HARRIS THEATER
MILLENNIUM PARK

Alexandra C. and John D. Nichols President and Chief Executive Officer
Joan W. and Irving B. Harris Theater for Music and Dance
Chicago, IL

THE SEARCH

The Joan W. and Irving B. Harris Theater for Music and Dance (the Harris, Harris Theater, or Theater) seeks a visionary, entrepreneurial, and strategic leader with a passion for performing arts to serve as its next Alexandra C. and John D. Nichols President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO). This is an unparalleled opportunity to lead one of the nation's most distinctive performing arts institutions with the mission to be Chicago's home for music and dance, connecting diverse audiences with outstanding artists from across the city, the nation, and the world.

Located in Millennium Park in the heart of downtown Chicago, the Harris was established to address a longstanding need within the city's cultural ecosystem: a premier performance venue designed for mid-sized music and dance organizations that had outgrown smaller spaces but were not well served by Chicago's largest stages. Since opening in 2003, the Harris has become a vital artistic anchor, expanding access to high-quality performance while strengthening the city's performing arts sector.

The Harris Theater operates through a distinctive dual model that combines service to Chicago's arts community with its own presenting program. At its core is the *Resident Company Program*, through which more than 32 small to mid-sized nonprofit music, dance, and multidisciplinary arts organizations use the Harris as their performance home. Support for these resident companies is core to the Harris' mission. Alongside this role, the Theater offers *Harris Theater Presents* (HTP), an independent presenting series that brings nationally and internationally recognized artists and companies to Chicago. The Harris Theater serves as both a shared cultural infrastructure supporting the local arts ecosystem and a curator and presenter of exceptional performances, making it one of Chicago's most important hubs for music and dance.

The next CEO will articulate a compelling vision for the future, cultivate the resources needed to advance it, and lead the organization through its next chapter of artistic, financial, and organizational growth.

Isaacson, Miller, a global executive search firm, has been retained to support the Harris Theater in this search. Confidential inquiries, nominations, and applications may be directed to the firm as indicated at the end of this document.

ABOUT JOAN W. AND IRVING B. HARRIS THEATER FOR MUSIC AND DANCE

The vision for the Harris emerged from decades of advocacy by Chicago arts leaders. It was reinforced by a landmark study commissioned by the MacArthur Foundation that identified a critical need for an appropriately scaled performance venue for the city's flourishing cultural organizations. Built as part of the development of Millennium Park, the 1,500-seat theater was the first major multi-use performance venue constructed in downtown Chicago in more than 70 years and quickly established itself as a cornerstone of the city's cultural landscape.

Today, the Harris advances its mission through three interconnected priorities: supporting Chicago's music and dance community, presenting artists of national and international significance, and engaging and granting access to diverse audiences through educational and community-centered programming. The Harris Theater serves as a shared home for 32 Resident Companies, providing subsidized access to critical resources that enable artistic organizations to thrive. Collectively employing more than 2,000 artists each year, Resident Companies represent the breadth of Chicago's performing arts ecosystem, including leading dance companies, chamber ensembles, opera organizations, and cross-disciplinary arts groups. Forty percent of Resident Companies operate with annual budgets of $1M or less, so the Harris provides an affordable and professional home for many of the city's most dynamic small and mid-sized arts organizations.

In 2006, the Harris' programming scope expanded with the opportunity to present New York City Ballet's long-awaited return to Chicago. The engagement was a smashing success, drawing near-capacity crowds and establishing the Harris Theater Presents series. Since that first presentation, HTP has expanded, bringing celebrated artists and ensembles from around the world to Chicago. Over the years, the Harris has welcomed internationally recognized artists and companies while creating opportunities for artistic exchange between local and global talent, establishing it as a model for collaboration, artistic excellence, and cultural impact.

The Harris Theater has also become an important civic institution within Chicago. Through education initiatives, community partnerships, audience development efforts, and accessible ticketing programs, the Theater seeks to broaden participation in the performing arts and cultivate the next generation of artists and audiences. Each year, the Harris Theater provides more than 1,500 free tickets through 58 Community Partner organizations, including ASPIRE; Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metropolitan Chicago; Manley Career Academy High School; My Block, My Hood, My City; and Whitney M. Young Magnet High School, among others. Its location within Millennium Park places it at the intersection of Chicago's cultural, civic, and tourism sectors, providing a highly visible platform for artistic expression and public engagement.

To learn more about the Harris Theater, see here.

ROLE OF THE PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

In collaboration with the board, staff, and other constituencies, the President and Chief Executive Officer is charged with developing a captivating and attainable vision for the Harris Theater's next chapter at a moment when external forces are having a profound impact on arts and culture organizations in Chicago, nationally, and globally. The CEO reports to the board, oversees an operating budget currently at $7.8M, and oversees six direct reports: Vice President of Operations and Production/General Manager; Chief Financial Officer; Director of Human Relations; Vice President of Development; Director of Programming and Engagement; and the Vice President of Marketing and Sales. With a full-time staff of 31 and an overall staff of 364, including part-time and unionized employees, the Harris expects the next CEO to bring deep administrative expertise combined with the ability to galvanize a broad set of constituencies around an inspiring artistic vision. The CEO must ensure that the Harris Theater continues to shine as a unique venue in the Chicago performing arts landscape.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

To engender success across all domains, the CEO must work collaboratively and creatively with staff and the board to address the following key opportunities and challenges in support of the Harris Theater's mission:

Shape and advance the next chapter of the Harris Theater

As the Harris Theater enters its third decade, the next President & CEO will have the opportunity to help define its future while honoring the vision and mission that have guided its success since its founding. The next leader will work collaboratively with the board, staff, resident companies, artists, and community partners to articulate a compelling vision for the Theater's future and build alignment around its strategic priorities, identity, and long-term direction. This work will require balancing artistic ambition, civic impact, financial sustainability, and service to resident companies, and through this effort, the CEO will ensure that the Harris Theater remains an indispensable cultural institution for Chicago and a recognized leader within the broader performing arts landscape.

Strengthen financial sustainability and lead the next generation of philanthropic support

The next CEO will inherit an organization with a solid financial foundation and significant momentum, as well as an opportunity to strengthen and diversify the Harris Theater's financial resources for the future. For more than two decades, the Theater has benefited from the generosity, vision, and advocacy of a dedicated group of founders, long-standing supporters, trustees, and advocates. Currently, philanthropy represents about 60% of the organization's total revenue. As the board looks to the future, one of their goals is to broaden its base of support and cultivate the next generation of donors, trustees, sponsors, and advocates.

As the Theater's chief fundraiser and ambassador, the CEO will articulate a compelling case for philanthropic investment and generate excitement around the Harris' future. This leader will help advance a significant capital campaign, deepen relationships with existing supporters, and identify new fundraising opportunities.

Advance artistic excellence while expanding audience engagement and revenue opportunities

The Harris has earned international recognition through a model that combines support for resident companies with innovative presenting activities through *Harris Theater Presents*. The next CEO will have an opportunity to evaluate and strengthen this complex model to ensure it remains relevant, sustainable, and responsive to the changing needs of audiences, artists, and partner organizations. This work will require the next CEO to carefully navigate the interplay among resident companies, *Harris Theater Presents*, commercial opportunities, and community impact. Success will require balancing mission and market realities while ensuring that programming serves as both an artistic and strategic driver of the organization's future. Potential areas of growth for *Harris Theater Presents* include expanding into new genres, forging new partnerships, attracting broader audiences, and leading the Harris in adopting new AI-enhanced technologies to drive growth and efficiency. Working with the board and senior staff, the next CEO will assess how artistic vision, programming leadership, and institutional strategy can best be aligned to support the Theater's long-term priorities.

Elevate the Harris Theater’s profile and deepen its impact across Chicagoland and beyond

The Harris Theater plays a singular role in Chicago's performing arts landscape. The next CEO will serve as a visible and influential ambassador, further strengthening the Theater's reputation as a premier cultural destination and a vital resource for artists, audiences, and arts organizations. This leader will cultivate meaningful relationships with a broad range of constituents, including resident companies, artists, donors, sponsors, civic leaders, public-sector partners, foundations, and community organizations. Through these efforts, the next CEO will elevate awareness of the Harris' distinctive value proposition while identifying opportunities to expand partnerships, increase visibility, and amplify impact throughout Chicago and beyond. The Harris is well-positioned to further distinguish itself as both a champion of local artistic excellence and a presenter of outstanding work. The next CEO will play a central role in shaping and communicating that narrative.

Foster organizational effectiveness and support staff development

The next CEO will inherit a dedicated and talented team that is deeply committed to the Harris Theater's mission. The CEO will foster a culture of inclusion, transparency, and shared purpose. This leader will invest in staff development and retention, support succession planning across key functions, and ensure that the organization has the capacity and structure necessary to achieve its strategic priorities.

The Theater operates within a complex environment that includes multiple labor agreements, part-time and seasonal staff, resident company relationships, and a broad range of operational stakeholders.

Unionized staff will be negotiating a new contract in 2027. The next CEO will navigate these dynamics thoughtfully while maintaining a strong and productive workplace culture.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The desired candidate will exhibit the following experiences and track record:

- **A minimum of seven years of relevant senior leadership experience** in a performing arts organization, orchestra, or related nonprofit organization.
- **Vision and strategic planning skills**: Track record of successfully developing and implementing an aspirational long-term vision and strategy for an organization. Experience cultivating and growing audiences and increasing organizational visibility, partnerships, and presence. This leader will be confident, decisive, and capable of uniting diverse constituents around a common vision.
- **Financial acumen:** Prior responsibility for the financial results of a business, performing arts organization, or nonprofit; ability to identify, analyze, and prioritize issues confronting the organization in terms of potential financial risks and returns.
- **Fundraising experience**: Proven fundraising and donor cultivation skills, ideally within the cultural and artistic worlds.
- **Performing arts literacy and passion**: A passion for performing arts with familiarity to provide aspirational leadership and credibly partner with artistic directors and musicians.
- **Track record of organizational leadership**: Experience in a leadership role within a complex organization of similar scale and significance in the nonprofit, public, or private sector. Demonstrated capacity to build and sustain strong operating processes and systems, resulting in operational viability and sustainability. Team leader and consensus-builder with a track record of building a culture of inclusion and talent development.

Research shows that people belonging to underrepresented groups often only apply to jobs if they meet 100 percent of the qualifications. As no one ever meets 100 percent of the qualifications, we encourage you to apply if you feel that most of the above qualifications reflect your experience and expertise.

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

This is a permanent, full-time position located in Chicago, IL. There is a flexible, hybrid work schedule with a minimum of 3 days per week in the office. The anticipated salary range is $250,000 - $300,000 and will be commensurate with experience. The Harris Theater recognizes that a comprehensive total rewards philosophy is essential to institutional excellence and the long-term vitality of the workforce. The organization is committed to providing a multifaceted portfolio of health, wellness, and financial benefits that emphasizes accessibility, quality, and flexibility.

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.

Jeff Kessner, Ben Tobin, Arianna Williams, Jenny Rubin
Isaacson, Miller

The Harris Theater is an equal opportunity employer that is committed to diversity and inclusion in the workplace. We prohibit discrimination and harassment of any kind based on race, color, sex, religion, sexual orientation, veteran status, national origin, or disability status, or any protected characteristic as outlined by federal, state, and local laws.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by the Joan W. and Irving B. Harris Theater for Music and Dance. 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 Joan W. and Irving B. Harris Theater for Music and Dance would supersede any conflicting information in this document.