



Search for the Executive Director and CEO
National Nordic Museum
Seattle, Washington

THE SEARCH

The National Nordic Museum (“the Museum”) seeks an experienced and innovative cultural leader to be the next Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The CEO will propel the Museum’s mission to “share Nordic culture, values, and ideas with people of all ages and backgrounds to create connections, generate dialogue, and inspire new perspectives,” using the Museum’s assets and platform to enrich lives in the Seattle area, nationally, and beyond.

Founded in 1979, the National Nordic Museum is the only institution of its size and scale in the United States to present the history and culture of the entire Nordic region (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the regions of the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland, and the cultural region of Sápmi) and the legacy of Nordic immigrants to the United States. Located along Seattle’s working waterfront in an iconic building that embodies Nordic design, the institution is both a museum and a community gathering place. Home to beloved festivals, pathbreaking exhibitions, innovation summits, and visiting dignitaries, the Museum offers a unique perspective on Nordic culture today.

Following the successful tenure of Eric Nelson, who will retire in 2024 after nearly 17 years of leadership at the Museum, the next CEO will join an organization that has significantly increased in size, scale, and impact. The Museum is federally recognized as a nationally significant cultural institution and draws regional, national, and international audiences. Today, the Museum has an operating budget of \$5.2 million and a staff of 38. The CEO will guide the next stage of the Museum’s remarkable trajectory by providing strategic leadership within the organization and partnership with its wide range of stakeholders. The next CEO will lead an innovative, internationally recognized museum and cultural hub.

Reporting to the Board of Trustees, the CEO will develop and steer a compelling vision for local, national, and global engagement within a top-tier cultural organization. They will be a genuine relationship builder dedicated to an expansive, inclusive understanding of Nordic nations and people. The CEO will take a creative approach to forming partnerships and fundraising to support the Museum’s rising profile and future growth. This role requires passion for the Nordic values of openness, sustainability, social justice,

and innovation, and a commitment to establishing a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace that puts these values into practice.

The National Nordic Museum has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in the recruitment of the new Executive Director and CEO. All inquiries, applications, and nominations should be directed to Isaacson, Miller as noted at the end of this document.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL NORDIC MUSEUM

The National Nordic Museum has established a legacy of convening, elevating, and inspiring Nordic and Nordic-American communities. The Museum has evolved into a cultural hub attracting more than 225,000 individuals per year, in person and online, to engage with art, culture, history, policy, business, innovation, and more. The Museum's vision is that "through the history we illuminate, the stories we tell, the connections we make, and the values we promote, we inspire our visitors to create a more vibrant, more just, more sustainable world."

Today the Museum is at a turning point, as its success has created an opening for an even bolder interpretation of its vision. After a transformational capital campaign and design process, the Nordic Museum opened a striking, state-of-the-art facility in 2018. Just one year later, in April 2019, it was designated the National Nordic Museum by an act of Congress. National designation recognizes the Museum's work to preserve, celebrate, and educate the American public about Nordic history, culture, and art. The designation also raises the Museum's stature, strengthening its ability to generate support from the private sector and Nordic institutions. The Museum seeks to sustain the connections that have brought it to this point while using its newfound momentum to expand its national and international presence.

Visitors to the Museum represent its local, national, and international audiences. Locally, visitors of Nordic heritage, recent Nordic immigrants, and Seattle-area residents are drawn to the Museum's exhibitions, public programs, and event spaces. Major recognition has increasingly made the Museum a regional and national destination for exhibitions, while the Nordic Innovation Summit draws business and industry leaders from the Nordics and beyond. The Museum continually engages with the honorary consuls for Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden; the respective Nordic embassies in Washington, DC; and Nordic leaders—many of whom, such as the President of Finland, President of Iceland, and HRH the Crown Princess of Denmark, have spoken to large audiences at the Museum.

The Museum is in the Ballard neighborhood of Seattle, a crossroads for the past and present of Nordic people in the United States. The modern 58,000 square foot building that houses the Museum embodies a pan-Nordic experience while providing facilities for expanded programs and exhibitions in line with the Museum's vision. The LEED Gold certified building draws upon Nordic design and sustainability practices. The three-story structure encompasses exhibition galleries, the Osberg Great Hall, three classrooms, a library and cultural resource center, collections storage, a gift shop, Freya Café, and administrative offices.

The Museum owns additional commercial property adjacent to the main facility. There is a significant opportunity in this space, including possibilities for revenue generation and additional collections storage.

The Museum's current goals represent continued transformation with an eye toward sustained impact. The 2023-2027 Strategic Plan, designed by the CEO and Board of Trustees, highlights key goals of enhancing visitor experience, engaging diverse audiences, ensuring collections stewardship meets the highest standards, and adjusting the business model and governance structure to support operational goals. The Museum also actively participates in conversations about Nordic culture in the 21st century.

The following Nordic values guide the Museum's work:

- *Openness*: Foster trust and tolerance, and support everyone's right to express their opinions.
- *Sustainability*: Embrace a connection to nature and employ responsible practices that demonstrate respect for our environment.
- *Social Justice*: Exhibit compassion, respect others, and manifest a conviction for the equal value of all people.
- *Innovation*: Encourage creativity, resourcefulness, and new ways of thinking.

Collection and Exhibitions

The Museum's collection of Nordic art, historical artifacts, and archival materials includes over 80,000 objects. An additional 1,000 oral histories, as well as ethnomusicological recordings, instruments, and texts documenting folk and traditional music and dance, make it among the largest and most important collections of its kind in the United States. The Museum presents exhibitions that encompass numerous facets of the Nordic experience. *Nordic Journeys*, the permanent exhibition, presents a broad understanding of Nordic life and culture as it has evolved over the last twelve thousand years. In 2023, the Museum originated *FLÓÐ*, an installation from well-known Icelandic artist Jónsi that brought an immersive experience of changing environmental conditions that broke records for the Museum. In 2024, *Nordic Utopia? African Americans in the 20th Century* will illuminate the untold story of African American visual and performing artists who sought new possibilities, inspiration, and environments in the Nordic countries. More information, including current and upcoming exhibitions produced and hosted by the Museum and its world-class curatorial team, can be found by visiting <https://nordicmuseum.org/collections> and <https://nordicmuseum.org/exhibitions>.

Programming and Outreach

The Museum's mission-driven event offerings have increased through the years, reaching a high in 2023 of 144 programs with 12,170 in-person and online participants. These include educational programs and

community events. The Museum organizes and hosts craft and design workshops, film festivals and screenings, book talks, and lectures around its major exhibitions. The Museum also serves as a convener on critical issues, including innovation in the Nordic region and the United States, economic development, environmental policy, cultural identity, and societal issues. The annual [Sámi Film Festival](#) gives audiences an opportunity to learn about topics of importance to Indigenous communities in the Nordic region. The annual [Nordic Innovation Summit](#), launched in 2018, engages thought leaders in innovation and technology to discuss solutions to the world's most pressing issues. As a result of its broad range and timely topics, the Museum has seen attendance grow nationally and internationally, reaching 54 countries across 6 continents. More information can be found here: <https://nordicmuseum.org/calendar>.

LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

In 2023 Eric Nelson announced that he would retire the following year. With the help of his vision and stewardship, the Museum has become a leading national museum, increased the depth and breadth of its programs, furthered its diplomatic relations and partnerships, and broadened its audience and engagement. Nelson has ensured that the Museum is seen as a critical partner to its stakeholders. These include community members, trustees, diplomats, and other cultural institutions. Nelson's signature achievement includes a successful capital campaign that led to an award-winning building, the Museum's national designation, and internationally acclaimed exhibitions, programming, and convenings.

ROLE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CEO

Reporting to the Board of Trustees, the Executive Director and CEO is responsible for guiding and executing overall strategy and operations and modeling organizational mission, vision, and values. Although its offerings go well beyond the traditional bounds of curatorial and exhibition work, sustained excellence in this realm is critical to the Museum's mission and future. Among the critical aspects of the role are the stewardship of the Museum's collection, oversight of a broad range of exhibitions, programs, and events, and management of a professional museum staff.

The CEO must reflect the ethos of the Museum and Nordic communities, allowing them to cultivate relationships with diverse stakeholders, cultural organizations, and government representatives locally, nationally, and abroad. Ongoing relationships with the five Nordic nations and their diasporas are central to the Museum's standing as a convener and cultural hub.

The CEO provides leadership and strategic direction to Museum staff and volunteers. They are supported by a leadership team including the Chief Operating Officer, Chief Curator, and Director of Development. The CEO oversees an annual operating budget of \$5.2 million. Earned revenue represented nearly 63%, and contributed revenue 37%, of the Museum's annual revenue in FY23. The current value of the Museum's endowment funds totals approximately \$8 million.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The Executive Director and CEO will address the following key opportunities and challenges:

Collaboratively define the Museum's future strategic vision to drive relevance, innovation, and impact

As the National Nordic Museum transitions to its next chapter, the CEO will build on the institution's legacy and partner with the Board, staff, and stakeholders to envision new directions. The Museum has the foundation and positioning needed to have lasting influence in numerous fields. In service of this goal, the CEO will guide stakeholder engagement to fulfill its strategic direction. A successful vision will balance multiple priorities: recognizing the existing community as a key asset, investing in the Museum's rising status as a cultural institution, sustaining its reputation as a trusted partner to the diplomatic community, and leveraging emerging opportunities in business and innovation. By honoring the past without being bound to it, and balancing ambition with sustainable growth, the CEO will unlock the Museum's potential.

Enhance the Museum's mission by expanding its regional, national, and international reach

The new CEO will inherit excellent relationships within the Seattle area, the Nordic region, and elsewhere. As the face of the Museum, the CEO will navigate this complex ecosystem of stakeholders, which includes longstanding community members, other institutions, members, donors, diplomats, politicians, and business and cultural leaders in the U.S. and abroad. There is also an opportunity to increase awareness of the Museum with a younger generation of museumgoers in the Seattle area, among cultural organizations nationally, and within business and innovation communities. To do this, the CEO will be a champion for the Museum's work and tell a compelling story that resonates with multiple audiences. They will be perceived by all stakeholders as a trustworthy partner. The CEO will also identify opportunities to expand the Museum's presence, leveraging cutting-edge technology and marketing strategies to engage new audiences and enhance the Museum's offerings.

Ensure long-term financial well-being through exceptional management and fundraising

The Museum is in a strong financial position. It has a foundation of success to build upon. Multiple revenue sources and strategic adaptations have allowed the Museum to emerge from recent years with a healthy balance of earned and contributed revenue and a favorable outlook for growth. There is now an opportunity to harness the Museum's resources and plan for its long-term aspirations. The CEO will be a judicious, savvy, and innovative manager of the Museum's financial and physical assets, which include its collection, primary building, and additional properties in Ballard. They will also expand the Museum's fundraising capacity, cultivating individual and institutional donors, and seeking new avenues to support operations and future capital projects. The CEO will bring a passion for and track record with fundraising and will pursue opportunities in the Seattle area, nationally, and internationally.

Lead and develop a high-performing team to sustain excellence as the Museum evolves

Staff at the Museum are mission-driven, passionate, and operate at a high level. The CEO will provide direction for the leadership team and staff with a focus on maintaining the high standards of professionalism needed in a world-class museum. The CEO will build and manage strong teams to ensure that staff work supports the institutional vision. They will develop a keen understanding of the strengths and opportunities for each team and will provide resources for further growth and impact. The Museum offers a wide variety and growing number of programs, and it is an appropriate time to assess them holistically and progressively develop programming at a scale that aligns with staff capacity. To ensure the Museum's ability to recruit and retain high-caliber staff, the CEO will foster an inclusive and welcoming work culture. To be successful, the CEO will embody Nordic values of openness and social justice, recognize and elevate contributions from across the organization, and be a champion for how equity and inclusion manifest within the Museum.

Elevate the governance structure to respond to the needs and aspirations of the National Nordic Museum

The Museum's growth has been bolstered by its Board of Trustees. Through their heritage and/or personal interest, they represent all five Nordic nations and a range of backgrounds in business, education, diplomacy, and more. The CEO will partner with the Board, communicating effectively and calling on their talents and resources to ensure the success of the organization. In addition to recruiting trustees with expertise in collections, fundraising, and other strategic areas, the CEO and Executive Committee will look holistically at the Board's current roles and functions, seek inspiration from the governance structures of peer and aspirational organizations, and pursue changes to ensure the Museum's success in its next phase. This includes actively cultivating a new generation of trustees, including those from groups underrepresented in the Nordic nations and the United States, to strengthen the Museum's connection to the diverse communities it engages.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

While no one person will embody all of them, the successful candidate will exemplify many of the following qualifications and attributes:

- Demonstrated passion for, or connection to, the Nordic nations. Broad cultural competency, international savvy, curiosity, and appreciation, with emphasis on Nordic cultures;
- Leadership style that is visionary, inclusive, and collaborative. An open and consultative leader who can partner with, motivate, and inspire all stakeholders;
- Past success working with a Board of Trustees and the ability to cultivate trustee relationships that will ensure the Board is deeply engaged in its fiduciary, stewardship, and strategic roles;
- Sustained successful senior management experience, including strong strategic planning, staff management, operations, and communications skills;

- Demonstrated success in relationship building, including with community, civic, diplomatic, and industry partners. International experience is a plus;
- Successful record of nonprofit revenue development encompassing earned revenue and individual, institutional, and endowment fundraising;
- Experience building and managing budgets while driving sound financial and policy decisions within a complex organization;
- Demonstrated ability to lead organizational transformation;
- History of implementing organization-wide strategies to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility both internally within an organization and externally with audiences and communities;
- Excellent managerial, planning, organizational, and administrative skills. Ability to develop leadership capacity and structure;
- Demonstrated commitment to the shared Nordic values of openness, sustainability, social justice, and innovation;
- Passion, vision, integrity, humility, and sense of humor;
- Excellent interpersonal and social skills.

COMPENSATION

The expected salary range for this position is \$250,000-\$325,000. The National Nordic Museum offers a competitive benefits package including paid sick leave, paid holidays, access to their Employee Assistance Program, and 403(b) retirement plan.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and applications accompanied by a letter of interest should be sent in confidence via the Isaacson, Miller website for the search: <https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/national-nordic-museum/executive-director-and-chief-executive-officer>. Electronic submission of materials is strongly encouraged.

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