

The Ringling

THE JOHN & MABLE RINGLING
MUSEUM OF ART

STATE ART MUSEUM OF FLORIDA | FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

Executive Director

The John & Mable Ringling Museum of Art, a unit of Florida State University
Sarasota, Florida

THE SEARCH

Approaching its centenary anniversary in 2027, [The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art](#) (The Ringling) seeks an executive director endowed with the imagination, experience, and energy to ensure the next 100 years of a beloved dynamic cultural complex. Vibrant, stable, popular, and vast, thanks to a mutually beneficial partnership with Florida State University (FSU), the long-term leadership of Steven High, and the dedication and support of board, staff, and community, The Ringling is positioned for yet greater impact, recognition, and success in its next chapter.

A unique institution on 66 bayfront acres encompassing a renowned art museum and collection, the Circus Museum, the 56-room Ca' d'Zan mansion, the Historic Asolo Theater, extensive archives, the Tibbals Learning Center, arboreta and botanic gardens, the Executive Director serves as the conductor of a multifaceted enterprise where art, visitor experience, scholarship, education, performance, preservation, fundraising, and community engagement intersect. Success in this role requires the ability to navigate complexity, build alignment among stakeholders with differing perspectives and priorities, and foster collaboration across disciplines and departments. At a positive and pivotal moment in its history, The Ringling seeks a leader who can build upon its extraordinary momentum and assets to chart an ambitious course for the future—preserving and enhancing one of Florida's greatest cultural treasures while expanding its capacity to educate, entertain, inspire, and serve generations to come.

Isaacson, Miller, the executive search firm, has been retained by Florida State University and The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art Foundation, Inc. Inquiries, nominations, and applications may be directed to the firm as indicated at the end of this document.

THE JOHN AND MABLE RINGLING MUSEUM OF ART

Founded through the 1936 bequest of John Ringling to the people of Florida, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art began with an extraordinary collection that included European Baroque masterpieces, the Museum building, a 55,000-volume art library and archives, and the Venetian Gothic mansion, Ca' d'Zan, surrounded by expansive bayfront grounds and gardens. The institution grew significantly with the addition of the Circus Museum in 1948 and the historic Asolo Theater in 1950, establishing The Ringling as a unique destination where art, architecture, performance, and circus heritage converge. As Florida's largest art museum, encompassing more than 500,000 square feet of facilities, the cultural campus welcomes more than 400,000 visitors annually in a county of roughly 480,000 residents, with approximately half traveling from outside Florida and abroad. Supporting the vibrant visitor experience is a talented and dedicated corps of 250 staff and 289 volunteers, who also have access to a breadth of professional expertise, institutional capacity, and strategic support from FSU. Key operational functions—including facilities and grounds management, technology services, finance, human resources, and development support—are strengthened through this partnership, enabling museum leaders and staff to focus on advancing mission-driven programs and visitor experiences.

The Ringling operates an annual budget of \$29 million and a growing endowment of \$70 million. Over 30 percent of all revenue is derived from an annual FSU allocation and investments, 15 percent from philanthropic activities, and 48 percent from auxiliary services, which include admissions. Noteworthy are the significant institutional resources and fundraising expertise from FSU, which have provided invaluable support for The Ringling to emerge as one of the University's most prominent advancement priorities, ranking second among FSU units in capital campaign fundraising.

Today, The Ringling stands as Florida's State Art Museum and one of the largest university-based museum complexes in the United States. The Ringling houses a 45,000-object collection, with most holdings accessible online, and has experienced a remarkable transformation through the restoration and reopening of Ca' d'Zan and the development of major facilities, including the McKay Visitor Pavilion, Tibbals Learning Center, Chao Center for Asian Art, and Kotler-Coville Glass Pavilion. For more information on the related entities, please refer to the addendum at the end of this document.

ROLE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Executive Director serves as the chief executive of The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, providing strategic, operational, and financial leadership as well as expertise in arts and culture. The Executive Director is responsible for advancing The Ringling's mission, stewarding its extraordinary art and living collections, historic assets, enhancing its contribution as the State Art Museum of Florida, and ensuring its continued growth, relevance, and impact as it approaches its centennial and beyond.

Working in close partnership with Florida State University, The Ringling Museum of Art Foundation Board, donors, community stakeholders, and a talented senior leadership team, the Executive Director will set and provide a compelling, integrated vision balancing advancement of the arts with operational excellence, professional leadership within the museum field, and meaningful engagement with the communities The Ringling serves. The Executive Director must be both a visionary and an executor—someone who can inspire bold thinking, cultivate transformative philanthropy, and elevate The Ringling’s profile while ensuring sound management, fiscal stewardship, and organizational effectiveness.

The Executive Director reports to the Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs of Florida State University. The Executive Director oversees the Museum's Operations, Development, and Human Resources functions. In addition, the following positions report directly to the Executive Director: Chief Curator, Chief Conservator, Head of Ringling Art Library, Head of Education Programs, Senior Registrar, Marketing Director, Curator of Circus, Curator of Performance, and Directorial Operations Administrative Specialist.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Building upon the success of the last decade, the strong foundation that already exists, and the mutually beneficial partnership with FSU, the Executive Director will address the following challenges and opportunities:

Define and execute an ambitious, inspiring, strategic vision.

The upcoming centennial and pending completion of the 2024-2028 strategic plan offer the incoming Executive Director a unique opportunity to build momentum around a new vision for The Ringling that captures the grandeur and historic legacy of The Ringling and combines it with contemporary relevance and innovation. There are opportunities to exercise creativity in exhibition programming, collection management, and staff development – and to establish lofty goals as a cultural centerpiece of Florida’s west coast. Most of all, the strategic vision must serve as a catalyst for deepening engagement across the wider community, including those who have yet to experience the treasures of The Ringling.

Augment philanthropic support and advance institutional influence.

Situated in one of Florida’s most affluent and philanthropic communities, The Ringling benefits from exceptional opportunities to expand its base of support among individuals, foundations, and corporations. To capitalize on this potential, the Executive Director will serve as the institution’s chief ambassador and lead fundraiser, cultivating transformational philanthropic investments, identifying new sources of support, and deepening engagement among existing donors and stakeholders.

In an increasingly rich environment for arts and cultural organizations, and serving as the Executive Director of a public state-funded museum, Ringling's next leader should have the political acuity and foresight necessary to anticipate emerging issues and safeguard The Ringling's reputation and public trust. Working closely with a sophisticated and highly engaged Foundation Board, the Executive Director will identify opportunities to advance strategic priorities, mitigate risk, elevate The Ringling's profile, and secure the resources necessary to achieve its long-term ambitions. The Executive Director should look to build enduring relationships in the local community, including but not limited to current and former board members and local leaders.

Champion workplace excellence and organizational sustainability.

The Board, staff, and volunteers share a deep commitment to and passion for The Ringling's place and mission. While The Ringling maintains steady staffing, the workforce is not exempt from the region's economic conditions that affect affordability. Principal among the Executive Director's responsibilities is inspiring and empowering a talented workforce, which entails identifying opportunities for professional development and creating the conditions that sustain growth in wages, advanced technology, and operational efficiency.

Above all, the Executive Director must be visible even as they develop a nuanced understanding of what it takes to operate a multi-disciplinary arts complex. The successful candidate will bring a leadership style characterized by enthusiasm, energy, integrity, and the ability to build trust, invite participation, and strengthen shared purpose across the organization.

Deepen collaboration and integration with FSU's academic enterprise.

FSU's strategic commitment to interdisciplinary inquiry, entrepreneurship, and creative excellence further enhances The Ringling's ability to innovate and expand its reach. Together, the institutions have endless opportunities to advance new scholarship, develop innovative programs, and create enriching experiences that expand public engagement and contribute to the cultural vitality of Florida and beyond. The Executive Director will have an enterprising approach to champion collaborations that both deepen connections with academic disciplines closely aligned with The Ringling's mission and expand opportunities for innovative partnerships across Florida State University, positioning the museum as a dynamic bridge between the arts, scholarship, and emerging areas of inquiry. Given the geographical distance from Tallahassee to Sarasota of over 300 miles, the Executive Director of the Ringling serves both as a key university officer and ambassador for FSU in the central Florida region.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

While not one person will possess all of them, the successful candidate will bring many of the following attributes:

- Resonance with the mission and values of The Ringling, including a deep appreciation for the full scope and breadth of its collections and assets;
- Respect as a peer and credible leader of a preeminent cultural institution with international reach and statewide impact, familiar with institutional best practices;
- Emotional intelligence, political astuteness, and the managerial sophistication to guide an enterprising and evolving institution;
- A track record of bold thinking, sound judgment, and effective execution, with the ability to assess established practices thoughtfully, strengthen what is working, and pursue new approaches that advance institutional priorities;
- Capacity to define, communicate, and execute clear priorities while operating within the framework of a public, state-funded institution;
- Outstanding communication skills and public presence with the appetite and ease to be an ambassador and advocate for The Ringling and FSU;
- Significant capacity for raising funds from a variety of sources, particularly individuals. Deep and enduring enthusiasm for an intensive involvement in development and donor relations;
- An aptitude for technology and understanding of its application to museum operations and programming;
- Confidence and sound judgment. Willingness to challenge conventional thinking, take calculated risks, and venture carefully into issues that are subjects of art inquiry and expression.
- Deep respect for the importance of a strong partnership with the Foundation Board, ensuring voices are representative of the broad community of supporters;
- A collaborative, forward-looking approach to partnership with FSU leadership, with the ability to strengthen existing academic and cultural programs while identifying new opportunities for innovation and shared impact;
- An advanced degree is required; a scholarly record is desirable.

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

This is a full-time position located in Sarasota, Florida. The anticipated salary for this position is in the mid to upper \$300,000s, commensurate with the selected candidate's exceptional qualifications, depth and breadth of experience, and demonstrated record of leadership and impact aligned with the scope and responsibilities of the role.

Florida State University is committed to attracting and retaining exceptional leaders through a comprehensive Total Rewards package designed to support your professional success, personal well-being, and long-term financial security. Our offerings encompass competitive compensation, comprehensive benefits, wellness resources, recognition programs, and meaningful opportunities for professional and leadership development. To learn more about the full range of rewards and resources available to FSU employees, please visit [FSU Total Rewards](#).

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/john-mable-ringling-museum-art-unit-florida-state-university/executive-director> to the attention of Sean Farrell, Sarah James, Berlinda Mojica, Drew Chang.

FSU is an Equal Employment Opportunity Employer.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by The John & Mable Ringling Museum of Art, a unit of Florida State University. 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 John & Mable Ringling Museum of Art, a unit of Florida State University would supersede any conflicting information in this document.

ADDENDUM

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

In 2000, stewardship of The Ringling was transferred from the Florida Department of State to Florida State University (FSU), reflecting a shared vision among state leaders, the arts community, and local stakeholders to elevate the Museum's role as a premier educational and cultural resource. The transition also established The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art Foundation, Inc., a direct-support organization that helps advance the Museum's mission.

FSU provides a distinct advantage that strengthens The Ringling's impact, visibility, and long-term sustainability despite the 326-mile distance between them. As one of the nation's leading public research universities and a State of Florida-designated Preeminent University, FSU brings exceptional academic resources, research expertise, creative talent, and global reach that help position The Ringling as a dynamic educational resource.

The partnership aligns naturally with FSU's mission to advance excellence in teaching, research, creative activity, and public service. Through connections to nationally recognized programs in art history, visual arts, theater, dance, film, and museum studies, The Ringling serves as a living laboratory where scholarship, innovation, and public engagement intersect. Faculty, students, and researchers have opportunities to collaborate with the museum's collections, exhibitions, archives, and historic properties, creating unique learning experiences that enrich both institutions. FSU's national reputation, operational expertise, and commitment to excellence provide a strong foundation for preserving The Ringling's historic legacy while ensuring its continued growth.

THE JOHN AND MABLE RINGLING MUSEUM OF ART FOUNDATION, INC.

The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art Foundation, Inc. is a Direct Support Organization to The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art under the direction of Florida State University as outlined in Florida Statute 1004.45. The Foundation supports The Ringling; it is not a governing board. FSU stewards The Ringling and approves the bylaws and board members of The Foundation.

The Ringling Museum of Art Foundation Board is an accomplished and highly engaged body of leaders whose collective experience spans world-class museums, major universities, Fortune 500 companies, healthcare systems, financial institutions, philanthropic foundations, and influential arts organizations. Composed of distinguished executives, scholars, cultural leaders, entrepreneurs, and civic visionaries, the board provides strategic counsel and advocacy for The Ringling. United by a shared commitment to excellence in the arts, education, and public service, several members have longstanding personal ties to The Ringling, and all have played pivotal roles in advancing its collections, facilities, and programs. The board's dedication helps ensure that The Ringling remains both a treasured cultural landmark and a dynamic institution serving broad and varied audiences.

The Florida Legislature's creation of the Florida State University-Ringling Center for Cultural Arts effectively brought The Ringling under Florida State University's management. The Foundation Board, a Direct Support Organization (DSO), was empowered by state statute to nominate the new Executive Director to the President of the University. The Executive Director reports directly to the Provost and Executive Vice President of Academic Affairs at Florida State University, Dr. James Clark.

THE SARASOTA AND MANATEE REGION

The Ringling sits on the Sarasota-Manatee county line. Sarasota and Manatee Counties comprise one of the nation's most distinctive cultural regions, combining a high quality of life, exceptional natural beauty, strong economic growth, and an arts and cultural ecosystem that far exceeds what is typically found in communities of comparable size. Located along Florida's Gulf Coast, the region is home to more than 900,000 residents and continues to experience significant population growth driven by retirees, professionals, entrepreneurs, and families.

Sarasota, in particular, has earned a national reputation as a cultural destination, with a remarkable concentration of museums, performing arts organizations, galleries, historic sites, educational institutions, and creative enterprises. The region is home to internationally respected institutions, including Sarasota Ballet, Sarasota Opera, Sarasota Orchestra, Florida Studio Theatre, Asolo Repertory Theatre, Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, Ringling College of Art and Design, the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, and numerous visual arts, literary, and community-based organizations. As the State Art Museum of Florida, The Ringling is a centerpiece in a well-established cultural community. According to a 2022 American for the Arts Survey (AEP6), nonprofit arts and cultural organizations in Sarasota County contributed over \$342 million to the local economy; in contrast, the economic impact nationwide was down almost 9 percent.

As is common to many rapidly growing coastal communities, Sarasota and Manatee counties face challenges such as housing affordability, workforce recruitment and retention, and environmental resilience. However, the unique concentration of wealth and community engagement has fostered one of the nation's most vibrant and well-supported cultural ecosystems, providing significant opportunities for institutional advancement and charitable investment, enabling area nonprofits to build strong endowments, undertake ambitious capital projects, and expand programming.