



Search for the Chief Financial and Operations Officer  
Marine Biological Laboratory  
Woods Hole, Massachusetts

## THE SEARCH

The Marine Biological Laboratory (MBL), North America's oldest private research laboratory, seeks an experienced, strategic, and collaborative individual to serve as its next Chief Financial and Operations Officer (CFOO). The CFOO will join the MBL at an exciting moment as the Director and Board of Trustees work together to develop a revised business model that advances institutional mission and achieves long-term financial sustainability. The CFOO will play a pivotal role in realizing this vision by aligning resources with institutional priorities, developing new revenue streams, harnessing data-driven financial analyses, championing modernized business practices, and providing leadership across all levels of the institution.

Recognized as one of the great international labs for research and education in the life sciences, the MBL draws accomplished researchers across a variety of biological disciplines. The MBL's [research](#) and [education](#) programs are renowned for their unique convening power and collaborative nature providing an innovative platform for seminal discoveries in biological research. This vibrant institution provides resident and visiting science programs and a growing portfolio of education courses from high school to advanced training levels. Research at the MBL spans subject areas including cell and developmental biology, climate and environmental science, evolutionary biology, genetics and genomics, regenerative biology, neuroscience, microbial ecology, and physiology. The MBL is one of six research institutions in Woods Hole including the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, the Woods Hole Research Center, NOAA Fisheries, Sea Education Association, and USGS.

Reporting directly to the Director and serving as a key member of senior administration, the CFOO is responsible for a broad portfolio across finance, human resources, IT, and facilities and services. The CFOO will be a partner to the Director, fellow senior leaders and the Board of Trustees, providing strategic leadership for financial and operational decision-making. The CFOO will bring a creative business mindset to the role, supporting data-informed decision-making, identifying new opportunities for revenue generation, maximizing revenue from existing fee for service research services, and supporting critical fundraising efforts. In addition to financial leadership, the CFOO will also oversee the MBL's facilities and operations. The CFOO must be a strong communicator, collaborator, and leader of teams, able to

build productive relationships across MBL and externally. The CFOO bring a deep appreciation for the MBL's research and educational mission, and an understanding of how financial, operational, and administrative functions unite to support modern scientific discovery and learning.

The Marine Biological Laboratory has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national search firm, to assist in this important recruitment. All inquiries, nominations, and applications for this opportunity should be directed in confidence to the firm as indicated at the end of this document.

## ABOUT THE MARINE BIOLOGICAL LABORATORY

Combining research and education has been integral to the MBL's mission since its founding in 1888. [The MBL and the University of Chicago affiliated in July 2013](#), a combination that enhances both institutions' missions of leadership and innovation in biological research and education. Today the MBL is home to a full-time resident research program with faculty and its education and visiting research programs welcome nearly 2,000 students, researchers, and faculty each year. The MBL employs nearly 300 year-round employees, of which half are research staff. MBL's research and education work is funded by federal granting agencies such as the NIH and NSF, by the respected charitable foundations such as the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, Burroughs Wellcome Fund, and the Moore Foundation, by private philanthropists dedicated to MBL's mission, and through tuition.

The MBL is known for pushing the boundaries of science, pioneering new fields, and establishing the careers of generations of leading scientists. Among scientists with an affiliation to the MBL (serving as a researcher, course faculty, and/or student) are 63 Nobel Laureates (since 1929), 25 Lasker Award recipients (2000-2024), and more than 300 National Academy of Sciences (NAS) members (since 1960). In 2024, 14 of the 124 members inducted into the NAS are affiliated with the MBL.

Among the key breakthroughs made at the MBL are the use of horseshoe crab blood to detect bacterial contamination, the discovery of proteins that control cell division — including its lack of control in cancer, understanding how the transport of molecules is precisely controlled within cells, and uncovering how molecules can be concentrated and organized within cells without the need for membranes. Furthermore, other discoveries have relied heavily on resources provided by the MBL, including harnessing green fluorescent protein (GFP) as a basic tool for cell biology, and understanding how nerve impulses are propagated.

Strategic research themes that drive MBL's research and education programs include innovation in biological imaging and the creation of a novel set of new genetically tractable organisms to develop the next generation of research models. By leveraging its access to a rich and diverse aquatic ecosystem, MBL scientists unlock secrets of basic biology that result in major improvements to human welfare and health. Innovation and advancements in genetics, and high-power imaging and analysis capabilities, provide powerful tools that allow MBL researchers to understand how their solutions work and identify approaches to apply them to human needs. The MBL's research and education portfolio includes marine

biology, but marine biology per se is not the Lab's sole focus. Rather the marine environment is just one of several key sources of inspiration for the MBL's basic biology research and education.

More information about the Marine Biological Laboratory can be found on the laboratory's website: <https://www.mbl.edu/>.

## Financial Overview

Fiscal Year 2024, MBL's operating expenses were \$53.4 million; the corresponding revenue was \$53.9 million. During the fiscal year, MBL received \$18 million in federal grants, \$5.9 million in foundation grants, \$11.2 million in support from UChicago, and \$5.9 million in contributions for use in operations. As of June 30, 2024, the endowment was valued at \$99 million.

## Leadership and Governance

The MBL is directed by [Nipam Patel, Ph.D.](#), who joined the MBL in 2018 from University of California, Berkeley. Patel is the 20th scientist to serve as MBL's director since its founding in 1888. The MBL remains a separate 501(c)(3) corporation registered in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and is as an affiliate of the University of Chicago. Currently 30 Trustees serve on the MBL Board. More information on the MBL's Board and its Bylaws can be found [online](#).

## ROLE OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL AND OPERATIONS OFFICER

The Chief Financial and Operations Officer (CFOO) reports to the Director and is a member of senior administration. The CFOO is responsible for the financial stewardship, operational effectiveness, and organizational alignment of the MBL to support world-class scientific research and education. This role combines strategic financial leadership with oversight of core operational functions including financial services, human resources, IT, facilities, and administrative services. The CFOO will be a close partner to the Director in working closely with and the Board of Trustees to shape the institution's long-term vision while maintaining day-to-day excellence in finance and operations.

## Institutional Responsibilities

- Lead effective budgeting, short and long-term financial planning and performance management, supporting sound decision-making.
- Support the development function through collaboration with the Chief Advancement Officer (CAO), this includes growth of the department, as well as working with the CAO to establish a five-year strategic plan for development.
- Lead enterprise risk assessment and management and associate risk prevention and mitigation.

- Helping to lead efforts to align organizational structure with the Board and Director's priorities and strategic performance initiatives.
- Work with Director and heads of research and education to understand current and future infrastructure needs, translating them into financial and operating plans.
- Oversee and drive continuous improvement in the full range of service operations, ensuring professionalism, transparent economics, and pricing.
- Oversee MBL initiatives to improve productivity of MBL people, equipment, facilities, and infrastructure.
- Challenge MBL's allocation of talent, space, and capital in the pursuit of scientific impact, focusing the portfolio of activities with decisive additions and eliminations.

#### **Functional Responsibilities (Finance):**

- Oversee the financial accounting, reporting systems, and policies, providing accurate, timely financial information to the management team and compliance with the requirements of statutory authorities, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, federal/private funding institutions, lenders, and the University of Chicago.
- Build independent relationships with the Finance Committee, Audit and Risk Committee, and full board. Support board members' understanding, oversight, and decision making with synthesized financial reports and recommendations. The CFOO also provides staff support to the Finance and Audit and Risk Committees.
- Manage cash/other items on the balance sheet, ensuring liquidity and prudent risk management.
- Build the finance/accounting organization with talent caliber that befits a leading scientific institution.
- Provide action-oriented FP&A/decision analysis to non-financial managers at the MBL.
- Lead relationships with lenders, advisory firms, and University of Chicago professionals: audit, investment management, tax pension, insurers, etc.

#### **Functional Responsibilities (Operations)**

- Lead the consolidation and upgrade of MBL facilities, working with real estate and construction professionals, the State of MA, other funders, and as appropriate other Woods Hole institutions.
- Unify grounds and facilities management into the strategic vision of the institution, building their understanding of the MBL's directions and the implications of their function(s) on the larger institution, and tapping ideas for integrating infrastructure needs with programmatic strategy.
- Work with the Director and heads of research and education on initiatives to profitably increase year-round facilities utilization and ensure offerings meet the needs of target users/programs.
- Work with the Chief of Staff to maximize time and productivity of the top team through nimble top team management, decision-making and prioritized implementation effectiveness.

- Support the HR function to build a high-performance culture, supporting HR processes/policies appropriate to a scientific and academic institution.
- With the Director, build high impact working relationships with other scientific institutions, the state of MA, and the Town of Falmouth.
- Lead negotiations with critical suppliers of strategic goods/services and major contracts to cost effectively meet the needs of a leading scientific institution.

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE CHIEF FINANCIAL AND OPERATIONS OFFICER

The success of the next Chief Financial and Operations Officer will be determined by how well they address the following opportunities and challenges:

### **Advance the MBL's Mission Through Strategic Financial and Operational Leadership**

As a key member of the senior administration, the CFOO will be a trusted partner to the Director, fellow senior leaders, and the Board of Trustees, bringing strategy, vision, and creative thinking to the MBL's financial and operational management. By leveraging robust financial planning and data, the CFOO will provide insights needed to gain a holistic understanding of the MBL, communicate the full implications of proposed initiatives, and guide strategic decision-making. Currently, the Board of Trustees is engaged in strategic planning to guide the MBL's future evolution. The CFOO will translate priorities charted out by the board into actionable business plans that ensure financial sustainability. The CFOO will facilitate the integration of programmatic, financial, and operational planning, connecting the dots between activities, infrastructure, and funding, and enable the exploration of innovative models of research and education.

### **Optimize the ERP System and Leverage New Capabilities**

The MBL went live with its new ERP system, NetSuite, in May 2025. The development of budgeting and forecasting modules are underway. As with any ERP implementation, there are opportunities to optimize its capabilities. The CFOO will support the Controller with ongoing optimization efforts, partnering closely with constituents across the MBL to identify challenges, understand user needs, streamline workflows, and provide robust training, and ensure accurate reporting and data accessibility and integration. The CFOO will understand the operational and analytical potential of NetSuite and guide change management efforts to maximize its impact.

NetSuite has greatly increased the MBL's analytical potential. The CFOO will assess the talent, capacity, and organization of the finance team to build out a financial planning & analysis function that provides the institution with an enhanced level of data-driven service and long-range planning. The CFOO will develop a robust culture of financial reporting, forecasting, and scenario planning that enables leaders to strategically allocate resources, prioritize, and make sound decisions.

---

### **Collaboratively Create New Revenue Opportunities**

In close partnership with the Director, board, and Chief Advancement Officer (CAO), the CFOO will support the growth of MBL's revenue by enhancing existing revenue streams, maximizing grant revenue, and developing new business opportunities. The CFOO and CAO will partner to align business and fundraising strategies, working together to communicate to donors the institutional needs that require funding, and the impact of gifts. The CFOO will also partner with the directors of research and education to evaluate the MBL's current activities, identifying opportunities for strategic investment and ensuring the best use of resources. Additionally, the CFOO will explore opportunities for business development in areas such as external partnerships, intellectual property monetization, and venture capital investment.

### **Oversee Facilities and Operations**

The MBL's campus includes a complex array of facilities with 345,000 square feet of program and administrative space, and 176,000 square feet of housing and dining space. Programmatic space includes laboratories and training classrooms, critical research service infrastructure, and a library. Housing and dining space includes dormitories, off campus cottage housing, and a cafeteria. Working closely with the Director of Facilities and Services, the CFOO will develop systems, procedures, and plans that ensure facilities are properly managed and maintained, and meet the standards needed to pursue scientific impact. Given the age of many buildings, and the MBL's location just feet away from the harbor, addressing deferred maintenance and building resiliency will be particularly critical areas of focus. The CFOO must think strategically to assess long-term maintenance trends, plan for capital outlays, and mitigate risk. The CFOO will partner with the directors of education and research to understand infrastructure needs of programmatic endeavors and translate them into financial and operational plans. The CFOO will forge strong relationships with external partners, including real estate professionals, the State of MA and town of Falmouth, grant funders, and as appropriate, other Woods Hole institutions to navigate regulatory issues, identify funding, and capitalize on potential cost sharing opportunities.

### **Support the Board of Trustees and Manage External Relationships**

The CFOO will cultivate strong working relationships with the MBL's Board of Trustees, supporting the board to carry out its fiduciary responsibility to the institution. They will produce timely financial statements and reports, relevant analysis, and offer counsel on key financial and operational functions. The CFOO will also maintain open lines of communication with external partners including banks and lenders, auditors, investment managers, insurers, and of particular importance, the University of Chicago.

### **Streamline Administrative Processes**

Despite its small size, the MBL is unusually complex given its combination of research and educational activities. The MBL is home to just under 30 resident faculty engaged in research and it welcomes nearly 2,000 visiting scientists, academic faculty, and students each year. The MBL also hosts nearly 3,000 visitors

annually for scientific meetings and conferences. Most of the summer educational and research activities are grant funded, and have developed their own cost structures, business plans, timelines, and reporting processes. The CFOO will assess and reimagine this administrative model, exploring opportunities for increased collaboration, efficiency, and consistency. The CFOO will balance the need to streamline with the meaningful variations that exist across activities. They will work with leaders in education and research to assess trade-offs and support programmatic priorities through administrative service delivery.

### **Lead Strong Teams and Build a High-Performance Culture**

The CFOO will provide leadership to the finance, IT, HR, and facilities and services teams, inheriting a talented and dedicated staff across these areas. The CFOO will create efficiencies across these teams, increasing communication and transparency between units, and aligning processes to create a more efficient, seamless service experience for faculty, researchers, and staff. Given the breadth of their portfolio, the CFOO will need to rely on their direct reports as subject matter experts and empower these leaders to take ownership and move initiatives forward. The CFOO will cultivate a culture of creativity, accessibility, mutual respect, and shared accountability, motivating teams to provide a high level of service and productivity across the institution.

The MBL is composed of a special community of dedicated year-round staff and steadfast alumni and supporters invested in the Lab's mission and impact on science. The CFOO will partner with the Director of HR, providing strategic guidance in relation to planning and prioritization as it relates to providing a stronger HR infrastructure during a time of institutional evolution and change. To develop a high-performance culture and comprehensive talent management strategy, the CFOO will support initiatives that promote staff development, professional growth, and competitive compensation structures.

## **EXPERIENCE AND CAPABILITIES**

- Bachelor's degree or higher required. Advanced degree strongly preferred.
- Committed to building community, showing excitement about science, and getting to know scientists and students at all stages of their careers.
- Ability to communicate and translate financial and operational information so that it is easily understandable and useful for non-financial stakeholders, such as lab heads and course directors, to understand and manage finances.
- Track record of successfully simplifying operations and operations, and ability to clearly and effectively communicate those activities to the board and other stakeholders.
- Ability to contribute to strategic philanthropy through a thorough understanding of institutional priorities, finances and opportunities for growth.
- Willingness to roll up sleeves as needed with physical operations.
- Experience with labor unions.

- Maintain an external awareness regarding financial functions at other not-for-profits, other leading scientific institutions, the Town of Falmouth, and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.
- Possess a mindset of helping all support/admin functions in raising their game to the highest levels of professionalism of industry/not-for-profit.
- Work ethic and track record of personal initiative required.

## COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

The total compensation for this position will be competitive and based on relevant skills and experience. The role is based in Woods Hole, MA. The MBL is open to a hybrid work arrangement.

## 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/marine-biological-laboratory/chief-financial-and-operations-officer>.

Dan Rodas, Partner  
Amble Ryan, Managing Associate  
Seema Khan, Senior Search Coordinator  
[Isaacson, Miller](#)

*The Marine Biological Lab (MBL) does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, or veteran status, and does not discriminate against members of protected classes under the law.*

*This document has been prepared based on the information provided by the Marine Biological Laboratory. The material presented in this leadership profile should be relied on for informational purposes only. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information, the original source documents and information provided by the MBL would supersede any conflicting information in this document.*