Monterey Bay Aquarium

Chief Development Officer

MONTEREY, CA



"The ocean is not separate from our lives; it delights us, sustains our climate, supports amazing wildlife, and feeds billions. At this moment in time, ocean conservation is not simply an environmental issue; it is crucial to the quality of life of generations to come."

– Dr. Jenny Gray, CEO, Monterey Bay Aquarium

Isaacson, Miller

The Search

The Monterey Bay Aquarium, one of the most respected and admired aquariums in the world, seeks an experienced fundraising executive to serve as its next Chief Development Officer (CDO). With the ocean in peril and its wildlife and habitats threatened by an ever-increasing pace of human activity, the Aquarium's mission is more urgent than ever before. This career-defining leadership role becomes available not only at a moment of significant resolve, but also at an important milestone in the Aquarium's history with the recent arrival of Dr. Jenny Gray, who joined as CEO in March 2026. As Dr. Gray and the Board of Trustees embark on an ambitious priority-setting process that will define the next comprehensive campaign, the Aquarium seeks a visionary leader to strengthen and scale its philanthropic enterprise while implementing a bold vision that aligns with the organization's future aspirations.

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Reporting to Dr. Gray, the CDO will direct all fundraising, donor engagement, and membership efforts across the Aquarium and serve as the architect of the institution's next comprehensive campaign while also ensuring the continued strength of annual operating support. The CDO will devise and execute strategies to expand and deepen the Aquarium's community of individual, foundation, and corporate supporters while leveraging its robust membership program, consisting of 72,000 households, as a gateway to long-term philanthropic engagement. Working alongside Dr. Gray and the Board of Trustees, the CDO will play a central role in shaping and translating campaign priorities, preparing for significant fundraising initiatives, and securing the resources necessary to advance both transformational capital projects and the Aquarium's renowned conservation, education, and research activities. Importantly, the CDO will serve as one of several new members of the Executive Leadership Team (ELT), helping to set organizational priorities, drive cross-functional alignment, and contribute to enterprise-wide strategic decision making.

The successful candidate will bring a distinguished record of fundraising achievement, including substantial experience securing major and principal gifts, leading complex campaigns, and managing high-performing development teams. The Aquarium seeks a strategic and disciplined leader who combines big-picture thinking with exceptional operational rigor. The successful candidate will bring a demonstrated ability to translate strategy into action, establish clear systems and priorities, and ensure consistent follow-through across a complex donor enterprise. As a trusted

thought partner to Dr. Gray, the CDO will provide counsel on fundraising strategy, help translate emerging organizational priorities into compelling philanthropic opportunities, and thrive in a dynamic environment characterized by ambition, momentum, and high achievement. The ideal candidate will be an inclusive and collaborative leader, an exceptional communicator, and a visible ambassador for the Aquarium's mission and core values.

Monterey Bay Aquarium has engaged Rachel Ellenport of Isaacson, Miller to assist with this important search. Inquiries, nominations, and applications should be sent in strict confidence to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.



About the Monterey Bay Aquarium

For nearly half a century, the Monterey Bay Aquarium has been a leader in science education and a global voice for ocean conservation through active programs in marine science and public policy. In the late 1970s, a group of marine scientists affiliated with Stanford University and Silicon Valley crafted a vision for what was to become the world-class Aquarium. After six years of planning, and funded by a $55 million personal gift from David and Lucile Packard, their vision became a reality in 1984. The Monterey Bay Aquarium opened its doors in a state-of-the-art building on the ocean's edge on Monterey's historic Cannery Row. The mission was and remains unique – not one of commerce, but a commitment: to inspire conservation of the ocean.

The Monterey Bay Aquarium was the first public aquarium with permanent exhibits devoted to the marine life of its home region: the waters of Monterey Bay and California's Central Coast. The exhibits helped spark public interest that led to designation of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, the largest in the continental United States. It was also the first aquarium with a living

kelp forest; the first to create large-scale jellyfish exhibits; the first to successfully exhibit young great white sharks and return them successfully to the wild; the only aquarium outside Japan to exhibit ocean sunfish, yellowfish, and bluefin tuna; and a pioneer in the creation of changing special exhibitions that are now common in aquariums worldwide.

Today, the Monterey Bay Aquarium works more effectively than ever on behalf of ocean health by integrating science-based conservation research with policy initiatives and partnerships that are making a difference. In the face of growing threats to ocean health, the Aquarium has adopted a new strategic approach that focuses its conservation and science efforts on critical issues affecting the future of the ocean, including steps to reduce plastic pollution, promote sustainable seafood globally, address climate change, and protect key species such as sea otters, sharks, and Pacific bluefin tuna. Welcoming nearly two million visitors annually to experience its more than 200 exhibits – along with its global research, policy initiatives, and education programs designed for teachers, students, and underserved communities – the Aquarium is working to turn the tide for ocean conservation.



Fundraising and Financial Overview

The Monterey Bay Aquarium has an annual budget of $113 million and comprises roughly 500 staff members, 40 of whom are in the development division. Currently valued at $375 million, the endowment is a significantly priority to grow to $400 million through positive investment performance, contributions, and bequests, with a long-term goal of $500 million by the Aquarium's 50th anniversary.

In Fiscal Year 2025, the Aquarium's revenue amounted to $184.6 million, with $76.6 million in contributions, $66.8 million from admissions, $13 million from membership dues, $13 million from endowment distribution, $12 million from retail and food services, and $3.2 million from other earned revenue. Additional information may be found in the 2025 Annual Report.

Leadership



Dr. Jenny Gray is the Nancy Burgermeister Chief Executive Officer of the Monterey Bay Aquarium. A leader in the global zoo and aquarium industry, and deeply respected for her work in animal ethics, welfare, and conservation, Dr. Gray joined the Aquarium in May 2026 following a 17-year tenure as CEO of Zoos Victoria in Australia. Under her leadership, Zoos Victoria was transformed into a global conservation leader dedicated to fighting wildlife extinction through research and habitat protection. Dr. Gray served a two-year term as president of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums and has played a pivotal role in global species recovery efforts through initiatives such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature's *Reverse the Red*. Her contributions have been recognized with some of the sector's highest honors, including Australia's Public Service Medal, the Order of Australia Medal, and the San Diego Zoo Global Conservation Medal. A native of South Africa, she holds master's degrees in ethics, engineering, and business administration, and a PhD in ethics from the University of Melbourne.

The Monterey Bay Aquarium is governed by an 18-member Board of Trustees, led by Chair Tegan Acton and Vice Chair Julie Packard. Ms. Packard transitioned to this leadership role after serving as the Aquarium's founding Executive Director for over 40 years. She also chairs the Aquarium's Development Committee.

Role of the Chief Development Officer

Reporting to the CEO and serving as a key member of her Executive Leadership Team, the CDO will define a development vision and implement the necessary infrastructure to support a comprehensive program that strengthens a culture of philanthropy; supports the Aquarium's strategic plan and impending campaign; attracts new sources of funding; promotes the involvement of donors, members, and friends; grows and retains staff; and continues to raise the visibility and reputation of the Monterey Bay Aquarium as a premier living institution and conservation organization – regionally, nationally, and globally.



Strategic Vision and Fundraising Leadership

- Serve as architect and leader of a strategic, cohesive, and systematic development program to broaden fundraising, outreach, and membership activities, and increase philanthropic revenue year-over-year. Prepare the Aquarium for future fundraising endeavors, ensuring an optimally deployed staff and an effective, efficient infrastructure that will support and sustain new levels of success.
- Based on strategic organizational priorities, identify compelling funding opportunities and match them to existing and potential donors. Leverage the emerging strategic plan and campaign messaging to energize, inspire, and challenge the Monterey Bay Aquarium community.
- Personally cultivate, solicit, and steward a select portfolio of major and principal gift donors. Lead the frontline fundraising team by example, demonstrating success and ensuring that timely steps are taken toward donor cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship.
- Develop and deploy a strategic and forward-thinking operating model that utilizes and is enabled by metrics, data, and development benchmarking with an eye toward best practices.

Executive Engagement

- Guide and support the CEO in her role as chief spokesperson and fundraiser, serving as an advisor and co-strategist in cultivating prospective donors and soliciting transformational gifts. Similarly guide and support the Board of Trustees, senior leaders, volunteers, and other key constituents in all development-related activities, ensuring that their time spent is productive, meaningful, and personally rewarding.
- Serve as an active member of the Executive Leadership Team. Build collaborative professional relationships with senior peers and foster a strong team orientation to achieve shared goals.
- Participate in organization-wide strategic planning efforts and contribute to discussions that guide strategies and policies shaping the Aquarium's future. Listen and contribute meaningfully to strategic insights.



Staff Management

- Lead, support, and mentor the Aquarium's development team of 40 staff (three direct reports: Vice President of Gift Planning, Vice President of Member and Donor Relations, and Director of Major Gifts), promoting a culture of excellence, collaboration, and professional growth. Further develop a high-caliber staff that is well prepared to meet the ongoing challenges and opportunities of an ambitious program.

- Set clear direction, priorities, and measurable goals for development personnel. Lead the division with values of transparency, communication, and collaboration.
- Maintain a leadership style that is inspiring, empowering, and motivating to staff. Foster a work environment that recognizes and rewards performance, supports new ideas and risk-taking, builds confidence, encourages teamwork, and reduces silos.
- Oversee development personnel activities, including the hiring, training, defining of job descriptions, and performance review processes for the team.



Qualifications and Characteristics

- A minimum of 10 years of progressively responsible experience envisioning, developing, and implementing a successful and comprehensive development program in a fast-paced environment.
- Depth of knowledge of best practices in all key areas of development, including demonstrated ability to conceptualize, manage, and close a comprehensive campaign.
- Experience building upon an existing program, resulting in a transformative increase in philanthropic revenue for an organization. Success in increasing the effectiveness of a development program and its staff through established objectives and performance standards.

- Strong strategic planning and analytical skills, coupled with proven experience in developing and effectively implementing and organization-wide development plan.
- Results-driven with personal experience cultivating major and principal gifts, including supporting donor strategies, solicitation approaches, and donor stewardship tactics.
- A range of fundraising experience from a variety of sources including major gifts, corporate and foundation giving, planned giving, and membership programs, with a track record of results across all areas.
- The credibility, maturity, and sound judgment required to effectively engage and leverage senior leaders, board members, and volunteers in the cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship of key prospects and donors, including high-net-worth individuals and business leaders.
- Deep understanding of resource management in terms of time, effort, budget, and funding, and evidence of strategic decision-making in allocating and tracking of resources.
- Exemplary organizational development skills in building and managing strong teams. The ability to inspire and motivate staff in line with strategic priorities, key performance indicators, and expectations.
- Experience as an influential leader and manager of a comparably sized team, with a proven track record of strong hiring, team development, and staff retention.
- Demonstrated history of implementing new approaches, informed by data, while thinking strategically and tactically to produce results.
- Strong personal integrity and work ethic, as well as a sense of humor and perspective.
- Bachelor's degree preferred; however, comparable years of directly relevant experience and a proven track record of achievement may be considered in lieu of formal education.

Compensation and Benefits

The anticipated salary range for this position is $360,000 to $375,000+, commensurate with experience. The Aquarium provides a comprehensive and competitive benefits package, including medical, dental, vision, and life insurance; a 403b retirement plan; a wellness program; learning and development opportunities; and generous paid time off.

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: Chief Development Officer, Monterey Bay Aquarium

Rachel Ellenport, Partner
Nicole Poe, Managing Associate
Megan Gorman, Managing Search Coordinator
Isaacson, Miller

The Monterey Bay Aquarium is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by Monterey Bay Aquarium. 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 Aquarium would supersede any conflicting information in this document.

