 50,000 rare books. It offers tailored resources and expert staff to assist curators, researchers, and educators. The Archives preserve the institutional memory of the Smithsonian, documenting its history, programs, and people through manuscripts, oral histories, and digital records. This includes managing official records and capturing digital content such as

websites and social media. The SLA is a leader in digitization, having digitized over 36,000 items totaling more than 13 million pages. It contributes extensively to the Biodiversity Heritage Library, an international consortium formerly hosted by the Smithsonian.

Total volumes owned by the Smithsonian Libraries exceed two million; more than 50,000 of these volumes are rare books, complemented by 11,000 manuscripts and vertical files. The Libraries house the nation's largest collection of commercial catalogs—500,000, representing more than 40,000 companies dating from the 1810s. The Libraries maintain a substantial and fast-growing collection of e-journals and databases to satisfy the research needs of its users, comprised primarily of the Smithsonian's curators, researchers, collections managers, exhibition designers, educators, and affiliated staff.

Through exhibitions, classroom programs, internships, and fellowships, the organization engages learners of all ages. It also hosts public events and lectures and maintains active social media platforms to share its collections and insights. Internally, it works closely with Smithsonian units to support exhibitions, research, and preservation. Externally, it partners with organizations like the Internet Archive for mass digitization and collaborates on special projects involving fragile and rare materials.

The organization is staffed by over 110 professionals, supported by volunteers, interns, and a national advisory board. It maintains locations across Washington, D.C., Maryland, Virginia, New York City, and the Republic of Panama, reflecting its global reach and commitment to accessibility.

ROLE OF THE DIRECTOR

Reporting to the Under Secretary for Science and Research, the Director is charged with overall planning, development, direction, and management of the Libraries and Archives. The Director will be a visionary digital leader and a proven operating manager. The Director oversees a staff of archivists, librarians, IT specialists, conservators, and administrative staff. Additionally, the Director has fiscal responsibility for a complex budget of combined Federal and Trust funds. The Director of the SLA is responsible for providing strategic leadership, being an astute financial manager, engaging nationally and globally with other library leaders, all while leading SLA into the modern age.

In addition, the position carries responsibility for records and archives management across the Smithsonian Institution. This includes ensuring that the Smithsonian Institution Archives maintains the documentary records necessary for institutional accountability, overseeing the identification and disposal of non-archival records, and safeguarding the preservation and accessibility of archival holdings. The Director will ensure that these resources are available for research by both internal stakeholders and the broader public, reinforcing SLA's commitment to transparency, stewardship, and scholarly engagement.

This SLA Director role offers a unique opportunity to lead transformative change within one of the world's most respected cultural and research institutions, aligning digital innovation with archival integrity and public service.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE DIRECTOR

The Director will address the following opportunities and challenges:

Provide innovative vision and strategic leadership to the Smithsonian Libraries and Archives

The Director of the SLA will lead efforts to develop collaborative platforms that support research, dissemination, and outreach, ensuring the SLA remains at the forefront of scholarly communication and public engagement. This includes leveraging emerging technologies to meet the evolving needs of a diverse audience ranging from online visitors and educators to scholars, researchers, conservators, and in-person visitors to Smithsonian facilities. In collaboration with the overall Smithsonian Institution's digital transformation plan, the Director will help shape the SLA digital strategy and will bring an innovative mindset and a deep understanding of digital transformation in cultural and academic institutions, with a commitment to expanding the reach and relevance of SLA's work. Additionally, the Director will need to be both strategic in their overall vision and management of the unit, as well as attentive to the day-to-day operations of SLA in a time where the unit is facing uncertainty and challenges within the current environment.

Manage resources with an entrepreneurial approach

The Director will be responsible for maintaining and expanding SLA's research resources with a strong focus on cost-effectiveness and sustainability. This includes identifying innovative approaches to resource management and advocating for open access publishing and the broader opening of the scholarly record. The position requires a forward-thinking mindset and a commitment to enhancing the visibility and impact of Smithsonian research on a global scale.

In addition to resource management, the role encompasses leadership of SLA's development program. This includes planning and executing strategies for corporate and individual gift cultivation while prioritizing strong relationships at the national and global levels. The Director will work closely with SLA Advancement staff and the Smithsonian Institution's Office of Advancement to secure private funding for key initiatives, including special projects and broader campaign activities. The role also involves seeking grant funding and major gifts, working in concert with the Institution's philanthropic Advisory Board to support SLA's fundraising efforts.

Utilize the Smithsonian's platform to engage leaders in the national library space

The Smithsonian Libraries and Archives plays a unique and influential role in the national library landscape, and this position is charged with leveraging that platform to foster meaningful engagement with leaders

across the field. The Director will represent SLA in national and international forums, building strategic partnerships and thought leadership initiatives that elevate the Smithsonian's voice in shaping the future of libraries, archives, and scholarly communication.

This role involves cultivating relationships with peer institutions, professional associations, and policy-making bodies to advance shared goals around access, preservation, innovation, and equity in the library and archival sciences. By positioning SLA as a convener and collaborator, the Director will help drive dialogue and action on key issues affecting the field of libraries, while also ensuring that the Smithsonian remains a visible and active contributor to the evolution of the field.

Through this work, the Director will not only amplify the impact of SLA's programs and initiatives but also help shape the broader discourse on the role of libraries and archives in a rapidly changing information environment.

Build service-oriented connections across the Smithsonian Institution

The Director of the Smithsonian Libraries and Archives will be expected to operate with a deep understanding of the Smithsonian's museum units as core institutional stakeholders and primary customers. Success in this role requires the ability to build trusted, service-oriented relationships with museum directors and senior leadership, engaging with them as strategic partners and colleagues.

In addition to strong interpersonal and diplomatic skills, the Director must bring a sophisticated understanding of how to lead within a large, complex bureaucracy. This includes navigating institutional structures, aligning priorities across departments, and advancing initiatives through collaboration, persistence, and strategic influence. The ability to balance visionary leadership with operational savvy will be essential to driving meaningful progress across SLA and the broader Smithsonian ecosystem.

Modernize the Smithsonian Libraries and Archives, strategically implementing emerging technology

The Director will be charged with ensuring SLA remains responsive to the evolving technological landscape and continues to meet the needs of its varied user base.

Serving as a key resource to senior leadership on matters related to information technology, the Director will provide insight and guidance on digital infrastructure and tools that support research and operational efficiency. A core component of the role includes upgrading essential systems, such as the library services platform, as well as actively supporting the Institution's scholarly research through the implementation and integration of data analysis tools, enabling deeper insights and broader access to the SLA's collections and services.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Ideal candidates will demonstrate many of the following personal qualifications, skills, and experience:

- An ALA-accredited MA or MS in Library Science degree, or an advanced degree in Information Science, History, Archival Science or its equivalent is required;
- A record of progressively responsible administrative experience in academic or other libraries or archives, including budget management, strategic planning, negotiation, and patron services. Experience in all types of libraries and archives will be considered equally;
- A record of developing or cultivating external funding sources for resource enrichment in a university or other non-profit setting;
- Excellent communication, interpersonal, and leadership skills, and the ability to act as a strong advocate for libraries at the institutional, national, and global levels;
- Demonstrated ability to lead and inspire teams through change, fostering a culture of growth, accountability, and shared purpose;
- A collegial leadership style that encourages input and promotes an organizational climate based on mutual respect, service, communication, and teamwork;
- Capacity to engage constructively with the range of stakeholder perspectives, while promoting contemporary understandings of institutional priorities;
- Experience working in a complex organization, as both a service provider and service recipient;
- Evidence of a strong commitment to fostering a hospitable workplace where current and prospective staff can thrive;
- Expert knowledge of the challenges and trends impacting cultural libraries, archives, and institutions, and experience developing innovative and creative solutions to deal with them;
- An understanding of how current trends have impacted the library and archive field;
- Commitment to ensuring the use of emerging technological advances including artificial intelligence, to provide more efficient and effective access to information resources and to enhance library services;
- Commitment to fostering internal and external communications, marketing, and donor relations efforts.

Security Level

This position has been reviewed to determine the level of position sensitivity. Based on the nature of the work, the position has been determined to be Public Trust / High Risk. This designation will require (1) a pre-employment Security Agency Check (SAC) for the prospective incumbent; and (2) a subsequent comprehensive background investigation and favorable adjudication in order to continue in the position.

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: <https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/smithsonian-libraries-and-archives/director>.

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*The Smithsonian Institution is an **Equal Opportunity Employer**. To review The Smithsonian's EEO program information, please click the following: <https://www.si.edu/oeo>.*

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