



Search for the inaugural Executive Director of the Arts Initiative

University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan

"We can be sure that through this initiative, we will be increasing imagination, which is fundamental to learning and discovery. Creativity and openness of the arts, coupled with the rigor of the sciences, can provide the inspiration and insights needed to find solutions for the world's greatest challenges." – Santa J. Ono, President of the University of Michigan

THE OPPORTUNITY

The [University of Michigan](#) (U-M)—one of the nation's leading and most esteemed research universities—seeks a visionary, collaborative, and entrepreneurial leader to serve as the inaugural Executive Director of the [Arts Initiative](#). Building upon a long history and legacy of artistic excellence at U-M, the Arts Initiative seeks to transform the university into an unrivaled destination for artists to make new work in collaboration with faculty and students, where students and experts in all fields learn from art's unmatched ability to foster experimentation and risk-taking, and where scholarship and art intertwine to illuminate and advance local, national, and global conversations. This is a distinct opportunity to join a premier research university at a moment of unprecedented investment in the arts and to give shape to this nascent and growing university-wide initiative, in the context of a campus-wide effort to embed the arts across the depth and breadth of the university's activity.

The Arts Initiative plays many roles at the university. It is simultaneously a convener, a funder, a programmer, an advocate, and a broadcaster. Part of the power of the initiative is its ability to mold itself to meet different needs across the university community, in concert with highest-level goals. The initiative was launched in 2019 with the goal of transforming U-M by promoting, enhancing, and supplementing the immense arts resources that already exist across the university. Following a successful initial start-up phase, the university has allocated [\\$20 million in funding](#) to the initiative over its next five years to enable its growth. The ED will lead the university community and the Arts Initiative team in creating a vision for and giving continuing shape to this growth. This work will involve connecting the university's myriad arts and cultural resources in new ways to achieve greater reach and impact; catalyzing arts integration in research, scholarship, and creative activity across disciplines; enhancing communication efforts in order to increase awareness of and access to the arts; partnering with external communities to support, learn from, and amplify the cultural vitality of the region; and building capacity and sustainability for the arts, including through fundraising efforts. In all this work, the ED will lead with a deep commitment to the

values of diversity, equity, and inclusion, ensuring that the arts are accessible and available to students, faculty, staff, and community members across the full range of human experience and academic inquiry.

The successful candidate will have distinguished achievement as an academic or professional in the arts. This person will have an appreciation for and understanding of the academic and educational mission of a top research university, a vision for the role the arts can play in strengthening such an institution, and a commitment to connecting the university to broader regional, national, and global conversations and communities. This person will have excellent communication skills and will be able to deploy them with stakeholders both internal and external to the university, including with community partners and donors. As the inaugural leader of a growing initiative, this person will have a track record of successful staff and budgetary management within a relevant organization.

The University of Michigan has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in this important recruitment. All inquiries, nominations, and applications may be directed in confidence to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

The [University of Michigan](#) (U-M) has a long and distinguished history. It was founded in 1817, 20 years before the territory became a state and 45 years before the Morrill Act of 1862 established the modern, public land-grant university system. It was one of the first public universities in the nation and for more than two centuries it has maintained the highest levels of education, scholarship, and research. The university sustains top programs in the arts and humanities, social sciences, biomedical sciences, business, law, and engineering and is the home of one of the largest and most distinguished academic medical centers in the world. It ranks among the world's top 35 universities according to the [QS World University Rankings](#) and among the nation's top 25 institutions according to [U.S. News and World Report](#).

The university's main campus is located in Ann Arbor, 35 miles southwest of Detroit, and it has regional campuses located in [Dearborn](#) and [Flint](#). The [19 schools and colleges](#) on the Ann Arbor campus span the arts, humanities, and sciences as well as most professions. Enrollment of undergraduate, graduate, and professional students surpassed 50,000 for the first time in the university's history in 2021 and grew to 52,065 during the fall 2023 semester. With more than 640,000 living alumni, U-M has one of the largest alumni networks of any university in the nation.

There are 7,457 members of the faculty across the university's three campuses. The Ann Arbor campus alone has a total of 6,752 faculty full-time equivalents (FTEs), of whom 3,617 hold instructional appointments with the remainder holding clinical and research appointments. One of the nation's most significant research universities, U-M reported a record [\\$1.86 billion in research expenditures](#) during fiscal year 2023. The university regularly ranks first or second in the country among public universities in total research expenditures. Having earned distinction in almost every academic area, U-M is an exceptional, comprehensive research environment.

The university is a national leader in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Beginning in the fall of 2015, U-M engaged in a yearlong period of intense planning, which culminated in the creation of the university's first five-year [DEI strategic plan](#); the appointment of the inaugural Chief Diversity Officer; and the development of the [Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#). The university recently launched its second five-year DEI strategic plan—[DEI 2.0](#)—which will guide institutional DEI efforts through 2028.

The university has achieved tremendous success in philanthropy. In 2018, it successfully concluded "[Victors for Michigan](#)," a seven-year capital campaign that surpassed its \$4 billion goal to raise \$5.28 billion for the university. U-M has a total budget of \$13.4 billion, and its endowment totals \$17.9 billion.

Arts & Culture at the University of Michigan

Four colleges and schools at the university specifically nurture artistic excellence as part of their mission: the [School of Music, Theatre and Dance](#); the [Stamps School of Art & Design](#); the [Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning](#); and the [College of Literature, Science, and the Arts](#). U-M is a leader in the world of arts education, and faculty, students, and alumni of these colleges and schools are active at the highest levels of their professions and industries. More broadly, arts programs can be found in all units on campus. For instance, [ArtsEngine](#) is an interdisciplinary initiative that connects the College of Engineering and School of Information with the arts schools, and the [Medical Arts Program](#) aims to enhance medical education through experiences and analysis of the musical, theatrical, literary, and visual arts. U-M intentionally connects with other universities in this work through the [Alliance for the Arts in Research Universities](#) (a2ru), which is based on the Ann Arbor campus.

The university has long supported and embraced a [culture of art](#) that enhances the lives of students, alumni, faculty, staff, and the broader community. Today, U-M is home to [more than 50 arts and culture spaces and places](#), including more than a dozen art galleries and collections; many performing arts venues; more than 20 libraries; [several museums](#), including the renowned [University of Michigan Museum of Art](#); and the [Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretum](#). The [University Musical Society](#), one of the leading performing arts presenters in the country, is housed on the Ann Arbor campus. The university boasts more than 200 [student arts organizations](#) and presents more than 1,000 performances and programs each year. U-M regularly hosts artists and performers from around the world.

ABOUT THE ARTS INITIATIVE

Rooted in the profound and irreducible capacities of art to create knowledge, enable new ways of thinking, and change the world, the [U-M Arts Initiative](#) aims to make the arts central and integral to the university's identity. Its mission is "to illuminate and expand human connections, inspire collaborative creativity, and build a more just and equitable world through the arts." To this end, the initiative's core goals include strengthening the student experience by expanding and integrating the arts in teaching and learning, activating interdisciplinary discovery and arts research, broadening and deepening partnerships with communities and the public, and building capacity and sustainability for the arts.

The initiative was launched in 2019 with the recognition that immense arts resources already exist at the university, but that their impact is constrained by limited capacity and institutional silos. As a university-wide endeavor based in the Office of the Provost, the initiative is uniquely positioned to gather, amplify, and enhance these resources in order to bring the arts to a new level of impact and access, thereby transforming the university. In its nascent years, the initiative has already supported a broad range of cross-university projects that [activate research and creative practice](#), [promote student engagement](#), and [bring creators on campus](#). During the fall 2023 semester, the initiative partnered with the U-M Museum of Art and the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts to organize a theme semester on the topic of “[Arts & Resistance](#),” which involved public performances, courses, lectures, conferences, exhibitions, workshops, and grants for students.

The initiative’s first three years, from 2019 through 2022, served as its “start-up phase.” During this time, it received \$2 million in funding from the university. In response to the initiative’s early success and impact, the university recently allocated [\\$20 million in funding](#) over the next five years to expand access, bring more artists to campus, and support and amplify the arts even further. This five-year period of investment will serve as the initiative’s “growth phase.”

The initiative currently comprises [11 staff members](#), and a search is underway to hire a Director of Communications. It is guided in its work by an [Executive Committee](#), which is composed of leaders from all key U-M arts units, and an [Advisory Committee](#), which consists of a broader set of collaborators from across the university.

ROLE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Reporting directly to the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs & Arts and Humanities, the Executive Director (ED) is the senior leader of the Arts Initiative and holds responsibility for advancing the initiative’s mission and pursuing its goals. In this work, the ED will lead and responsibly manage the initiative’s [staff](#) and [financial resources](#). As the inaugural ED, this person will have the distinct opportunity to define the position; this is an opportunity for a creative leader to think and dream boldly, innovatively, and ambitiously. This person could hold a faculty or a staff appointment, depending on their professional, academic, and artistic background and experience.

The ED will address the following key challenges and strive to use them as opportunities to further strengthen the arts ecosystem at the university and beyond:

Collaboratively craft a vision and give shape to the initiative’s next phase of growth

The Arts Initiative is in the midst of a period of immense growth and transformation. One year ago, there were three staff in the initiative; today, there are eleven. The university invested \$2 million in the initiative’s initial three-year start-up phase; this investment has increased to \$20 million over the active five-year growth phase. While the initiative has existed for a few years, this will be the inaugural ED. As such, the ED will have the distinct opportunity to join the organization, learn about the broader university context and progress the initiative’s staff have already made, and lead the initiative in defining a vision

and giving shape to its next phase of growth. This will necessarily be a collaborative effort, not only within the initiative but also with partners across the university and in the community.

Connect the university's arts and cultural resources in new ways to achieve greater reach and impact

There are myriad arts resources, programs, and assets across the university and in the broader region that benefit faculty, students, staff, and the community. Because of the highly decentralized nature of the university, these programs largely operate in silos, which limits their capacity for reach and impact. As a university-wide initiative located in the Office of the Provost, the Arts Initiative is uniquely situated to serve as the connective tissue of the university's significant arts ecosystem, creating new opportunities, pathways, and frameworks for collaboration and access. To this end, the ED will spend time learning about the rich arts and cultural resources that exist across the university and will weave them together in innovative ways to achieve greater reach and impact than they could independently.

Catalyze interdisciplinary discovery, research, and creative activity, both within and beyond the arts

The arts enable people to think in new ways and to imagine alternate perspectives and possibilities. In the context of a research university, the arts aid scholars and students in discovering new approaches to challenges. The ED will work in close partnership with colleagues in the [Office of the Vice President for Research](#), the [Alliance for the Arts in Research Universities](#) (a2ru), and the colleges and schools to enable and encourage arts integration in research and creative activity across disciplines, thereby transforming U-M into an institution where the arts are integral in the creation and dissemination of knowledge.

Centralize and enhance communication efforts in order to increase access to the arts

Because the university is highly decentralized, it is common for people not to know what is happening in units beyond their own. This leads not only to some redundancies in programming, but also to students, faculty, staff, and community members not being aware of opportunities from which they could benefit. The ED will lead the Arts Initiative in centralizing information and amplifying communications about the robust arts offerings and resources that exist at the university. In this work, the ED will seek to ensure the arts are accessible and available to all students, faculty, staff, and community members across the full range of human experience and academic inquiry, for instance by collaborating and communicating intentionally with community partners, academic leaders, and other key stakeholders.

Enhance community engagement efforts and strengthen the cultural vitality of the region

The Arts Initiative has begun to partner with external communities to share resources and amplify the cultural vitality of the region, for instance through the [Culture Corps](#) undergraduate internship program as well as public art programs such as [Michigan Monuments](#). In partnership with the [Vice Provost for Engaged Learning](#) and other key stakeholders, the ED will develop and implement a comprehensive arts engagement strategy that draws on and empowers arts efforts across the region. This work will take place in proximity to the three campuses in Ann Arbor, Dearborn, and Flint, in nearby Detroit, and beyond. Critically, the ED will lead these efforts with an understanding of the importance of engaging meaningfully with the community in their creation, approaching the effort as a true partnership.

Build capacity and sustainability for the arts through organizational leadership and fundraising

As the leader of a nascent, growing unit, the ED must expertly and responsibly manage the personnel and financial resources of the initiative, supporting the staff in their development, strategically allocating resources to maximize impact, and nurturing the initiative as it grows into an integral part of the fabric of the university. Beyond the immediate context, the ED should also look to the future and build long-term capacity and sustainability for the arts at U-M. In this work, the ED will partner closely with the [Office of University Development](#) and leadership of the university's other arts units to engage in mutually beneficial development and fundraising activities. U-M aims for a culture of collaboration rather than one of competition, and the ED will support and participate significantly in cross-unit activities on this front.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE

The university is primed for an inspiring, collaborative, and visionary leader to join the Arts Initiative and lead it forward into its next phase of growth. The successful candidate will possess many, if not all, of the following qualifications, skills, and qualities:

- A passion for the arts and the role they play in society; an advocate and champion of artistic expression, free speech, and artists, and of their power to enrich and transform our world; an informed understanding of regional, national, and global arts landscapes; the ability to identify strategic opportunities for U-M to contribute to the wider arts and culture ecosystem;
- An appreciation for the academic and educational mission of a top research university; a vision for the role the arts can play in strengthening a research university; an interest in cross-disciplinary experimentation, research, creative activity, and innovation;
- The ability to engage diverse stakeholders in the development of a collaborative vision, as well as the ability to articulate and communicate that vision to widely varying constituencies;
- A track record of leadership and management within a relevant organization; the ability to supervise, mentor, and lead a team of high-achieving, talented staff; the skill to lead through influence and persuasion, ideally in a decentralized organization; an approach to leadership that melds artistic sensibility, business acumen, and data-informed decision-making;
- An understanding of budgeting in a complex organization; the ability to steward and allocate resources strategically, thoughtfully, and responsibly;
- A demonstrated commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in all forms; an understanding of the ways in which diversity, equity, and inclusion are essential conditions for achieving the highest levels of academic and artistic excellence;
- A collaborative approach to work; a natural affinity for building relationships and developing partnerships with diverse communities; demonstrated experience working with a wide array of university stakeholders, including faculty, students, staff, and external partners;
- A talent for fundraising; the ability to set clear and strategic funding priorities across the arts landscape; the skill to engage effectively with donors;
- Excellent communication skills; the ability to be a public spokesperson for the Arts Initiative; the capacity to build an organization's visibility and reputation regionally, nationally, and globally;

- Distinguished achievement as an academic or professional in the arts.

ABOUT ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

Nestled in southeastern Michigan, the city of [Ann Arbor](#) was recently ranked the [best place to live in America in 2023](#). It has long been considered one of the nation's best college towns and one of America's most bike-friendly and sustainable communities. With a population of over 120,000, Ann Arbor is one of Michigan's most populous cities. It's known for its thriving arts and culture scene, including galleries, museums, arts non-profits, and performances. [Downtown Ann Arbor](#) features eclectic shops, more than 45 restaurants and bars, and numerous entertainment options. Beyond its academic and cultural offerings, Ann Arbor embraces innovation and fosters a growing tech sector and entrepreneurial spirit.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

The University of Michigan has retained Isaacson, Miller to assist in this search. Please direct all inquiries, nominations, and applications (including CVs and letters of interest) electronically and in confidence to:

Keith Mason, Managing Associate | Sheryl Ash, Partner
Annah Wells, Associate | Rachel Banderob, Search Coordinator

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/university-michigan-ann-arbor/executive-director-arts-initiative>

EEO Information: *The University of Michigan is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. The university will not discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, sex, color, religion, creed, national origin or ancestry, age, or marital status. Further, the university, through its employment practices and procedures recruits and employs qualified personnel for all of its diverse activities and at all of its facilities. The university provides equal opportunities before and during employment by administering each and every phase of its personnel program without regard to race, sex, color, religion, creed, national origin or ancestry, age, or marital status.*

Inquiries or complaints may be addressed to the Equity, Civil Rights and Title IX Office (ECRT) at 734-763-0235 and ecrtoffice@umich.edu, and as follows:

Sex/Gender Identity/Gender Expression/Sexual Orientation, including sexual misconduct: ECRT Sexual and Gender-Based Misconduct Director and Title IX Coordinator

Disability: ECRT Disability Director and ADA Coordinator

Race/Color/National Origin/Age/Marital Status/Religion/Height/Weight/Veteran Status: ECRT Civil Rights Director

Land Acknowledgement: *The University of Michigan occupies the ancestral, traditional, and current lands of the Anishinaabe or People of the Three Fires, namely the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Bodewadmi Nations.*

These nations were forced to cede their lands in 1817 through the coercive Treaty at the Foot of the Rapids. The Treaty earmarked half of the lands for 'a college at Detroit,' where Indigenous students would be able to receive an education. Despite this commitment, U-M did not enroll an Indigenous student until 130 years later. Additionally, it is the sale of this land that established U-M's endowment and helped create and sustain U-M as a premier research university.

As U-M continues to occupy this land, we recognize that this acknowledgment does not substitute for the creation of an authentic and sustained relationship with the Indigenous communities and their lands that we occupy. Further, this acknowledgment will not erase the harm and violence that have been done to Indigenous people through the actions and inactions of the institution. However, through a land acknowledgment, U-M is taking an important small step towards the creation of an equitable, sustainable, and self-determined future. In offering this land acknowledgment, we recognize and affirm Indigenous people and communities who live in Michigan now and those who were forcibly removed from their homelands. We also affirm Indigenous histories and experiences, and the historic and ongoing struggles for Indigenous sovereignty.