American Museum of Natural History

Dean of Collections
American Museum of Natural History
New York, New York

THE SEARCH

The American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) seeks an outstanding scholar and accomplished leader to serve as its next Dean of Collections (dean). This is an opportunity to lead the stewardship of one of the world's most important natural history collections, ensuring its accessibility and relevance for generations to come. Since its founding in 1869, AMNH has been a preeminent scientific and cultural institution, advancing its global mission to discover, interpret, and disseminate information about human cultures, the natural world, and the universe through a wide-ranging program of scientific research, education, and exhibition.

The dean will build on the strong legacy of the AMNH and continue its record of innovation, excellence, and impact. The Museum's research enterprise includes more than 170 scientists, with more than 35 curators, who work with the collections of more than 30 million artifacts and specimens that are the foundation for the research, exhibitions, and public engagement at AMNH. Reporting to the provost and working collaboratively with peers across the museum, the dean will champion initiatives that enhance the care, management, and global accessibility of collections. This individual must also have a commitment to the highest professional standards and ethics and the ability to cultivate support and partnerships to further the Museum's mission and strategic goals.

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

THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

The American Museum of Natural History was founded in 1869 by a special act of the Legislature of the State of New York, with the mission "to discover, interpret, and disseminate—through scientific research and education—knowledge about human cultures, the natural world, and the universe."

One of the largest natural history museums in the world, AMNH is beloved by generations of New Yorkers and is a top destination for visitors from all over the globe. Each year, it welcomes millions of visitors—more than four million ticketed visitors in 2025—to more than 40 permanent exhibition halls and special exhibition galleries, including the Rose Center for Earth and Space, which houses the Hayden Planetarium, and the Richard Gilder Center for Science, Education, and Innovation, which opened in May 2023. AMNH also distributes scientific and educational content, special exhibitions and planetarium shows to venues in more than 25 countries, and through its online resources, and targeted educational programs for people of all ages.

Beyond its exhibition halls, AMNH's educational offerings include classes for pre-K through high school-aged students, lectures for adults and festivals for families, and, through the Richard Gilder Graduate School, graduate programs in comparative biology (PhD) and science teaching (Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT), Earth Science Residency). Professional development series and online courses delivered by the Museum serve teachers throughout the New York region and across the country. AMNH also houses one of the largest natural history libraries in the world.

The Museum's research enterprise includes more than 170 scientists, including more than 35 curators, who work at AMNH in disciplines ranging from anthropology and astrophysics to zoology, leveraging the Museum's vast collections of more than 30 million artifacts and specimens. The Museum's curators and scientific staff engage in cutting-edge research, which drives the content of its exhibitions and educational offerings. The Museum's expeditionary program is global, with fieldwork conducted on all seven continents. Critically relevant cross-disciplinary programs include the Center for Biodiversity and Conservation (CBC), whose researchers work to realize the full lifecycle of conservation action.

Located next to Central Park on Manhattan's Upper West Side, AMNH is a prominent New York City landmark that includes more than 20 interconnected buildings that house its collections and exhibition halls. These range from its first building, constructed in 1877, to a major new facility—the architecturally acclaimed Gilder Center for Science, Education, and Innovation—which opened in 2023 with new exhibition halls and collections spaces, classrooms, an expanded library, and an immersive theater.

AMNH is supported by philanthropic giving, grants from foundations and corporations, admissions revenue, endowment yield, and ancillary activities, as well as operating and capital support from the City of New York, and grants from the City, State, and Federal governments.

ROLE OF THE DEAN OF COLLECTIONS

Reporting to the provost, the dean serves as the chief administrator of the Museum's scientific collections. The role includes setting policies and ensuring best practices in collections care, management, and processes. The dean has responsibility for the annual collections report. Working closely with curatorial leaders, the dean provides strategic oversight across five divisions—Anthropology, Paleontology, Physical Sciences, Invertebrate Zoology, and Vertebrate Zoology—and is a strong advocate for the critical role of collections in furthering the Museum's mission. The dean drives digitization initiatives to improve discoverability of collections, implementing solutions that foster efficiency and innovation across divisions.

The dean directly oversees the offices of the Registrar and Science Conservation, Collections Programs, and Collections Database Management. In addition, the dean provides direction and ensures alignment of the collections teams that reside within the curatorial divisions and report to their respective division chairs.

The Dean also holds a tenured appointment as Curator and Professor, providing opportunities to pursue research and mentor students and postdoctoral scholars.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

To successfully contribute to AMNH's mission and vision through leadership of the collection, the dean will address the following opportunities and challenges:

Lead implementation of strategic goals and drive impactful outcomes for collections.

AMNH is advancing a strategic plan with ambitious institutional goals that call for collaboration across the Museum and leadership that inspires and unites stakeholders. The dean will play a pivotal role in shaping a vision that is bold yet actionable. Key priorities for the stewardship of collections include federal compliance, collections policy compliance, strengthening capacity for collections management, and ensuring best practices that are ethical and sustainable. The dean will provide leadership that encourages teamwork, promotes shared approaches and efficiencies, and develops long-term initiatives for upholding the excellence of collections.

Develop a plan for caring for, cataloging, and digitizing the collections.

The Dean will have oversight of advancing the digitization of the collections and modernizing the technology for collections management as part of the Museum's strategic plan. Achieving these goals will require a cohesive plan that reflects the diverse needs of digitization and, where appropriate, establish approaches that work across curatorial divisions. The ultimate goal is to maximize use of the collections for current and future research, as well as to enhance education and public engagement.

Lead, develop, and empower a high performing team.

The Museum is home to a team of dedicated collections professionals, and the dean will demonstrate a deep understanding of their work to foster collaboration and a shared commitment to institutional goals. As a visible and engaged leader, the dean will maintain clear communication through effective delegation, transparency in decision-making, and regular, supportive interaction with the team. The role also requires attentiveness to internal management to ensure that processes, policies, and functions operate seamlessly in support of the Museum's mission.

Partner with AMNH Advancement to grow fundraising.

The dean serves as the lead advocate of the Museum's collections. In partnership with colleagues in advancement, the dean will help cultivate support to enhance digitization efforts and care across the collections, improve facilities, and address deferred maintenance that affects the collections, and increase opportunities to connect broad audiences to the collections to deliver on the Museum's mission. Providing supporters with compelling storytelling to promote understanding of the Museum and the integral role of the collection in its mission is a key priority.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The committee is seeking candidates who demonstrate the following:

- PhD in a discipline relevant to AMNH;
- Proven track record of research excellence and scholarly publications appropriate for appointment as a tenured curator and professor;
- Demonstrated experience in managing or providing strategic leadership to an institutional collection;
- Adept at leading in a matrixed environment across multi-disciplinary teams;
- Experience in managing and developing significant research collections;
- Successful track record of attaining extramural support;
- Experience in developing and executing a strategy for digitization of collections;
- An understanding of, and a commitment to, best practices in natural history collections professional standards, cultural stewardship, and ethics;
- Familiarity with regulations related to collections management including, but not limited to, relevant government agencies, legal requirements related international research, and NAGPRA.
- Ability to creatively approach problem-solving and strategic planning to operationalize efficiencies;
- Strong interpersonal and communication skills and the capacity to build, maintain, and foster relationships with and between colleagues including curators, staff, and administrators;
- Demonstrates outstanding integrity and professionalism while collaborating effectively with others.

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COMPENSATION

This position has a salary range of $275-300k.

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/american-museum-natural-history/dean-collections

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