



President
Science Philanthropy Alliance
New York, NY

THE SEARCH

The Science Philanthropy Alliance (SPA) seeks a dynamic and inspiring leader to serve as its next President—one who is passionate and persuasive about the potential of philanthropy to enhance scientific discovery. SPA's next president will join the Alliance at a time of immense promise for philanthropy and great import for science as well as at a defining moment in its institutional evolution, having attained its largest member base since its founding in 2013 and establishing itself as a 501(c)3 organization in 2025. In an uncertain time for science support, the Alliance is a champion for growing philanthropic support and leveraging the unique role of philanthropy to drive discovery science that fuels the innovation for the benefit of society.

SPA has experienced a remarkable trajectory over the last thirteen years. Through exceptional leadership, it has expanded its member base dramatically and increased its visibility and influence. SPA also has developed a highly trusted reputation as an advisor to potential new philanthropists. Building on this record of success and impact, the next President will chart the next ambitious chapter for SPA. This includes sharpened focus on service to members, identification of best practices and strategies that span the sector, and continued efforts to steward a significant portion of new wealth toward science. The President will be a distinguished and compelling ambassador and persuasive advocate to articulate the critical importance of discovery science and its potential to change the world.

ABOUT THE SCIENCE PHILANTHROPY ALLIANCE

The Science Philanthropy Alliance is dedicated to advising philanthropists on strategies for supporting discovery science. Founded in 2013 by six visionary foundations, the Alliance has grown into a vibrant network of over [40 member organizations](#) and a global community of funders, scientists, and advisors committed to advancing scientific discovery for the benefit of humanity. In 2025, the Alliance transitioned its operations to an independent 501(c)3 organization after a decade of fiscal sponsorship. The Alliance supports both emerging and established science funders with tailored advisory services including landscape analyses, program design, and connections to leading scientific experts across disciplines.

Beyond advising, the organization convenes funders and leaders in academia, government, and industry to foster connection, shared learning, and innovation. Through these forums, members identify emerging scientific opportunities, funding trends, and collaborative ventures. The Alliance's interdisciplinary team and network of renowned science advisors bring deep expertise in philanthropic strategy and emerging scientific research. The Alliance has also become a hub for insights into the science funding landscape. In partnership with the University of California San Diego's Frontiers in Science and Innovation Policy Program, SPA produces the [Science Philanthropy Indicators Report](#), an interactive resource that examines long-term trends in research funding to help inform strategic decisions about future investments in science.

The Alliance's mission has become increasingly important in a rapidly changing funding landscape. At the same time, the emergence of a new generation of philanthropists and great new wealth creation provides extraordinary opportunity. SPA is uniquely positioned to engage these new donors and serve as a bridge that connects philanthropic ambition with support for discovery science. Together, SPA's activities provide the insights, guidance, and connections to help philanthropists make a lasting impact.

Leadership

The Alliance's inaugural President was Dr. Marc Kastner, a renowned condensed matter physicist, member of the National Academy of Sciences, and former Dean of Science at MIT. A highly respected scientific leader, Dr. Kastner played a pivotal role in shaping the Alliance's early vision, establishing its credibility within the scientific and philanthropic communities, and building the foundation for its future growth. He continues to serve as a trusted advisor to the organization.

Since May 2021, Dr. France Córdova has served as the Alliance's president. Under her leadership, the Alliance has strengthened its position as a leading resource for philanthropists and foundations. The organization expanded its advisory services and grew its membership from 30 institutions to 47 institutions today, while deepening engagement across its member community. She guided the Alliance through several major strategic milestones, including the launch of its first formal strategic plan. Before joining the Alliance, Dr. Córdova served as Director of the National Science Foundation, President of Purdue University, and NASA Chief Scientist, among other significant roles. She served in five presidential administrations helping to shape the nation's scientific enterprise at the highest levels. Throughout her career, she has been a pioneering figure for women in science and scientific leadership and a widely respected advocate for discovery science and scientific opportunity.

ROLE OF THE PRESIDENT

The president serves as the chief executive and primary external representative of the science philanthropy alliance, responsible for shaping strategic direction and stewarding relationships with a network of eminent philanthropic, scientific, and institutional leaders. They lead a high-performing team of fifteen staff, which is expected to grow in select functional areas. The president reports to the alliance's [board of directors](#) and will be expected to work in close collaboration with the board to advance the mission and vision of the alliance during a time of dynamic change for both science and philanthropy.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE PRESIDENT

Champion Philanthropic Support for Scientific Discovery

The President must articulate a compelling case for philanthropic support of scientific research. Working closely with the expert team of philanthropic advisors, the President will define strategy for engaging potential donors and personally engage with organizations and individuals to make the case for funding basic science. The President will work with members to highlight gaps and opportunities where new funding could be particularly impactful and communicate those clearly and persuasively to new members and philanthropists. The President will also ensure that the organization is nimble and responsive to the evolving landscape in which new means of philanthropic investment and changing donor trends among a new generation of philanthropists is transforming the field.

Elevate SPA's Visibility, Influence, and Thought Leadership

The President will continue and extend the Alliance's position at the forefront of conversations about the future of scientific discovery. They serve as the primary champion, leader, and voice for the Alliance's mission through partnership with leaders across the scientific landscape as well as prospective new funders. By expanding the Alliance's visibility, the President will help attract new members and advisees and deepen reach and influence on critical issues facing the field. As a non-partisan organization, the President will ensure that the Alliance remains a trusted partner and neutral convener for the field. The member organizations represent a broad range of perspectives, so the President must bring judgement to not speak on behalf of members but to share common points of interest.

Develop and Implement a Bold, New Strategic Plan to Define SPA's Next Chapter

SPA has achieved significant success, and it has grown and matured significantly since its founding. The next President will work in close consultation with the Board of Trustees to sharpen its strategic objectives and organizational goals for the next era. The President will also consult member institutions and seek alignment around how SPA can add the most value to the community. In developing a new strategic plan, the President will leverage SPA's distinctive role in the science philanthropy ecosystem and position the organization to navigate opportunities and challenges in today's funding landscape. Outlining clear metrics and outcomes will be crucial for tracking SPA's impact and progress.

Leverage the Alliance's Members and Network of Scientific Expertise

SPA plays a pivotal role in convening and connecting member institutions to amplify their impact. The collective expertise of the member institutions is a tremendous asset, and the President will engage with foundation leaders and promote relationship development at multiple levels with member organizations. Through its meetings, Special Interest Groups (SIGs), and member activities, the Alliance will act as a knowledge hub of strategies and programs throughout the member network. SPA must translate that data and intelligence into insights for new funding strategies, collaborative grantmaking opportunities, and funding gaps, especially to fulfill its goal of providing new philanthropists access to tested and trusted approaches to stimulating scientific discovery. A notable feature of SPA is its team of distinguished external science advisors. These advisors are a trusted source of insight and guidance from the forefront of science to inform philanthropic decision-making. The President will personally nurture, recognize, and recruit the network of advisors, who are an essential component of SPA's credibility and a major differentiator from other advising organizations.

Strengthen Organizational Capacity and Culture

The next President will ensure that the organization has the talent, structures, and operational capacity necessary to support its aspirations. With approximately 15 staff members and a growing portfolio of programs, services, and stakeholder relationships, the Alliance will continue to invest in strong internal communication, coordination across teams, and clear decision-making processes, while fostering an inclusive and respectful professional culture. The President must encourage strong connections across remote and on-site staff, ensuring effective collaboration and a shared sense of purpose across the organization.

Steward Resources and Strengthen Organizational Sustainability

The President will oversee the organization's finances, operations, and programs with sound judgment and disciplined fiscal stewardship. SPA has historically relied on a combination of membership dues and grants to fund its efforts. The President will guide the development of a sustainable, long-term business plan and revenue model to power its continued growth, vitality, and sustainability. This includes maintaining a strong focus on member engagement and value while considering the optimal approach to advisory services, convenings, and broader field-building activities. As a newly independent 501(c)(3), SPA now also has opportunities to cultivate new sources of philanthropic support.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The incoming President is expected to bring a level of seniority, expertise, and experience that readily commands respect from senior leaders across science, philanthropy, government, and industry. The President should have demonstrated an ability to build effective and trusted relationships with philanthropists, as well as other Alliance stakeholders, and a fluency in basic science to serve as an

effective spokesperson for the importance of science research and champion of the basic science community.

The President should have experience building coalitions or partnerships and maintaining high-level relationships across sectors. The President should have a deep understanding of the U.S. scientific funding ecosystem, including philanthropy, federal agencies, research institutions, foundations, and private donors. A successful candidate will also bring experience in leading high-performing teams or organizations, working effectively with Board leadership, navigating evolving markets or ecosystems, and developing and implementing organizational strategies. An understanding of 501(c)3 organizations, including their legal and regulatory requirements, is expected. The President will need to be both a visionary leader for science philanthropy, as well as a hands-on manager of a small nonprofit organization.

The search committee recognizes that no single candidate will possess all of the experiences, skills, and characteristics outlined below. The ideal candidate will bring a compelling combination of qualifications derived from leadership experiences that could span a variety of professional sectors or backgrounds.

Skills

- Scientific expertise, intellectual curiosity, and thought leadership.
- Demonstrated ability to operate effectively across philanthropy, academia, government, industry, and others.
- Strategic planning and financial management, with the ability to evaluate strategic choices with attention to evaluation of impact on the organization and its mission for the field.
- A track record of inspirational leadership and relationship development to convene stakeholders with diverse perspectives around shared goals.
- Keen listening and persuasive communication skills, with a talent for leading wide-ranging, technical, and intellectual conversations at in-person events and online forums.
- An effective spokesperson for the mission of the Alliance, able to build on the organization's momentum, communicate scientific concepts at a high level, and generate enthusiasm and passion for science discovery.
- Organizational development and talent management, with an ability to be highly effective as the leader of a small team and lean operation.
- Fundraising ability, particularly to attract support for larger causes, investments, and projects, beyond those of an organization's own financial needs.

Characteristics

- Deep commitment to the Alliance's mission to advance scientific discovery through visionary philanthropy.
- Ability to navigate a rapidly evolving scientific and philanthropic environment with the capacity to identify emerging opportunities and challenges.
- Outstanding personal and professional integrity.

- Notable gravitas and professional recognition.
- A future-focused, outside-of-the-box thinker and strategist; evidence of innovation and creativity.
- Credibility, presence, and judgment to engage as a trusted advisor to high-net-worth individuals, philanthropists, and foundation leaders.
- Demonstrated political acumen and diplomatic skill; evidence of success advancing institutional goals in complex and evolving environments. High emotional intelligence, with interpersonal skills well-suited for interacting with a range of audiences.
- Advanced degree in science, or equivalent, preferred.
- Ability and willingness to travel on a regular basis.

LOCATION

- Expectation to live in or spend at least 30% of time in New York City.
- Ability to commit to five years of leadership.

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/science-philanthropy-alliance/president>.

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This document has been prepared based on the information provided by Science Philanthropy Alliance. 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 Science Philanthropy Alliance would supersede any conflicting information in this document.