



GRANT PARK MUSIC FESTIVAL

President and Chief Executive Officer
Grant Park Music Festival
Chicago, Illinois

THE SEARCH

The Grant Park Music Festival (the Festival) seeks a strategic and collaborative organizational leader with a passion for music as its next President and CEO (CEO). This is an opportunity to lead the nation's longest-running free outdoor summer classical music series, making live symphonic and choral performances accessible to Chicagoans and visitors of all ages.

Serving as a civic and cultural leader, the Festival continues to expand partnerships with world-class artists, local music schools, esteemed performing arts organizations, and Chicago's beautiful city parks. With the opening of Millennium Park in 2004, the Grant Park Orchestra and Chorus found a new home in the Jay Pritzker Pavilion, a state-of-the-art outdoor concert facility designed by Frank Gehry. Today, the Festival produces a ten-week season featuring nearly 200 free music events across the city. Over 250,000 people attend the Festival's mainstage concerts every summer in Millennium Park. An estimated 100,000 listeners enjoy live radio broadcasts and internet streaming of the Festival's concerts via its annual partnership with WFMT-FM. The Festival also provides an array of free enrichment and lifelong learning programs that engage approximately 40,000 children and adults annually.

As the Festival plans for the future, the CEO will provide innovative leadership and strategic vision to all aspects of the organization. The CEO will demonstrate a commitment to the Festival's mission and core values, as well as an appreciation for and understanding of its contributions to the arts within the local community and beyond. They will be a thoughtful partner to the artistic leadership, an effective team leader to staff, and a force for ongoing board engagement and fundraising success, building the long-term financial resources to sustain the Festival in the future. The CEO will lead a collaborative process to define the next strategic chapter for the organization, continue cultivating strong partnerships with the City of Chicago, and raise the visibility and awareness of the Festival as a key cultural institution in Chicago.

Isaacson, Miller, a global executive search firm, has been retained to support the Grant Park Music Festival in this search. Confidential inquiries, nominations, and applications may be directed to the firm as indicated at the end of this document.

ABOUT GRANT PARK MUSIC FESTIVAL

For over 90 years, the Grant Park Music Festival has been Chicago's summer musical sensation, demonstrating that classical music performed by a world-class orchestra and chorus can have a profoundly transformative impact on the city. Showcased in a spectacular setting in the heart of the city, the Festival continues to be a summer gathering place for all of Chicago. The Festival's core programs include a ten-week season of concerts, artistic development initiatives, radio broadcasts, and community engagement programs with an extraordinary line-up of artists and performances. Featuring the world-class Grant Park Orchestra and Chorus, the Festival's free outdoor concerts take place in the Festival's official home at the [Jay Pritzker Pavilion](#) in Millennium Park, and in neighborhood venues across the city.

The Grant Park Music Festival originated from a series of free, city-sponsored concerts designed to uplift the spirits of Chicagoans during the Great Depression. Initially, the Festival operated as a department of the Chicago Park District. In 2002, the Grant Park Orchestral Association (the Association) was founded as an independent 501(c)3 non-profit organization to produce the Grant Park Music Festival and serve as a steward of its legacy. The [Chicago Park District \(CPD\)](#) and the City of Chicago's [Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events](#) (DCASE) provide the Association with key direct and in-kind support for the Festival.

The Festival boasts a reputation for wide-ranging and adventurous repertoire that spans well-loved favorites, rarely performed masterworks, music from the present day—including regular commissions and world premieres—and innovative multidisciplinary events. The Festival also regularly collaborates with rising and established national and international guest soloists, intentionally elevating diverse composers and musicians who reflect the many facets and cultures of Chicago's metropolitan area. Through its Festival Fellows program, the organization also offers vital rehearsal, performance, and development opportunities for pre-professional artists from historically underrepresented racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and geographic groups, enabling them to work alongside the Orchestra and Chorus under the Festival's artistic leadership and positioning them for successful careers.

In 2014, the Festival undertook a long-range strategic planning exercise, which helped the organization articulate three key goals that they have pursued in the past decade: (1) to be essential to the vitality of the city, connecting people of all backgrounds to symphonic music, (2) to thrill audiences with outstanding musical experiences not found anywhere else, and (3) to preserve the Festival as a unique cultural asset. Over the past decade, the Festival has worked to integrate Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) best practices across the organization. In the last five years, activities have included 1) consultant-led DEIB trainings for artistic leadership, all core staff, Board members, and representatives of the Orchestra and Chorus; 2) an independent equity audit and subsequent restructure of human resource processes; 3) creation of a DEIB Committee comprising Board members, musicians, staff, and community stakeholders. The Festival has also continued to invest in representation on stage to reflect and celebrate the rich multiplicity of the Festival's community. In 2025, 85% of concerts featured works by women and/or composers of color, and 80% showcased a woman and/or guest artist of color.

Outgoing President and CEO, Paul Winberg, has guided the organization to a place of strength, having implemented many of the strategies identified to advance these goals. Under his leadership, the Festival expanded its education programs and fellowships to build awareness and support emerging talent, elevated the Festival's artistic profile through commissions, unique collaborations, and recordings, invested in city relationships and board development, and increased its financial resources, including launching the Festival's first endowment campaign. While the core values – Openness, Excellence, Creativity, and Service – and major goals identified in the long-range plan remain relevant today, the next President and CEO will step in at a moment ripe for revisiting the specific strategies that will drive the Festival forward for the coming decade.

Orchestra and Chorus

The Grant Park Music Festival was founded in 1935, and for its first nine years of operation, featured a series of visiting orchestras. In 1944, the Grant Park Orchestra was formed as a resident orchestra for the Festival, and in 1962, the resident Grant Park Chorus was formed. The [orchestra and chorus](#) hold both joint appearances and separate performances, and have released recordings of works ranging from classical repertoire to contemporary American orchestral music, and a recent release of choral *a cappella* holiday music.

The Grant Park Orchestra features 83 professional musicians from orchestras and musical institutions across the U.S. Outside of the ten-week Festival season, these musicians can be found throughout the country performing with major orchestras, teaching at numerous universities, and appearing frequently on concert stages across the country. The orchestra is represented by the Chicago Federation of Musicians (CFM).

The Grant Park Chorus is a professional ensemble of 62 regular choristers and additional supplemental members. Chorister contracts include six programs each season. The majority of the vocalists reside in Illinois and perform with ensembles such as Chicago a cappella, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and the Chicago Symphony Chorus, in addition to solo appearances and teaching careers. Recognized for its artistic excellence, the Chorus is represented by the American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA).

Artistic Leadership

Artistic Director and Principal Conductor, [Giancarlo Guerrero](#), is a six-time Grammy® winning conductor whose imaginative programming and “curatorial and interpretive creativity” (Chicago Tribune) draw out of his orchestras “exceptionally powerful and enchanting performances” (BBC Music Magazine). 2025 marked Guerrero’s first season as Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Grant Park Music Festival. Guerrero has also taken on the role of Music Director with the Sarasota Orchestra in the 2025-26 season and will transition to the position of Music Director Laureate with the Nashville Symphony, following a sixteen-year tenure during which he championed the works of prominent American composers through commissions, recordings, and world premieres.

[Christopher Bell](#) has served as Chorus Director of the Grant Park Chorus since 2002. Bell oversees the chorus along with the Vocal Fellowship, a unique program designed to nurture the careers of singers historically underrepresented in the field. Bell prepares all of the Festival's choral programs and conducts the Festival's popular Independence Day Salute concert each year. During his tenure, he and the chorus have been recipients of the prestigious Margaret Hillis Award for Choral Excellence, presented by Chorus America, as well as glowing reviews from both critics and audiences alike. In 2013, Bell won the Michael Korn Founders Award for Development of the Professional Choral Art.

Operations and Finance

The Festival's budget for 2026 is \$8.9 million, with contributed income accounting for 65% of operating revenue, funding from the Chicago Park District making up 27%, and the remaining 8% from endowment draw and earned revenue. Over the past decade, the Festival's impressive fundraising results have allowed the organization to pursue investments in new commissions, artistic initiatives, the engagement of high-profile guest artists, and expanded community engagement programming. The Festival has worked diligently to build robust private support from a dedicated community of individuals, foundations, and corporate donors, plus a sophisticated membership program, as well as an Endowment Fund and Board Designated Investment Fund, which currently total a combined \$32 million. The 2025 classical performances at the Jay Pritzker Pavilion saw an average attendance of more than 7,500, a 3% increase over the prior year. The Festival's financial success is marked by 15 consecutive years of operating surpluses, an achievement rarely matched in the industry. The Festival is in the final phase of the [Festival Forever](#) endowment campaign to ensure that this popular summer tradition endures and thrives. The campaign has raised over \$14.5 million to date, and is on track to reach its \$15 million goal.

Staff and Board

The Festival maintains a year-round administrative [staff](#) of 17, plus a seasonal team of over 80 production, technical, and front-of-house staff members. In addition to producing the Festival season, the team also coordinates [youth education](#) and [fellowship](#) programs. Direct reports to the CEO include the General Manager, Chief Marketing Officer, Chief Financial Officer, and Chief Development Officer, as well as the Chorus Director and the Artistic Director/Principal Conductor. The Festival is governed by a 40-member [board of directors](#) who are committed to supporting the unique Festival experience of free, high-quality classical music in the heart of the city.

ROLE OF THE PRESIDENT AND CEO

The President and CEO will join a strong team of staff and board leaders, as well as exceptional artistic leadership and musicians. The CEO will be tasked with ensuring that the Grant Park Music Festival continues to shine as a unique urban classical festival of the highest caliber. The next CEO will be a leader in the Chicago arts and culture and civic communities and will persuasively communicate the organization's singular mission and its role in the city's cultural landscape.

The next CEO will build on the organization's existing strengths, continuing the financial and creative successes of the Festival while building deeper connections and visibility across the city. The CEO will continue the momentum of recent philanthropic success to secure the organization's long-term financial sustainability and resilience, and address the following key priorities and opportunities

KEY PRIORITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Develop and lead a strategic vision and plan for the Festival

The new CEO will work across the organization to develop and support the next era of the Festival, amplifying the organization's financial health, creative excellence, and accessibility to ever-broader audiences. They will articulate the Festival's sense of purpose and provide clarity and inspiration regarding the vision for the future. In doing so, the next CEO will unite the various stakeholders and ensure that the Festival maintains its position as an indispensable cultural asset to Chicago and a uniquely accessible classical festival nationally and internationally.

Grow the Festival's financial resources

Enhancing and sustaining funding is a top priority for the next CEO, including further growing the resources that will enable the Festival to increase access and inclusion for communities across Chicago. The next leader will reinvigorate and inspire existing donors and members, while also developing and cultivating the next generation of patrons. They will effectively communicate the Festival's distinct strengths and core values to a variety of audiences. The new CEO will blend effective fiscal management, strategic fundraising insights, and a keen awareness of best practices in symphonic program design and marketing to support the Festival's ongoing programs, new initiatives, and long-term sustainability.

Steward key partnerships with civic partners, and position the Festival as a leading cultural institution

The new CEO must understand the Festival's role as a cultural cornerstone in Chicago and an institution with the power to further connect communities and transform lives. Increasing the Festival's visibility and brand awareness is an important priority for the organization's next chapter. The next CEO will be a leader in sustaining the key civic partnerships with Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events and the Chicago Park District, connecting, networking, and building partnerships that benefit the Festival as well as the city writ large. In doing so, the CEO will have the opportunity to strengthen the civic sector, amplify the Festival's footprint in both Chicago and nationally, and cement the Festival as a crucial organization in the cultural life of the city.

Celebrate the artistic excellence and bold programming that the Festival offers

The CEO will ensure that the Festival's artistic output continues to inspire and engage audiences. The CEO, Artistic Director/Principal Conductor, and Chorus Director are essential partners in the success of the Festival. Giancarlo Gurerro and Christopher Bell are widely respected and accomplished leaders, and the musicians are energized by their leadership. In close collaboration with the Artistic Director/Principal

Conductor, the next leader will invest in the artistic excellence and innovative programming that audiences, musicians, and staff treasure, further raising the Festival's reputation among the world's great summer music festivals.

Grow and develop an engaged and diverse staff and Board

The CEO will inherit a talented orchestra and chorus, high-performing staff, and dedicated board. The next CEO will be a unifying and inspiring force, strategically guiding consensus-building and navigating relations both internally and externally. Further, the next leader will provide consistent support and development across the organization to sustain a team of the highest quality. They will ensure that the Festival is an equitable workplace for musicians and staff at all levels.

The Board is a generous and engaged group of individuals, many of whom have been long-time supporters of the Festival, purposeful about their stewardship of the organization, and committed to its vibrancy—and the vibrancy of the community it serves. The next CEO will build on this strong foundation and will call upon their talents and resources to ensure success. The CEO must maintain a strong partnership with Board members, connecting with them individually and as a group, to ensure sustained cultivation and support for the Festival.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The desired candidate will exhibit the following experiences and track record:

- **Vision and strategic planning skills:** Track record of successfully developing and implementing a long-term vision and strategy for an organization. Experience cultivating and growing audiences and increasing organizational visibility, communication, and civic presence across diverse constituencies.
- **Political savvy and effective civic relationship builder:** Experience stewarding successful public/private partnerships in Chicago or elsewhere. Demonstrated commitment to leading a civically engaged organization; track record of community engagement work and building collaborative relationships with other cultural institutions and government entities.
- **Skilled at building organizational visibility:** Capacity to expand the Festival's brand, recognition, and audience. Track record of broadcasting a welcoming, vibrant organizational identity and acting as a passionate ambassador of the mission.
- **Financial and fundraising experience:** Proven fundraising and donor cultivation skills, ideally within the cultural and artistic worlds. Prior responsibility for the financial results of a business segment of an orchestra, performing arts organization, or non-profit; ability to identify, analyze, and prioritize issues confronting the organization in terms of potential risk and returns.
- **Musical literacy and passion:** A musical passion and sufficient familiarity to provide aspirational leadership and credibly partner with artistic leadership and musicians.
- **Track record of organizational leadership:** Experience in a leadership role within a complex organization of similar scale and significance in the non-profit, public, or private sector.

Demonstrated capacity to build and sustain strong operating processes and systems, resulting in operational viability and sustainability.

- **Effective manager of operations and governance:** Team leader and consensus-builder who can spearhead strategic planning and delegate operational details. Track record of building a culture of inclusion and talent development. Demonstrated history of strong Board recruitment, development, and collaboration.
- **A minimum of five years of relevant senior leadership experience** in an orchestra, festival, closely aligned organization, or related nonprofit organization.

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

The anticipated compensation for this position is \$250,000 to \$300,000, which will be competitive and commensurate with experience. The President and CEO is expected to reside in the Chicagoland area, ensuring visibility and accessibility for staff, civic partners, and the community. Periodic travel for conferences, events, and network building is expected.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

The Festival strives to create a workplace that reflects the diversity of our city and the audiences we serve. People of all backgrounds and experiences, and especially those who have been historically underrepresented in the field, are encouraged to apply. 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/grant-park-orchestral-association/chief-executive-officer>.

Benjamin Tobin, Nella Young, and Alaine Small

Isaacson, Miller

The Grant Park Orchestral Association provides equal employment opportunities to all employees and applicants without regard to actual or perceived race (including traits associated with race, including, but not limited to, hair texture and protective hairstyles such as braids, locks, and twists), color, sex, religion, national origin, ancestry, age, pregnancy (including childbirth, or medical or common conditions related to pregnancy or childbirth), genetic information, marital status, familial/parental status, disability (physical and mental), military status, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and expression, citizenship or immigration status, unfavorable discharge from military service, order of protection status, credit history, arrest record, conviction record, family responsibilities, and any other classification/characteristic protected by applicable federal, state or local law.

This document has been prepared based on information provided by the Grant Park Music Festival. The material presented in this 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 Festival would supersede any conflicting information in this document.