

Cleveland Museum of Natural History (CMNH)

Chief Executive Officer

The Board seeks an experienced museum executive to lead an accomplished team of professionals; increase museum attendance and membership; grow and diversify revenue; and advance & share scientific research.

Making full use of the completely redesigned and upgraded CMNH campus, exhibits and infrastructure, the CEO and team will deliver not-to-be-missed STEM/STEAM educational experiences that share the natural history of Ohio and the world with visitors of all ages.

BACKGROUND

[The Cleveland Museum of Natural History](#) offers a unique window into the natural and cultural history of Cleveland, Ohio, America and the world. CMNH's roots date back to the 1830's. The museum was officially established in 1920 and welcomed its first public guests in 1922. Since then the organization has captured the interest of the community and the world by showcasing specimens of great importance, including "Balto," the renowned sled dog, "Dunk," the prehistoric predator named Ohio's official state fossil in 2021, and "Lucy," the famous Australopithecus afarensis specimen that brought the global spotlight to the Museum's world-class research. The Natural Areas Program was established in 1956 and includes [Mentor Marsh](#), [Scheele Preserve on Kelleys Island](#), [North Kingsville Sand Barrens](#) (all open to the public) and 62 other preserves. CMNH protects, manages, restores and studies over 12,500 acres in northern Ohio, which comprise the living laboratories and collections of this institution. The Museum is also home to the state-of-the-art Shafran Planetarium and the Ralph Perkins II Wildlife Center & Woods Garden (presented by KeyBank), an outdoor gallery of native Ohio plants and animals.

In 2021, the Museum's Board, donors and community invested \$150M in a complete campus upgrade that includes 375,000 square feet of redesigned and renovated space, reimagined galleries and exhibits, new space to house and study collections, upgrades to infrastructure and more than two acres of outdoor space used daily by the visiting public. The new campus, which re-opened in December 2024, enjoys the support of 7,465 active member households and hosts over 200,000 visitors annually.

CMNH [studies and shares knowledge embedded in collections](#) that encompass just under 2.6 million specimens and objects spanning the history of the cosmos and more than 400 million years of the Earth's natural history. The Museum benefits from on-site laboratories for specimen study, preparation and imaging. The state-of-the-art collections facility has storage dedicated to biological anthropology, biology, archaeology and Earth sciences; paleontology collections; and a specialized dry storage space for Cleveland Shale and pyrite-susceptible collections. Areas of study and exploration are similarly organized into Astronomy, Anthropology, Biology, Earth Sciences and Natural Areas and Conservation. Objects in the collections are viewed as being held in trust to advance scientific and cultural knowledge and are used to promote a contextualized understanding of our world and people.

Diverse programs provide information in ways that can be easily absorbed by those of different age groups and interests, including elementary and middle school programs, programs for teens, summer camps and public programs and presentations for adults. There is strong cooperation between the Museum, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and the area's independent schools.

The Board provides fiscal oversight to the Museum which has an annual operating budget of \$21M and an endowment of \$180M that includes unrestricted and restricted elements. Staff is comprised of 160 permanent personnel, including 7 curators and 20 part-time employees, many of whom are students. 235 volunteers and docents lend support to the organization in various ways.

The CEO will strengthen CMNH financially, operationally and programmatically and position the Museum as the region's most important and exciting experiential education institution focused on our natural world.

BASIC FUNCTION

Reporting to the Board, the CEO will lead CMNH as it ignites a love of learning and our natural world through innovative and engaging STEM/STEAM educational experiences for visitors, students of all ages, educators, scientists and other community members. Key metrics for the CEO will be increased visitorship, financial strength, and the ability to sustainably drive contributions and in-kind support through annual fundraising outreach to individuals, foundations, business and government entities.

The CEO shapes the organization's vision and brand, drives attendance, leads fundraising efforts and manages all curators, staff and volunteers. The CEO also oversees collections, operations, exhibits, programs, research, systems and processes to ensure sustained financial strength and efficient operations.

The CEO will maximize earned income through ticket sales, memberships, rentals, retail operations and special event sales and will work with schools, school districts and educators to promote field trips, summer camps and remote learning opportunities. Advocacy for, and communication about, the Museum's value to many audiences, supporters, partners and interest groups is required.

The CEO will evolve the Museum's brand, uniting all facilities, exhibits, collections, research, assets and programs into a common vision and a logical flow. CMNH will be positioned regionally, nationally and internationally as a distinctive, must-visit place of learning.

This highly innovative institution requires a skilled manager, talented marketer and master fundraiser. The CEO will lead The CMNH in providing endless avenues of inspiration, learning and storytelling of our natural world.

ONGOING RESPONSIBILITIES

LEADERSHIP & GENERAL MANAGEMENT

- Lead, inspire and mentor curators and staff in the vision and goals of the Museum; hire, supervise, motivate, support, empower, develop, evaluate and recognize staff; ensure staff capabilities are appropriate to the organization's needs, staff composition mirrors that of a very diverse visiting public and that various audiences identify with staff; create a work environment and culture that attracts talent and encourages staff retention and positivity while also providing for changes to staff where necessary; implement consistent human resources and management policies & procedures;
- Interpret CMNH's mission into a Strategic Plan approved by the Board that is updated and refined as needed; supply the Board with complete, accurate and timely reports and data required for informed decisions (including from external advisors/consultants); proactively bring recommendations to the Board in matters related to objectives, policies and long-term strategy;
- Encourage a proactive approach in maintaining collections, research, exhibits and the facility as an ageless, safe and vibrant environment; oversee the preservation, maintenance and periodic improvement to the Museum's physical assets, including exhibits, collections, the building and infrastructure;

- Develop supportive collaborations and partnerships in communities served by CMNH; cultivate productive ongoing relationships with government officials, school boards, university boards and regents, corporate and community leaders and others to advance CMNH's goals and strategies;
- Provide for efficient day-to-day management of all finances and operations, delegating work to members of the executive team as appropriate; ensure that the organization's finances are responsibly managed, that strong controls are in place and that financial reports and other documents are prepared in a timely and accurate manner and shared with the Board;
- Identify and help recruit new Board members whose talents, interests and commitment will help fund and advance CMNH's mission and programs.

EXHIBITS, EDUCATION AND PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

- Share knowledge embedded in CMNH collections with the visiting public through permanent and changing exhibitions and programs; develop new, fun, informative and inspiring exhibits and public programs; ensure that best practices are employed; leverage the galleries in ways that deepen the visitor experience and make repeat visits worthwhile for members;
- Working with national and international partners, create educational programs that are appropriate for school and community audiences; promote dissemination of these programs; develop relationships that may lead to appropriate gifts to strengthen public programming, K-12 educational offerings and the quality of permanent and temporary exhibits;
- Work collaboratively with other like-minded, STEAM-focused organizations and appropriately manage various relationships with other museums and attractions, thought leaders in the field, schools, universities, patrons and other community members; serve as an advocate for the organization and assert CMNH interests in advancing science education.

RESEARCH

- Review and assess, with reference to peer and academic review processes, the scientific and cultural research being conducted by various Museum divisions and curators; advance knowledge across diverse fields of study, ensure that practices are of the highest caliber and research is shared with colleagues and the community through publications, exhibits, programs, presentations and critical dialogue;
- In collaboration across CMNH divisions, and working with national and international partners, universities and research institutions, develop a broad range of new research proposals; outline within each proposal, project objectives, budgets, prospective funding sources, staffing and other necessary infrastructure and resources; engage the general public in supporting scientific research;
- Provide appropriate guidance and direction for exhibitions from the permanent collection; design educational programming about CMNH research and collaborations for the Museum and for public dissemination across Cleveland and Ohio.

COLLECTIONS

- Review and assess the breadth and depth of the Museum's collections and develop a comprehensive plan (including needed infrastructure and budget) to enhance, shape, enrich and improve them; analyze the collection's value as a resource for sharing knowledge; review and enhance standards for acquiring and preserving items; undertake appropriate acquisitions

while ensuring that funding is made available for their preservation and storage when new collections are acquired;

- Oversee the conservation and exhibition of collection assets, ensuring that they are stored, handled and preserved in good order and with reference to the best practices in the field; review and expand space dedicated to storing collections, ensuring in the process that collections are preserved and safeguarded;
- Develop communication strategies for enhancing the reputation of the collection as a treasured scientific and cultural resource; develop relationships with individuals and institutions that may lead to appropriate gifts to the Museum;
- Actively pursue ways to increase access to the collections by the public, educators, students and scholars; leverage collections in ways that deepens each researcher's and visitor's appreciation for the natural and cultural world and inspires repeat visits to CMNH.

REVENUE OPTIMIZATION, MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

- Serve as the chief fundraiser for the Museum; work with the CMNH Board, development team and senior staff to drive annual fundraising and campaign solicitations; increase revenue from admissions, licensing, facility rentals, cafe, store and other sources; set high expectations for increased financial support from regional and national foundations, corporations, individuals, governments and other philanthropic sources; strengthen fundraising systems, workflows and donor recognition;
- Grow the unrestricted and restricted endowments, enabling CMNH to continually upgrade exhibitions, enhance the facility and provide for financial stability as the institution matures;
- Engage audiences and study the shifting landscape of audience engagement; solidify the Museum's reputation as an exceptional museum among Cleveland, Ohio, regional, national and international audiences; engage visitors to Cleveland and to partner institutions like the Cleveland Museum of Art;
- Communicate to current and prospective supporters, members, residents and tourists using conventional and new (social media, mobile, etc.) tools; actively seek opportunities to publicly advocate for the organization; serve as public and media spokesperson for the organization when appropriate.

IDEAL EXPERIENCE AND QUALIFICATIONS

The ideal candidate will have a combination of the following types of experience, qualifications and attributes:

- Strong management background in a museum or similar institution known for experiential learning, innovative programming, exhibits and exhibitions and cultivating strong community ties; an understanding of diverse audiences and staff with different backgrounds and identities combined with strong fundraising success and financial and operations management acumen;
- Experience successfully navigating human resource management processes (evaluation, hiring, firing) in a museum, university or similar institutional setting would be an advantage, as would experience working with multiple stakeholders (e.g. deans, department chairs, curators, department heads or their equivalents);

Cleveland Museum of Natural History
Chief Executive Officer

- Experience working successfully with diverse donors, community leaders and Board members to financially strengthen institutions; measurable success increasing earned and contributed revenue; strong understanding of financial management practices;
- Experience delivering Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) educational experiences and programs would be a distinct advantage; an advanced degree in education, anthropology, paleontology, biological or STEM sciences, or other related field is preferred but not required; a minimum of five years of executive experience at a similarly scaled, larger or aspirational institution is required, preferably at a museum or other experiential learning organization;
- Experience shaping a highly effective and inclusive operating environment; a demonstrated ability to forge mutually respectful and effective relationships with a diverse group of personalities in a collegial and cooperative manner, including the means to address issues in non-confrontational and non-polarizing ways, but nevertheless with determination;
- An individual with outstanding oral and written communication skills; a passion for connecting the public with CMNH; someone who will enjoy engaging with diverse constituents, donors, educators, scientists and academics professionally and personally;
- A leader adept at planning, prioritizing, organizing and following through; a hard worker with a high-energy level who welcomes accountability; a team player and team builder who is straight-forward, shares information easily, celebrates success and respects the abilities of others; someone who imparts trust, integrity and solidity; is able to analyze and formulate disparate information into a sound, well-organized plan; and is willing to both give and accept guidance;
- A person who embraces an open-door approach and has a sense of perspective and humor.

COMPENSATION

The salary range for this position is \$375,000 - \$475,000. Compensation will be competitive and based on experience.

For more information please contact:

Oscar Quiros

(415)762-2643 or oscarq@moppenheim.com

Mark Oppenheim

(415)762-2640 or marko@moppenheim.com

m/Oppenheim Executive Search

San Francisco, CA

Cleveland Museum of Natural History
July 2026