

Wenner-Gren Foundation

Supporting Anthropology Worldwide

Est. 1941

President
The Wenner-Gren Foundation
New York, New York

THE SEARCH

The Wenner-Gren Foundation, a highly respected private operating foundation dedicated to providing leadership in support of anthropology and anthropologists worldwide, seeks a strategic, visionary, and collaborative next President. Wenner-Gren has a storied history of advancing anthropology through convening conversations and publications, as well as through grant and fellowship programs designed to support innovative and ethical research across all branches of anthropology. In a moment of global change—including significant change in the funding landscape for the humanities and social sciences—the next President will have a singular opportunity to ensure the Foundation remains a beacon for anthropology as a vital, engaged, and inclusive discipline that is grounded in rigorous methodology and enhances humankind's understanding of itself and its place in the world.

The role of the President is to lead the Foundation to advance anthropological knowledge, amplify its impact, foster inclusivity across the discipline, and address threats facing anthropology as a career and a field of study. The President will be a public champion for the discipline and its scholars, and an adept communicator to showcase the critical value of anthropology. The successful candidate will have significant leadership experience—including strategic planning and financial management—in higher education, philanthropy, or another related sector, as well as the ability to inspire and convene diverse constituent groups.

Wenner-Gren has retained Isaacson, Miller, a global executive search firm, to assist in the recruitment of its next President. Please direct all applications, nominations, and inquiries to Isaacson, Miller as indicated at the end of this document.

ABOUT THE WENNER-GREN FOUNDATION

The Wenner-Gren Foundation was endowed in 1941 by Axel Wenner-Gren, a Swedish industrialist who was considered one of the wealthiest men in the world during the 1930s. The Foundation was initially created to support general research, education, and technical and scientific work. Soon after its inception,

Paul Fejos, the Foundation's first Director of Research and later its first President, persuaded the then Board of Directors to focus the mission of the Foundation on the relatively new field of anthropology. Supporting anthropology would help to promote social cooperation in the years following World War II, preserve important ethnographic and archaeological data and artifacts imperiled by civilization and development, and foster intercultural understanding.

In subsequent years and decades, the Foundation emerged as the primary force in the generation and dissemination of anthropological scholarship and knowledge. It founded [Current Anthropology](#) in 1959, which quickly became one of the leading scholarly journals in the discipline, featuring articles across the spectrum of anthropology — social, cultural, and physical — as well as ethnology and ethnohistory, archaeology and prehistory, folklore, and linguistics. The Foundation also sponsored landmark conferences and symposia, helping to set the agenda for the discipline.

In addition, Wenner-Gren developed a commitment to special research needs not met by other funding sources by strengthening its emphasis on innovation and leadership in the discipline. The small grants program was expanded considerably to provide support for more doctoral students and thereby promote the continued invigoration of the academy. The Foundation also introduced new fellowships to allow students from developing countries to get world-class training in anthropology.

Wenner-Gren Today

The Foundation is committed to helping anthropologists advance anthropological knowledge, build sustainable careers, and amplify anthropology's impact within the wider world, and is dedicated to broadening the conversation in anthropology to reflect the full diversity of the field. Each year, the Wenner-Gren Foundation awards about \$6.2 million in grants and fellowships to support anthropology worldwide.

All programs contribute to the Foundation's mission in more than one way, but broadly address these four major goals:

- I. Advance knowledge across anthropology's many subfields and specializations.**
- II. Amplify the discipline's impact by giving anthropologists the skills and platforms they need to reach broader audiences and affirm the value of anthropology in a rapidly changing world.**
- III. Nurture and safeguard anthropology as a career and a discipline by helping anthropologists demonstrate its value and develop new ways to put their skills and insights to work.**
- IV. Foster inclusive conversations by supporting anthropologists with different backgrounds, perspectives, methods, and commitments.**

The Foundation provides grant opportunities for anthropologists at every stage of their careers and is inclusive of a variety of types of research. [Dissertation Fieldwork Grants](#) for doctoral students and [Post-](#)

[PhD Research Grants](#) for established scholars support individual research projects. Grantees are asked to identify the audiences and stakeholders they hope to reach with their projects. Awards are designed to do more than simply advance a single career, but to advance the discipline and broaden the discourse. This commitment to collaborative and community-rooted scholarship is similarly exemplified by the Foundation's [Engaged Research Grants](#), which support the work of scholars who advance conversations in anthropology through studies designed and carried out in collaboration with Indigenous and underserved communities. [Global Initiatives Grants](#) help launch innovative projects that benefit the discipline as a whole by creating the conditions for anthropologists to do better work. From 2026–2030, Global Initiatives Grants will fund projects in public anthropology that are designed to reach broad, general audiences.

The Foundation also deepens the field's diversity of voices through fellowships in the [Anthropology of Black Experiences](#), which support writing projects that expand anthropological conversations and build capacity in anthropology by amplifying perspectives previously underrepresented in the discipline. The Foundation's efforts are further strengthened through initiatives and partnerships with organizations such as the American Anthropological Association and the School for Advanced Research to provide support for scholars to improve their skills in writing and public communication.

Beyond grants, Wenner-Gren sustains anthropological research through its publications and convenings. *Current Anthropology* remains a leading international journal that brings archaeology and biological, linguistic, and sociocultural anthropology into conversation. Published by the University of Chicago Press and sponsored by the Wenner-Gren Foundation, it is distinctive for its global reach, four-field scope, and tradition of publishing major articles alongside invited commentary and author responses.

At the heart of the Foundation's convening work are its [symposia and seminars](#). Since the 1950s, the Foundation has convened Wenner-Gren Symposia as intensive research-centered gatherings on questions of broad importance to anthropology that might not otherwise take place, bringing together diverse perspectives and approaches from across the discipline and beyond. The week-long symposia foster conversation, debate, and collaboration that open new directions for anthropological thinking. In selecting symposia, the Foundation prioritizes strong concepts and theoretical frameworks, interdisciplinarity, global scope, and the potential to open new conversations beyond topics previously addressed.

Seminars foster intergenerational engagement and focused connection. These three-day gatherings welcome accomplished junior and senior anthropologists who are working to transform the discipline or to change the debate on emerging research questions or themes. Seminars spark new connections and advance work aligned with the Foundation's strategic goals—from expanding anthropological knowledge to promoting a more inclusive and impactful field. Together, these convenings reflect the Foundation's proven approach: transformative ideas in anthropology emerge not in isolation but in conversation.

Governance and Finance

The Foundation is governed by a 13-member Board of Trustees, with members appointed to three-year terms with a limit of four terms. The Chair stands for election every three years, with a two-term maximum; other officers are elected annually. Along with its Board, the Foundation has an Advisory Council comprised of eight senior international anthropologists who provide guidance on program development and leadership initiatives in the field.

The Wenner-Gren Foundation's endowment is approximately \$226.6 million, and its FY2026 operating budget is \$12.5 million. The organization is on solid financial footing, and it has made a handful of strategic decisions over the past two years to ensure the Foundation is both supporting current needs in anthropology research and well-positioned to support future generations of anthropologists.

Staff

The work of the Foundation is supported by a team of 15 knowledgeable, highly skilled, and dedicated staff members, many of whom have long tenures at the organization. These professionals manage the administration of the office, symposia, events, communication, digital outreach, and the archives, as well as review of grants and programs, with close involvement and support on the part of the President. In addition, external subject-matter experts provide constructive feedback to all grant applicants and ensure that the research funded by the Foundation is of the highest quality. The Foundation has a flat organizational structure with significant collaboration and respect across programmatic and operational staff.

Wenner-Gren currently has office space in Midtown Manhattan, one of the world's cultural and intellectual hubs.

ROLE OF THE PRESIDENT

Reporting to the Board of Trustees, Wenner-Gren's next President will assume the helm of an organization with an excellent international reputation and outsized influence on anthropology. The President will need to be both a visionary leader to support the future of the field in the face of uncertainty, as well as a strategic manager of a private operating foundation.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

This is an inflection point for Wenner-Gren and the field of anthropology. The Foundation has the stature and resources to play an important part in making a forceful case for the importance and relevance of anthropology as an essential discipline. At some institutions, both in the U.S. and elsewhere, the study of anthropology has been in decline, even as it attracts scholars globally. This presidency offers the unique

opportunity to consider these trends, support anthropology's vitality and permanence, and address the following challenges and opportunities:

Set a bold strategic vision and goals

Wenner-Gren has long served as a pillar organization in the field of anthropology and elevated the discipline as an essential tool to understand the world in which we live. In recent years, the Foundation has further increased its global engagement, taking particular care to connect with anthropologists in low- and middle-income countries. The Foundation has also long embraced the four-field approach within the discipline, supporting socio-cultural anthropology, linguistic anthropology, biological anthropology, and archeology. The next President will build on this impressive record by collaboratively developing an ambitious vision for how to best support the discipline in the coming years, including specific strategies and goals to determine the success of those efforts. This work will be particularly important as the funding landscape continues to change and the value of the discipline is challenged by external forces.

Ensure long-term financial sustainability and effective management practices

Though the work of the Foundation is supported by a healthy endowment, sound financial management and planning are necessary as costs increase and requests for funding grow. The President will lead the Foundation's effort to align its programs and initiatives to its strategic goals and the needs of the discipline, prioritizing those activities which provide the greatest return on investment. The Foundation has recently evaluated its grant practices to bring down operational costs while managing the review process for a large increase in applications. The President will be tasked with learning and understanding the practices and operations of the Foundation, and in consultation with staff, assess potential for leveraging technology and other tools to develop and implement sustainable process improvements.

Enhance the Foundation's role in communicating anthropology's value to a diverse range of audiences

The President will be a public champion for the discipline, showcasing the critical value of anthropology to scholars, policymakers, other funders, and general audiences. This requires fluency in translating complex ideas into compelling narratives, and a willingness to engage the public with energy and conviction. This work may include increased convenings, new methods of public anthropology, and coordination and partnership with other foundations and granting organizations.

Lead and support a dedicated team

The Wenner-Gren staff are highly skilled and deeply devoted. They are a remarkable source of institutional knowledge with many serving on the Foundation's staff for decades. The next President will maintain a positive office culture characterized by collaboration, collegiality, respect, and transparency in order to sustain high morale and a close-knit organization, even as the Foundation anticipates generational turnover of some key staff positions. The President will also lead the effort to support staff as they improve work processes and adapt to new trends, including the response to a recent influx in grant applications.

This work is essential as the Foundation seeks to minimize overhead expenses without sacrificing the rigor of its efforts or the quality of its outcomes.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The next President will bring many of the following professional qualifications, experience, and personal qualities.

Organizational Leadership

- Demonstrated ability to lead effectively across philanthropy and academia;
- Successful leadership in strategic planning and financial management, with the ability to evaluate strategic choices with attention to impact on the organization and the field;
- Keen analytical and intellectual abilities; a demonstrated aptitude for translating creative ideas into action with a long-term outcome and positive impact;
- Entrepreneurial spirit and drive;
- Ability to work effectively with a governing board and advisory council.

External Engagement

- A track record of inspirational leadership and relationship development to convene stakeholders with diverse perspectives around shared goals;
- Intellectual curiosity, and ability to facilitate thought leadership;
- The ability to represent the Foundation as a passionate and credible spokesperson and ambassador; outstanding communication skills; superior writing and excellent presentation abilities.

Management Experience

- Management experience with proven results, including hiring, retaining, and developing an effective team of professionals;
- Strong interpersonal skills and a collaborative style, with a highly developed capacity to work with a broad array of internal and external stakeholders and partners; openness and a willingness to listen;
- A leadership style that is enthusiastic, energetic, and inspirational.

Field Leadership

- A comprehensive view of and deep appreciation for the broad field of anthropology with a sophisticated understanding of the challenges the discipline faces and a desire to address them;

- Beyond any particular expertise or academic background, a willingness and ability to engage with all the subfields of anthropology inclusive of socio-cultural anthropology, linguistic anthropology, biological anthropology, and archeology;
- An understanding of the larger context in which Wenner-Gren's work is conducted: the higher education landscape, the international arena in which the practice of anthropology takes place, scholarly collaboration and innovation, and the grant-making world.

COMPENSATION

This position has a target hiring salary range of \$350,000 - \$400,000 commensurate with experience.

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/wenner-gren-foundation/president>.

Jeff Kessner, Ryan Leichenauer, and Jenny Rubin
Isaacson, Miller

The Wenner-Gren Foundation is an equal opportunity employer.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by The Wenner-Gren Foundation. 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 The Wenner-Gren Foundation would supersede any conflicting information in this document.