

m c a s d

Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego

Chief Executive Officer
Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego
La Jolla, California

THE SEARCH

The Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego seeks an innovative, empowering, and purposeful leader to serve as its next Chief Executive Officer. Building on a period of significant institutional investment, MCASD's next CEO must steward the museum's assets and provide clear direction for growth and impact. In close partnership with the Board and staff, the CEO will strengthen MCASD's identity, deepen its connection to the community, and advance MCASD as a leading voice in contemporary art locally, nationally, and beyond.

Founded with a commitment to presenting contemporary art in dialogue with its region, MCASD has grown into a vital cultural institution with a world-class collection, a new architectural home, and a deep relationship with the cultural life of San Diego and the broader region. Today, the museum offers programs of exhibitions, education, and public engagement that reflect both local context and global conversations in contemporary art.

As MCASD looks ahead, the next CEO must fully activate the museum's resources—artistic, organizational, and geographic—in service of greater clarity, visibility, attendance, and impact. Drawing on San Diego's distinctive cultural landscape and civic partnerships, the CEO will position MCASD as an essential destination for contemporary art and ideas, resonant within its community and meaningfully connected to the broader field.

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

ABOUT MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART SAN DIEGO

Founded in 1941, the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (MCASD) is the region's leading institution devoted to the collection, preservation, and presentation of contemporary art from 1950 to the present. From its origins as a small art center in La Jolla, MCASD has evolved into a nationally recognized museum distinguished by artistic rigor and deep engagement with the cultural life of Southern California.

MCASD's mission is clear and outward-looking: *to invite all people to experience our world, our region, and ourselves through the prism of contemporary art.* The Museum's values emphasize the essential role of artists as innovators, the capacity of contemporary art to illuminate the issues of our time, and the importance of listening and responding to the needs of diverse publics and communities.

The Museum seeks to harness the potency of contemporary art to inspire expansive thinking and an inclusive world.

To learn more, please visit: <https://mcase.org/>

Transformative Renovation in La Jolla

In April 2022, MCASD reopened its La Jolla campus following a four-year, \$105 million renovation and expansion led by Selldorf Architects. The project more than doubled the Museum's physical footprint, bringing the total campus size to approximately 104,400 square feet. The reimagined campus integrates historic architecture with contemporary design, adding new light-filled galleries, outdoor terraces overlooking the Pacific Ocean, and a sculpture garden.

COLLECTIONS AND EXHIBITIONS

MCASD stewards a permanent collection of more than >5,600 works of art, with notable strengths in postwar and contemporary practices, including conceptual art, minimalism, installation, and photography.

MCASD presents a dynamic program of original and traveling exhibitions. Exhibitions are developed through original research and scholarship and frequently serve as the basis for publications, public programs, and cross-disciplinary dialogue. Through its exhibitions, MCASD positions contemporary art as both a reflective and generative force—one that responds to lived experience, engages urgent social questions, and expands how audiences understand the present moment.

To learn more, please visit: <https://mcase.org/collection>

LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT

Over decades, MCASD has cultivated a deep commitment to serving its communities through contemporary art—engaging audiences whose lived experiences are shaped by San Diego’s geographic, cultural, social context, and embracing the vibrancy of its binational region..

Public learning at MCASD is grounded in exhibitions and extended through a wide array of interpretive and educational programs, including artist talks, lectures, panel discussions, tours, publications, and community events. These programs are designed to foster meaningful encounters with contemporary art and to encourage reflection on the social, cultural, and aesthetic issues that shape the present moment.

To learn more, please visit: <https://mcasd.org/learn>

ROLE OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

The CEO of the MCASD serves as the institution’s chief strategist, fundraiser, and steward, responsible for advancing MCASD’s mission, artistic excellence, and long-term sustainability. Reporting to and working in close partnership with the Board of Trustees, the CEO provides visionary and inclusive yet decisive leadership across all facets of MCASD, including artistic direction, community engagement, financial health, organizational culture, and external relationships. As the museum’s ambassador, the CEO cultivates deep, lasting relationships with artists, donors, civic leaders, community partners, and global leaders while guiding a talented staff of 59 full-time and 33 part-time to realize MCASD’s full potential in a moment defined by a transformed campus, expanded capacity, and opportunities for sustained impact. The CEO oversees an operating budget of > \$10M and an endowment of > \$50M.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE CEO

The CEO will address the following key opportunities and challenges:

Articulate and execute on a bold strategic vision

The CEO will articulate a clear, forward-looking vision that inspires and positions MCASD for its next era of impact. In close partnership with the Board and staff, the CEO will align priorities, resources, and ambition—building on institutional strengths while guiding thoughtful growth. By unifying stakeholders around a compelling path forward, the CEO will build shared momentum and elevate support for a museum that is distinctive, ambitious, and relevant.

Cultivate and steward key relationships to expand MCASD’s impact locally, regionally, and beyond

The CEO will advance MCASD’s reach and relevance by strengthening relationships locally, regionally, and beyond. This includes engaging San Diego’s broad community through creative,

proactive approaches; further activating Board partnership; and reinvigorating its commitment to and engagement with the public, relationships with local industry leaders, donors, and collaborators. By deepening ties with peer institutions and the broader contemporary art community, the CEO will extend the museum's influence and visibility nationally and internationally.

Grow institutional resources to support the museum's ambition and impact

The CEO will provide strong operational leadership to ensure MCASD is well-positioned to advance its ambitions sustainably. This includes strengthening organizational capacity, building and diversifying audiences, and cultivating deeper and more resilient donor support. Working closely with the Chief Advancement Officer and the Chief Financial Officer / Chief Operating Officer, the CEO will lead efforts to expand philanthropic investment, align contributed and earned revenue strategies to support programmatic excellence, stimulate long-term growth, and promote strong fiscal governance.

Empower, inspire, and support the dedicated museum staff

The CEO will build on MCASD's staff's deep institutional knowledge and commitment, fostering a culture that supports excellence, collaboration, and growth. A key priority will be recruiting and retaining outstanding talent, including the successful recruitment and integration of a new Chief Curator, while ensuring staff are positioned to do their best work. The CEO will also support professional development and provide mentorship, investing in people as the museum's most vital asset and strengthening MCASD's capacity for long-term success.

Activate and Strengthen Board Engagement and Partnership

The CEO will partner closely with a committed and engaged Board to foster a collaborative culture that values diverse perspectives and thoughtful, constructive dialogue. Working closely with the Board President and board leadership, the CEO will sustain productive relationships across the Board, strengthen effective governance, and ensure shared accountability for MCASD's strategic, artistic, financial, and operational priorities.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

While no one person may embody all, the successful candidate will bring many of the following professional qualifications and personal qualities.

- Proven success as a senior leader of a museum, cultural organization, arts institution, nonprofit, or civic institution exercising international reach and impact;
- A champion of contemporary art that aligns with a passion for MCASD's mission, purpose, and collection. The ability to build rapport with and command the respect and support of collectors, curators, colleagues, and the public;

- Appetite for and successful track record in revenue development, including individual, institutional, and endowment fundraising;
- Demonstrated experience in increasing the visibility, attendance, and impact of a civic institution;
- Commitment to museum best practices, their implementation, and impact;
- Success driving digital strategy and audience engagement for an arts organization;
- Experience leading, serving, and working with a governing Board;
- Demonstrated success in building meaningful partnerships with diverse constituencies, as well as a high degree of cultural competency;
- An innovative, collaborative, and transparent leadership style that fosters trust and accountability, with demonstrated change management experience;
- Exceptional communication skills, encouraging and facilitating dialogue around challenging issues;
- Experience building and managing budgets while driving sound financial and policy decisions within an organization of ideally comparable complexity and similar funding streams; and
- Extensive executive experience leading strategic planning;
- Demonstrated results driving programmatic and operational excellence.

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

This is a permanent, full-time position based at MCASD's La Jolla campus with a targeted starting salary range of \$400,000 - \$460,000, commensurate with experience.

San Diego and La Jolla

San Diego is California's second-largest city and a globally connected coastal region known for its temperate climate, outdoor orientation, and balanced pace of life. The city offers the professional scope of a major metropolitan area alongside everyday access to beaches, parks, and cultural amenities, creating an environment that supports both sustained career engagement and long-term living. San Diego's diverse neighborhoods, strong educational institutions, and active civic and cultural life make it an appealing setting for individuals and families considering relocation.

La Jolla—often called the “Jewel” of San Diego—is a distinctive seaside community defined by its dramatic coastline, walkable village center, and strong sense of place. Daily life in La Jolla is shaped by proximity to the Pacific Ocean, with coastal trails, public spaces, and small-scale commercial districts integrated into a residential setting. The community is home to a concentration of leading academic, scientific, and cultural institutions, including the University of California San Diego, the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, the Salk Institute for Biological Studies, and the La Jolla Playhouse. This blend of natural beauty, intellectual energy, and civic engagement creates a setting that is both grounded and outward-looking, offering an exceptional quality of life for those seeking to live and work in a culturally rich coastal environment.

To learn more about San Diego and La Jolla, visit: <https://www.sandiego.org>.

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/museum-contemporary-art-san-diego/chief-executive-officer>.

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Isaacson, Miller

MCASD prohibits discrimination and harassment against individuals based on race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and expression, marital status, age, disability, pregnancy, reproductive health decisions, medical condition, covered veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by law.

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