



Chief Executive Officer

St. Louis Public Library

St. Louis, Missouri



THE SEARCH

The St. Louis Public Library (SLPL) seeks a strategic, collaborative, and visionary leader as its next Chief Executive Officer and Foundation President (CEO) to lead a highly regarded civic institution. The next CEO will bring a strong commitment to serving St. Louis's diverse communities and to advancing the Library's role as an essential public resource, while navigating a complex urban and political environment with diplomacy, credibility, and deep community engagement.

The St. Louis Public Library is a high-performing, deeply trusted urban institution that plays a critical role as both a cultural anchor and a core provider of social infrastructure across the city. With a strong financial and operational foundation, the library serves as a stabilizing presence in a variety of neighborhoods throughout the city where it often functions as a primary point of access to essential services, particularly in neighborhoods with significant socioeconomic challenges. Its reach and reputation extend beyond traditional library services, supported by active partnerships with schools, cultural organizations, and civic institutions, positioning it as a collaborative hub within the region. At the same time, the library operates within a complex city landscape and is entering a period of transition and opportunity, including system changes, expanded regional collaboration, and the potential for a major fundraising initiative. Together, these factors underscore an institution that is both well-established and poised for continued evolution as it redefines its role in meeting the needs of the community.

Anchored by an engaged and mission-centered senior leadership team and reporting to the Board of Directors, the next CEO will provide strategic, financial, operational, and cultural leadership for the Library, ensuring that SLPL fulfills its public mission with excellence, transparency, and long-term sustainability. In partnership with the Board and throughout the community, the CEO will be expected to articulate and execute a compelling vision for the Library's future relevance and impact in St. Louis, one that advances thoughtful strategic planning, strengthens the Library's visibility and community-centered service, deepens philanthropy and resource development, builds strong civic and regional partnerships, and sustains a collaborative, high-performing organizational culture.

St. Louis Public Library has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in recruiting the Chief Executive Officer. All inquiries, applications, and nominations should be directed in confidence as noted at the end of this profile.

ST. LOUIS PUBLIC LIBRARY

[St. Louis Public Library](#) (SLPL) was established in 1865 as the Public School Library Society of St. Louis. In the beginning, it was a subscription library open only to paying members. Then it opened to the public for reference and reading on the premises in 1874. During 1893-94, the Library was re-established by voters to be run by an independent board and supported by a property tax as a free service available to all St. Louis residents. In 1901 Andrew Carnegie made a substantial gift to the St. Louis Public Library which allowed for the construction of Central Library and six neighborhood Branches, four of which still exist and are actively used today (Barr, Cabanne, Carpenter and Carondelet). The original collection, owned by

the Library in 1865, included 1,500 books and by 1893, that number had grown to 90,000 items. Between 1894 and 1917 book deliveries, children's programs and a librarian training school began. By 1938, the collection grew to 900,000 books and other items.



From these origins, the St. Louis Public Library has grown into one of the metro region's most important civic institutions, while maintaining a longstanding commitment to public access, learning, and service. Today, SLPL operates [15 locations](#) across the city, employs more than 300 staff members, and welcomes approximately 1,300,000 visitors annually, stewards a collection of more than 2,400,000 books and items, and serves over 148,000 active cardholders. Guided by its mission to provide learning resources and information services that support and improve the lives of individuals, families, and the community as a whole, the Library continues to play a vital role in the civic and cultural life of St. Louis.

The SLPL also serves St. Louisans during times of need. In partnership with the St. Louis Area Diaper Bank, the SLPL offers free emergency diaper distribution at four locations, including the Central Library. Additionally, the Julia Davis Library offers a circulating collection of home repair and maintenance equipment designed to support community resilience.

Two branches, Julia Davis and Cabanne, reopened in May 2026 after the completion of extensive renovations and repairs following a destructive tornado that moved through St. Louis in May 2025. Their reopening underscores both the Library's resilience and the essential role its branches play as

neighborhood anchors, providing not only access to books and information, but also welcoming public spaces, programs, technology, and community connection.

The St. Louis Public Library is a municipal library district, which is a political subdivision of the State of Missouri. The Library is overseen by the [Board of Directors](#), a statutory governing board whose members are nominated by the Mayor of St. Louis and confirmed by the Board of Aldermen. These nine civic leaders are drawn from across the community and serve as volunteers.



Central Library

[Central Library](#), a beautiful masterpiece of Beaux-Arts and Neo-Classical architecture that regularly tops national rankings as one of the most beautiful libraries, is located in downtown St. Louis and houses the SLPL's main operations. The array of services provided includes notary and passport services, research assistance, and a [Creative Experience lab](#), supported by a full programming schedule for all age groups.

The Library is a major resource center and has a substantial collection of almost 400,000 cataloged items, which caters to its diverse user base. The circulating collection is extensive, featuring current and classic works across various categories, including fiction and nonfiction bestsellers, literary fiction, popular and classic nonfiction, and graphic novels. Unique to Central Library are its distinguished special collections, which include genealogy materials, rare books and manuscripts, and the St. Louis Room that is dedicated to local history. A primary objective for the Central Library's collection development is to support St. Louis's historic and diverse community. This is achieved by maintaining contemporary collections

alongside materials of high historical value and significance. The Library also houses an archival stacks collection of non-English historical materials in German, French, Spanish, Italian, Japanese, and Arabic. The Foundation's capital campaign raised funding for the 2012 \$70 million restoration and renovation of Central Library.

SLPL Finances

SLPL operates on a fiscal year running from October 1 through September 30. For FY26, SLPL's revenue budget is \$36.4M. Eighty seven percent of the budgeted revenue comes through a dedicated voter approved real estate and personal property tax from the City of St Louis. Excluding strategic capital investments, SLPL has operated a surplus budget the past 5 years with approximately 10 months of invested reserves. During the last 5 years, the SLPL Foundation has given the Library over \$5.5M to support the Library's programming and technological needs. The Foundation has over \$10.2M in investments that generate additional income to support the Library. Together, these resources provide a stable and flexible base from which the Library can sustain its operations, support strategic priorities, and invest in its long-term future.



THE CITY OF ST. LOUIS

St. Louis offers a compelling blend of cultural vibrancy, accessibility, and affordability, making it an attractive place to live and work. Known as the "Gateway to the West," the city pairs a rich history with a dynamic, modern economy anchored in health sciences, education, and emerging technology. Residents enjoy a high quality of life, supported by an array of free, world-class cultural institutions, including the

Saint Louis Art Museum, Zoo, History Museum, and the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra. The famous Gateway Arch, the Missouri Botanical Garden, the Muny Outdoor Theatre, and Forest Park anchor a network of iconic destinations and expansive green space that further enhance the region's livability. Additionally, the city is home to two top research universities, two children's hospitals, and a vibrant professional sports culture. Distinctive neighborhoods, extensive parks and greenways, and a vibrant arts and culinary scene contribute to an engaging and accessible lifestyle. Combined with a cost of living below the national average and a strong sense of community, St. Louis offers a welcoming, family-friendly environment. To learn much more about the wonderful attractions and culture of the city, visit [Explore St. Louis](#).

ROLE OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

The Chief Executive Officer serves as both the leader of the St. Louis Public Library and President of the SLPL Foundation, providing overall leadership for the institution's strategy, operations, and external engagement. Reporting to and working closely with the Board of Directors, the CEO oversees a high-performing Library Council that includes the Chief Operating Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Public Services Officer, Chief Development Officer, Director of Marketing, Director of Technology Services, Director of Collection Management Services, Director of Central Services, Director of Neighborhood Services, Director of Digital Services, Director of Youth Services, and Director of Human Resources. The CEO has five direct reports: Chief Operating Officer, Chief of Public Services, Director of Technology Services, Director of Marketing, and Chief Development Officer. The CEO is responsible for setting strategic and operational direction; recommending and implementing policies and procedures; allocating resources; administering major expenditures and contracts; and recruiting, developing, and evaluating senior staff. The role calls for a visible, dynamic, and engaged public leader who can represent the Library with credibility and clarity across St. Louis, while maintaining strong relationships with staff, patrons, elected officials, donors, and civic and community partners. At the same time, the CEO will need to be prepared to lead SLPL through a period of evolving external pressures and headwinds, requiring forethought, political savvy, and steady leadership.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Develop and execute a sustainable vision and strategic plan

One of the most important opportunities for the next CEO will be to guide a thoughtful, community-informed strategic planning process that clarifies the Library's long-term service model, footprint, and priorities for investment. In partnership with the Board, staff, and community stakeholders, the CEO will assess the long-term viability of SLPL's facilities and branch system in light of demographic shifts in the city, infrastructure needs, and fiscal realities. The Library is also in an innovative and heavily-used partnership with the St. Louis County Library, which includes a joint catalog, material exchange, and combined children's summer programming. The CEO will help shape the Library's approach and handling of this important partnership. Working closely with the Library Council and Board of Directors, the CEO

will be expected to translate these considerations into a clear and actionable plan for the future, lead the implementation of that plan, align institutional resources and philanthropic strategy with strategic priorities, and help position SLPL for continued relevance, sustainability, and impact in St. Louis.

Elevate the Library's visibility and steward community-centered access

The next CEO will serve as a compelling public voice for the St. Louis Public Library and work to strengthen its standing among the metro area's leading civic and cultural institutions, while clearly distinguishing the library's unique value as an essential public resource. By building strong relationships with residents, donors, elected officials, and community partners, the CEO will help increase awareness of Library's work and broaden support for its future. At the same time, this leader must be adept at addressing some of the challenges of an urban public-service environment, ensuring that SLPL remains welcoming and inclusive while bringing clarity, consistency, and sound judgment to operational expectations, safety, and community access.

Promote a stronger culture of philanthropy and resource development

As President of the Foundation as well as Chief Executive Officer of the Library, the next CEO will have an important opportunity to strengthen SLPL's philanthropic capacity and broaden support for its mission. The Foundation is a private nonprofit entity that was established in 1989 to accept contributions on behalf of the SLPL. Working closely with the Foundation's Chief Development Officer and the 22-member Foundation board, the CEO will cultivate major donors and institutional partners, articulate a compelling case for investment, and help position the Library for greater private support. With a feasibility study underway to assess the potential for a \$20 million endowment campaign, the next CEO will play a leading role in a significant fundraising effort. This will require a dynamic and credible relationship builder who can convey the Library's value and future aspirations with clarity and conviction.

Navigate the civic landscape and strengthen strategic partnerships

The next CEO will operate effectively within St. Louis's civic and political environment while advancing relationships that support the Library's mission and long-term position in the region. This leader will be expected to maintain productive relationships with the Mayor, Board of Aldermen, state legislators, and other public officials, bringing sound judgment, diplomacy, and credibility to those interactions. The CEO will also work to strengthen ties with regional library systems and cultivate partnerships with school districts, universities, cultural institutions, and community organizations, helping to ensure that SLPL remains well-positioned within a changing regional and sector landscape.

Sustain a strong leadership culture while strengthening talent across the organization

The next CEO will inherit a deeply experienced, collaborative, and mission-driven senior team, which includes five direct reports, whose strength and stability have been central to the Library's success. An

important opportunity for this leader will be to build on that foundation by fostering a culture of trust, professional growth, and shared accountability across the organization. In partnership with the Library Council and other leaders, the CEO will support the continued development of senior staff, strengthen leadership capacity at multiple levels, and ensure that SLPL remains well-positioned to attract, develop, and retain talented employees in a changing workforce environment. This work will require an inclusive and appreciative leader who values the strengths of the current team while also bringing a thoughtful approach to succession planning, staff development, and long-term organizational effectiveness.



QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

While no individual will embody every quality outlined below, the ideal candidate will bring many of the following professional and personal characteristics:

Required:

- Proven leadership experience in a complex organization.
- Demonstrated experience working effectively with a governing board.
- Strong ability to lead and develop senior staff.
- Proven track record of financial management experience.

Preferred:

- An MLS or advanced degree in a related field.
- Demonstrated deep knowledge of trends shaping libraries and information access.

- Successful and significant fundraising experience.
- Strong familiarity with urban service environments.
- Demonstrated experience in a public or quasi-public institution.

Additionally, the CEO will:

- Champion a deep commitment to public libraries, public service, and the profession of librarianship.
- Provide strategic, forward-looking leadership.
- Exercise decisiveness and sound judgment.
- Demonstrate emotional intelligence and integrity.
- Communicate with clarity and speak persuasively in public settings.
- Cultivate philanthropic relationships with confidence and skill.
- Navigate political and civic dynamics with astuteness.
- Apply financial acumen and long-range planning discipline.
- Lead effectively through change.
- Advance equity, inclusion, and community engagement.
- Engage diverse constituencies across ideological, economic, and social lines with ease.
- Bring a track record of success in large, diverse, urban environments.
- Respond effectively to evolving opportunities and challenges.
- Manage multiple priorities simultaneously with discipline and agility.
- Maintain confidentiality and exercise discretion.

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 for the CEO of St. Louis Public Library](#).

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Public Library shall not discriminate against qualified people in regard to any employment practices or terms, conditions, and privileges of employment, regardless of race, creed, color, sex, age, national origin, religion, disability, pregnancy, marital status, sexual orientation, predisposing genetic characteristics, or veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by law.

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