



Executive Director
Telfair Museums
Savannah, Georgia

THE SEARCH

The Telfair Museums (Telfair) seeks a vibrant, strategic, and engaging leader to serve as its next executive director. This is an opportunity to lead a major cultural institution with a powerful connection to the community of Savannah and a national arts reputation. Telfair’s mission is to offer compelling expressions of visual culture – embracing three unique buildings and three distinct collections that bridge three centuries of art and architecture. The museum develops awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the arts and serves as a dynamic cultural center connecting people of all ages and backgrounds.

The executive director will build on the strong legacy of the Telfair Museums and continue its record of innovation to effectively tell the combined story of the three sites. They will guide the organization with a vision that amplifies Telfair as an essential community and cultural destination, charting a path that utilizes the Telfair Museum’s singular ability to engage the past, present, and future of art, history, and architecture. Working with the board of trustees, staff, and community stakeholders, the executive director will provide strategic vision, energetically and broadly engage the community and national peers, and serve as a persuasive advocate and spokesperson for the Telfair. This leader must be relational in their approach, civically engaged, embrace the social expectations of an important Savannahian leader, and possess the ability to develop sources of financial support for the Telfair’s strategic ambitions.

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

THE TELFAIR MUSEUMS

Opening in 1886, Telfair Museums is the oldest public art museum in the Southeast and the first U.S. Museum founded by a woman. The museum features a world-class art collection in the heart of Savannah's National Historic Landmark District and encompasses three sites: the [Jepson Center](#), the [Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters](#), and the [Telfair Academy](#). The Telfair Museum collection consists of over 8,000 American and European paintings, sculpture, works on paper, and decorative arts items dating primarily from the 19th century through the present day. With particular strengths in American portraiture, American Impressionism, the Ashcan School, and American and English silver, the collection includes works by artists such as George Bellows, Frederick Frieseke, Sam Gilliam, Childe Hassam, Robert Henri, Jacob Lawrence, and Elaine de Kooning.

The original Telfair Academy neoclassical building was constructed as a home around 1820 by the British architect William Jay for the Telfair family. In 1883 Mary Telfair left the home and its furnishings to be converted into a museum. The Academy building now houses the Telfair's collections of 19th and 20th century American and European art, and notably the Bird Girl sculpture, which was famously on the cover of the book *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*.

The Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters, was built as a private residence at the same time as the Telfair Academy by the same architect. The house and its decorative arts collections were donated to the Telfair in 1951. The Owens-Thomas House has the only intact urban slave quarters in Savannah. The presence of the slave quarters has provided the Telfair with opportunity for thoughtful and meaningful exhibitions and programs, and in 2018 the home's slave quarters were renovated and reinterpreted to center the stories of the enslaved inhabitants. The house fronts Oglethorpe Square, one of Savannah's 23 park-like squares, a short walk from Telfair Square.

The Academy building faces Telfair Square, as does the most recent of the Telfair's three buildings, The Jepson Center, designed by Moshe Safdie, opened in 2006. The Jepson is dedicated to both the Telfair's contemporary art collections and to temporary exhibitions. In addition, the Jepson also houses the Telfair's interactive Children's Art Museum. The Jepson Center links the history preserved by the Owens-Thomas House & Slave Quarters and Telfair Academy to the future of art and architecture. Through three unique sites Telfair museums presents the history and possibilities of creative culture in Savannah.

The Telfair Museums serve over 213,000 visitors annually. The Telfair has a variety of education and outreach programs including in-school programs and in-person field trips that are attended by over 7,600 K-12 students.

Community activities include summer youth outreach to 12 city-supervised Neighborhood Centers and additional programs targeted at seniors, audiences with disabilities and veterans. Among the museum's key annual events are: I Have Marks to Make, which features the therapeutic values of art and exhibits work by individuals with disabilities; PULSE Art and Technology Festival, an annual new media festival; and Telfair's Juneteenth, celebrating freedom, African American culture and history.

Organizational Capacity and Finances

The work of the Telfair Museums is enabled by 43 full-time and 7 part-time staff. The senior team of seven reporting to the executive director includes the chief financial officer, chief revenue officer, director of curatorial affairs and curator of decorative arts, director of facilities and curator of architecture, director of guest services, and director of institutional advancement. The annual operating budget for the museum is approximately \$7.7 million. As of 2024, the Telfair had over \$33 million in endowment funds. The Telfair is governed by an active and engaged [Board of Trustees](#) composed of 24 members.

SAVANNAH

Established in 1733, Savannah has both a rich history and culture and is a modern city of innovation. Savannah has a distinct energy and exciting trajectory as the third busiest cargo port in America, home to Gulfstream Aerospace, and Hyundai Motor Group's \$7.6 billion electric vehicle and battery plant.

Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD), with its over 18,000 students, injects a youthful future-facing creativity into the city that perfectly complements the region's deep historical roots. Savannah State University, the oldest historically black public university in Georgia, adds the energy of another 3,000+ students.

The city of Savannah is the county seat of Chatham County and has a population of approximately 150,000 people, with a metropolitan population of 400,000. Savannah continues to be a major tourist destination, with more than 17 million visitors annually generating more than \$4 billion for the regional economy.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

As the Telfair Museums looks to its future, the executive director will address the following interrelated opportunities and challenges as key priorities:

Enhance outcomes with a unified strategic vision

The executive director will continue the significant recent successes stabilizing the museum as it prepares for a new leader and ambitious future. The Telfair staff and board have set an organized internal foundation that will support multi-year strategic planning and allow the institution to be more purposeful in its long-term positioning and goals. The Executive Director will ensure excellence in exhibitions, collections, programmatic content, and engagement, with clear objectives for measurable success. The next leader will listen, assess and appreciate the improvements that have occurred and work with the staff, board and community to set a course for enhanced relevance, vitality, and overall excellence that resonates and directly engages all residents and visitors to the Telfair today and tomorrow.

Ensure long-term financial sustainability through exceptional management and fundraising

The executive director is the museum's ambassador, chief advocate, and cheerleader, and a visible presence comfortable with the closely aligned social and philanthropic activities of the region. They will broaden the donor base and inspire new champions among individuals, corporations, and foundations and compellingly communicate impact, demonstrating the Telfair's value to the region and the broader arts field. The executive director will have an understanding of demographic shifts in the region and in regional philanthropy, as well as trends in institutional giving in the arts nationally, to develop a tailored strategic approach that deepens and diversifies support. While increasing contributed support, the executive director will also work to maximize the potential for earned revenue and effective budgeting where possible. Sound business acumen and a full understanding of the Telfair's financial picture will be integral to the executive director's and the Telfair's success.

Lead, develop and empower a dedicated team

The executive director will be responsible for developing a truly dedicated museum staff, demonstrating an understanding of their work, learning their names and contribution, and promoting institutional cohesion and a collective responsibility for the Telfair's future. The executive director will be a decisive, values-driven leader who establishes clear communication, practices transparency, implements field best practices, and holds individuals accountable. The executive director will lead with a sense of joy and passion that others find irresistible.

Enhance and sustain community engagement and grow its regional and national reputation

The executive director will advance strategies in outreach to expansively engage audiences and welcome new visitors into the Telfair. The executive director will embrace their role as a civic leader and represent the museum as an active partner in the greater community of Savannah. Over 80% of visitors to the Telfair are tourists. Growing proportional and repeat visitation from Savannah while

positioning the museum as a tourism destination that is a must to experience will be a strategically important balance.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The next executive director will embody most, if not all, of the following professional qualifications and personal qualities:

- Experience and proven success as a senior leader of a museum or similar cultural organization
- An enthusiastic approach to community engagement and comfort in serving as a face of the institution to the public
- A record of successful executive administration, including strategic planning, program assessment, personnel management, and financial health
- Demonstrated creativity, curiosity, vision, and compassion in approaching the role of the museum in contemporary society, maintaining relationships with existing partners, and forging connections with new ones
- A strong record of measurable success in developing donor relations and fundraising
- Demonstrated experience in programmatic or institutional innovation leading to organizational strength for the Museum's next chapter
- Excellence in oral and written communication skills
- A captivating passion for art, history, and enthusiasm for the Telfair's collection
- An open and collaborative approach to management, building capacity and accountability among staff and maintaining high morale.

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

This is a full-time position located in the Savannah with a starting salary range of \$275,000 - \$325,000.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of 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/telfair-museums/executive-director> to the attention of Sarah James, Ryan Leichenauer, Siobhan Hanley.

Telfair Museums is an equal opportunity employer and strongly encourages applications from candidates of any race, color, religion, creed, gender, national origin, age, disability, marital or veteran status, sexual orientation, and/or any other legally protected status. This document has been prepared based on the information provided by Telfair Museums. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information, the original source documents and information provided by Telfair Museums would supersede any conflicting information in this document.