



Search for the Director of Conferences  
The National Bureau of Economic Research  
Cambridge, MA

## **THE SEARCH**

The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), an independent, non-partisan, non-profit organization that supports and disseminates economic research, seeks an experienced conference-organizing professional to serve as its Director of Conferences. This is an opportunity to lead the planning of 125+ meetings a year for an organization that facilitates the research of more than 1,750 affiliated economists at colleges and universities throughout North America. The NBER provides resources and infrastructure for academic research, supports access to both government and private datasets, distributes more than 1,200 working papers by its affiliated researchers each year, and hosts meetings that serve as venues for sharing, critiquing, and improving on the latest research findings. The organization plays an outsize role in the conduct of economic research and in the use of such research to inform policy: 44 current or former NBER affiliates have been awarded the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences, and 13 have chaired the President's Council of Economic Advisers.

The Director will join a close-knit, collegial, and long-tenured administrative staff of about 40 FTEs who are devoted to the organization's mission and who see themselves as part of the institution's tradition of service for the public good. Reporting directly to the President and CEO, the Director will be a key member of the senior leadership team and will develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to build operational capacity for conferences at the NBER; further integrate the conference function across the organization; continue to offer best-in-class customer service and support for NBER program directors and conference attendees; and provide leadership to the talented conference team.

The NBER seeks an experienced and collaborative conference leader who is both a strategist and an implementer, and whose prior professional experience ideally includes working with academics and researchers. The ideal candidate will have excellent organizational and communication skills, superb managerial skills, and a demonstrated commitment to strengthening diversity and belonging. The successful candidate will also possess intellectual curiosity, energy, flexibility, empathy, and optimism, and a desire to join an organization that is fundamentally people-centered in its philosophy and operations.

The NBER is partnering with Isaacson, Miller, the national recruiting firm. Confidential inquiries, referrals, and nominations may be directed to the firm as indicated at the end of this document.

## **ABOUT THE NBER**

### ***Organizational Context***

Founded in 1920 and headquartered in Cambridge, MA, the NBER is a private, not-for-profit organization that is committed to undertaking and disseminating unbiased economic research among public

policymakers, business professionals, and the academic community; it does not make policy recommendations. The NBER advances its mission in five ways: (1) by carrying out research projects on emerging economic issues; (2) by administering grants that affiliated researchers receive from government and private funders; (3) by distributing and/or publishing (through a relationship with the University of Chicago Press) the findings of research projects; (4) by convening researchers from many institutions at in-person and virtual conferences; and (5) by maintaining an archive of datasets used for economic research. The NBER's 1,750 affiliated researchers are organized into 19 research programs; researchers in each program meet several times over the year to share and discuss their latest findings.

The NBER's FY23 operating budget is approximately \$35 million. Revenue comes from a combination of indirect costs on research grants from government agencies and private foundations, contributions from corporations and individuals, working paper subscriptions, and portfolio income.

### ***Leadership and Governance***

The NBER has been led since 2008 by James Poterba, its President and Chief Executive Officer. A highly regarded economist and the Mitsui Professor of Economics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he is a member of the National Academy of Sciences, as well as a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Finance Association, and the American Economic Association.

The NBER is governed by a 51-member Board of Directors, with representatives from leading research universities, economics professional organizations, and the business and labor communities.

For more information, visit [nber.org](https://nber.org).

### ***Conferences at the NBER***

Every year, the NBER convenes over 125 meetings at which researchers share and discuss their latest findings and plan for new projects. The largest NBER meeting is the Summer Institute, a three-week gathering each July comprising roughly 50 sub-meetings. The Summer Institute attracts more than 2,700 researchers, most of whom are not affiliated with the NBER.

Most NBER meetings are held in-person, with live streams created through Zoom and available on YouTube. Many in-person meetings have a hybrid component, with an opportunity for remote participation on Zoom for those unable to attend in person. Throughout the year, there are some virtual only meetings. The NBER does not charge participants to attend its meetings, but the meetings are invitation-only.

The directors of the NBER's 32 research programs and working groups, as well as other researchers who have been tapped to convene meetings, work with the four-person conference department to plan and carry out meetings. Some program directors have vast experience; others are navigating conference planning for the first time. Program directors review papers and set agendas. The conference team manages the logistical, financial, and technical details of each meeting, including grant compliance, when necessary, and processing travel reimbursement requests.

## **KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE DIRECTOR OF CONFERENCES**

The next Director of Conferences has an opportunity to build on a highly successful foundation to make NBER's high volume of meetings run even more efficiently and effectively. Specific opportunities for the Director include:

### ***Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to build operational capacity for conferences at the NBER.***

The NBER has successfully planned and executed more than a hundred meetings a year for nearly two decades. Its conference staff shifted almost seamlessly during COVID to support virtual engagement when in-person gatherings were restricted. Hybrid meetings are a legacy of this pivot. As the organization looks to the future, the next Director will be expected to survey long-standing practices, processes, technologies, and systems to evaluate which ones work well and where there is opportunity for improvement.

The structure of NBER's conferences creates some repetition in meeting planning that provides inherent efficiencies. The next Director will be charged with implementing best practices and technologies in conference organizing and finding opportunities to minimize time-intensive tasks so that both the conference team and the meeting organizers can focus on the critical tasks that require significant attention.

### ***Oversee the financial planning and management of NBER conferences.***

The next Director will have primary responsibility for securing bids for conference space, particularly for the many-faceted Summer Institute meeting, in a timely and cost-effective fashion, and will work with the NBER IT department to oversee audio-visual arrangements for these meetings. The Director will manage a portfolio of meeting venues, including a 55-person on-premises conference facility at the NBER, and a number of different Cambridge-area hotels that have hosted past conferences.

### ***Further integrate the conference function across the organization.***

The conference team manages all logistical aspects of conference planning and execution, but needs to collaborate with several other NBER departments, including accounting and financial administration, research and grants management, information technology, and communications. The Director will work with the other departments to understand the workflows that cross departmental boundaries, and proactively strengthen the connective tissue and communication lines between the conference team and these other units with the goal of facilitating smoother workflows across the organization.

### ***Continue to provide best-in-class customer service and support for NBER conference organizers and attendees.***

The conference team is engaged, responsive, and committed to customer service. NBER's conference organizers, all of whom are faculty members engaged in their own research throughout the year, appreciate the quality and care the team provides. As the incoming Director updates organizational systems and processes, NBER's best-in-class customer service cannot be compromised.

***Provide leadership to the talented conference team.***

The dedicated staff on the NBER conference team provides exceptional resources and services to program directors and other conference organizers. The longevity of many staff members, on the conference team and elsewhere, is a testament to the NBER's positive culture. The next Director will lead and advocate on behalf of the strong conference team, minimize their pain points during particularly busy times, and ensure opportunities for professional growth and development.

**QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS**

The Director of Conferences role requires a leader with conference planning expertise; an appreciation for how to work effectively with academics; and a willingness to act as a "player-coach" by handling some conference tasks directly, while simultaneously serving as leader, building a team, and delegating to others as appropriate.

The ideal candidate will possess many of these competencies, qualities, and experiences:

- **Outstanding leadership abilities:** Strategic vision, excellent judgment, intellectual flexibility, and organizational sophistication. Experience in project planning and implementation across a collaborative organization. Ability to move decisively and sustain support.
- **Conference planning expertise:** Depth of knowledge around high-volume conference planning as well as the ability to manage large meetings with many attendees. Understanding of how to strike the right balance among operational efficiency, personal preferences and habits, and organizational consistency and sustainability.
- **Financial Acumen:** Experience in creating conference budgets and negotiating vendors, including hotels, restaurants, audio-visual service providers, transportation services, and other services that may be relevant for the delivery of NBER conferences. The ability to analyze trade-offs between different vendor configurations.
- **Strong administrative abilities:** Excellent organizational and communication skills. Experience in process transformation and change management, with proven ability to develop and nurture staff. The ability to prioritize; proven ability in resource management.
- **Superb managerial skills:** Exquisite listening skills, high emotional intelligence, and the ability to lead in an environment that values individuals, institutional longevity, and congeniality.
- **Demonstrated commitment to strengthening diversity and belonging:** A record of visible commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion. A style that is communicative, welcoming, transparent, and interpersonally and interculturally respectful.
- **Additional qualities:** Persistence, optimism, and enthusiasm. Personal humility, coupled with professional ambition. A professional record that demonstrates effectiveness in building trust and credibility. Good humor, self-awareness, generosity, and empathy. Devotion to the highest ethical standards; personal and professional integrity above reproach.

This position is based in Cambridge, MA. The NBER operates under a hybrid (partial remote and partial in-person/in-office) work environment. The Director of Conferences is expected to be in the office at least three days a week.

#### **APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS**

Inquiries, referrals, applications, and supporting materials can be directed electronically and in confidence to:

Jeff Kessner, Partner  
Janette Martinez, Senior Associate  
Jenny Rubin, Senior Search Coordinator

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/national-bureau-economic-research/director-conferences>

*The NBER is an Equal Opportunity Employer and it does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, color, sex, age, national origin, or disability. It will make reasonable accommodation for any disabled applicant, and will provide assistance to disabled applicants as needed during the application process.*