

Position and Candidate Specification



Denver Museum of Nature & Science

President & CEO

PREPARED BY:

Mary Gorman
Ellen Pennow
KP Trueblood
Mila Barzdukas

May 2026

Assignment: 66805-001

The Denver Museum of Nature & Science (DMNS) is a place where curiosity takes root and wonder feels earned. One of the region's most valued cultural institutions, DMNS is where science is treated as a public good and questions are welcomed. Generations of families return to deepen their understanding of the natural world and humanity's place within it. Founded in 1900 and located in Denver's City Park, DMNS carries both deep local meaning and national and international stature.

Scientific rigor is central to the Museum's identity. A committed [team](#) of more than 50 scientists and collections professionals leads original research across disciplines, advances scholarly knowledge, and brings discovery into public view. Their work grounds the Museum's exhibitions, programs, and public dialogue in credibility and care.

Today, DMNS functions simultaneously as a destination and a platform for learning. Its 716,000-square-foot campus stewards more than four million objects and specimens spanning anthropology, earth sciences, zoology, health sciences, and space sciences. Each year, more than 1.4 million visitors explore [exhibitions](#), the Infinity Theater, and the Gates Planetarium. More than 200,000 students and educators connect through [school programs](#), outreach efforts, and distance learning, while hundreds of thousands of people engage through lectures, community partnerships, and digital experiences that extend the Museum far beyond its walls.

At its heart, DMNS exists to kindle lasting interest in nature and science and to make that interest tangible and meaningful for people of all ages and backgrounds. Discovery, immersive exhibitions, and active research converge to translate complex ideas into moments of clarity and delight. Through the [Institute for Science & Policy](#), the Museum also occupies a singular civic role. It convenes scientific, nonpartisan conversations on some of the most challenging issues of our time, including climate change and public health.

This work is sustained by dedicated staff, an engaged volunteer corps, and a culture shaped by community partnership. DMNS is widely respected not only for the strength of its science, but for its steadiness and its commitment to thoughtful stewardship, institutional trust, and relevance across shifting social and political contexts. Strong federal and local support reinforces this foundation, fueling research, training future scientists, and broadening access.

Over the past two decades, under the leadership of President and CEO George Sparks, DMNS has grown in scale, confidence, and ambition. Campus expansions, expanded scientific and educational capacity, and a reimagined visitor experience have marked this period of evolution. Major investments, including the Morgridge Family Explorations Center and the Avenir Collections Center, have positioned the Museum for sustained growth. Recent projects like the Strum Family Wing and the reimagined Dea Family Gems & Minerals Hall signal an institution that continues to invest thoughtfully in what comes next.

DMNS is a high-performing, mission-driven organization with deep community trust, national relevance, and forward momentum. It enters its next chapter grounded in a legacy of excellence and guided by an enduring belief in the value of science, learning, and shared discovery.

KEY DENVER MUSEUM OF NATURE & SCIENCE FACTS

- 1.4 million visitors onsite each year, with an additional 600,000 reached beyond the Museum’s walls
- 481 staff members, full-time and part-time
- 975 + volunteers
- More than 4.3 million objects in the scientific collection
- Over 200,000 K–12 students served annually through school programs, outreach, and distance learning
- Five active scientific research disciplines spanning Anthropology, Zoology, Earth Sciences, Space Sciences, and Health Sciences
- Reaccredited by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) in 2026, reflecting nationally recognized standards of governance, collections care, ethics, and public trust

CORE VALUES

- We love science
- We are curious, creative, and playful
- We cultivate relationships with each other, diverse communities, the environment, and for our future
- We think critically and act with empathy

Learn more about DMNS at <https://www.dmns.org/>

The Denver Museum of Nature & Science (DMNS) seeks a bold, grounded, and future-focused leader to serve as its next President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO). After more than two decades of transformative leadership, the Museum stands as one of Denver’s most trusted civic institutions—respected for its scientific rigor, public service, and deep community roots. The next CEO will honor this legacy, while shaping and executing an ambitious vision for the future. They will lead a large, multifaceted organization that blends a world-class museum, a vibrant scientific research enterprise, and expanding platforms for learning and public dialogue.

Externally, the CEO will be a compelling ambassador for DMNS, strengthening its presence among scientists, educators, donors, policymakers, and the public to extend the Museum’s reach and impact. They will reinforce the Museum’s role as a trusted, nonpartisan source of scientific knowledge and a vital civic resource for the region and beyond.

Internally, the CEO will align the organization for its next chapter by developing strong leaders and clarifying structures, decision rights, and accountability. They will embed a culture of performance, collaboration, and continuous improvement, bringing the operational focus and managerial discipline needed to move a complex enterprise forward, while balancing ambition with thoughtful attention to long-term institutional strength.

In partnership with the board of trustees, the CEO will guide all facets of the institution—science, education, exhibitions, operations, philanthropy, and community engagement. Their charge is to strengthen DMNS’s financial foundation, expand its reach, and ensure that the Museum continues to thrive as an enduring force in the cultural and scientific life of the community.

KEY RELATIONSHIPS

Reports to Board of Trustees

Current direct reports Chief Operating Officer
Chief Financial Officer
Senior Vice President, Development, Membership and Insights
Senior Vice President of Science and Chief Curator
Executive Director, The Institute for Science & Policy
Executive Assistant to the President and Chief Executive Officer

Other key relationships Museum staff and volunteers
Current and potential donors
Scientific and Cultural Facilities District members
Other key non-profit and institutional leaders
DMNS Foundation Board
Scientists, academic professionals, and scholars
Local and regional business, cultural, and community leaders
Denver city officers and Colorado state and federal leaders

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES AND DESIRED OUTCOMES

- Lead the development of a future-ready business model that supports innovation, adaptability, long-term sustainability, and a next-generation visitor experience.
- Advance scientific excellence and funding through rigorous research, active scholarship, and the integration of science into public-facing work.
- Grow attendance and membership by modernizing the guest experience, ensuring it meets expectations, and expanding engagement across diverse audiences.
- Strengthen public trust in science by upholding DMNS's credibility, openness, and nonpartisan engagement.
- Foster a healthy, high-engagement culture grounded in clarity, collaboration, accountability, and shared purpose.
- Drive a long-term campus vision that unifies visitor experience, scientific infrastructure, collections, and community access.
- Align capital planning and fundraising to deliver major investments, campaigns, and institutional priorities.
- Strengthen financial resilience through disciplined planning, diversified revenue, and growth of the DMNS Foundation principal.
- Support continued authorization of the [Scientific and Cultural Facilities District \(SCFD\)](#), a seven-county, voter approved tax district which enables broad access to over 300 of Denver's world-class cultural institutions, through effective stewardship, accountability, and strong regional relationships that reflect DMNS's value to the public.
- Partner with the board of trustees to ensure effective governance, strategic alignment, and shared accountability.
- Elevate DMNS's visibility and influence locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

IDEAL EXPERIENCE AND COMPETENCIES

The next President and CEO of the Denver Museum of Nature & Science is a strategic, mission-driven leader, who brings clarity, judgment, and inspiration to a complex, multidisciplinary institution. This individual partners closely with the board of trustees to guide the Museum's long-term direction and ensure excellence across science, education, operations, and public engagement.

They excel at aligning vision, strategy, and execution across large enterprises, leading people, finances, operations, and external relationships with discipline and care. They understand how to strengthen an organization's core, while preserving what makes DMNS credible, durable, and deeply valued by its community.

The ideal candidate brings integrity, emotional intelligence, and strategic business insight. They possess natural intellectual curiosity and a genuine respect for science as a driver of discovery, learning, and public trust. They honor the Museum's legacy, while having the conviction to lead meaningful change. Comfortable navigating complexity and competing expectations, they steward DMNS with steadiness and imagination, positioning the institution for sustained relevance and impact in the decades ahead.

As such, the search committee seeks an individual with the following experience and capabilities:

Mission-Driven, Community-Centered Leadership

- Experience leading an organization with a clear public-facing mission—whether in business, government, philanthropy, education, or the nonprofit sector—with a record of strengthening credibility, trust, and community value.
- Demonstrated success building strategic partnerships across sectors (civic, business, academic, philanthropic, scientific) to advance mission and broaden impact.
- Experience serving as a high-profile, visible, credible representative of an organization, engaging effectively with policymakers, community leaders, donors, clients, or other key stakeholders.
- A history of stewarding an institution's reputation with integrity, nonpartisanship, and sound judgment.
- Evidence of intellectual curiosity and a genuine appreciation of science, learning, and discovery.

Strategic Business and Operational Acumen

- Experience setting and executing long-term strategy in a complex enterprise, navigating shifting political, economic, cultural, or market conditions.
- A record of strong operational and financial leadership, including oversight of significant budgets, infrastructure, and multidisciplinary teams.
- Demonstrated ability to strengthen organizational resilience through diversified revenue streams, whether earned income, public funding, philanthropy, partnerships, or other business models.
- Experience driving growth in audience, customer, or stakeholder engagement through data-informed strategy, pricing, marketing, or experience design.

- A track record of identifying and executing responsible revenue generating opportunities, while protecting mission, values, and brand.
- Experience partnering with a governing board or equivalent body to ensure strong governance, strategic alignment, and shared accountability.
- Proven success cultivating philanthropic, investor, or major stakeholder support through compelling storytelling and disciplined relationship management.

Leading People and Organizations

- Experience building and sustaining a healthy, inclusive, and high-performing organizational culture grounded in trust, respect, and shared purpose.
- A track record of attracting, developing, and retaining strong leaders and teams, with clear systems for roles, decision rights, and accountability.
- Demonstrated ability to assess and refine organizational structures to improve clarity, efficiency, and enterprise-wide execution.
- Experience leading organizations through change with steadiness and empathy, balancing ambition with attention to staff well-being and long-term resilience.
- Evidence of success managing evolving workforce expectations and fostering organizational health in dynamic, complex environments.

COMPENSATION

The estimated base salary range for this role is \$500,000-600,000. Total compensation will include:

- A competitive base salary
- An annual performance-based incentive opportunity
- A comprehensive executive benefits and retirement package

Final compensation will be determined based on the selected candidate's experience, qualifications, and alignment with organizational needs, and in accordance with Board-approved ranges.

APPLICATIONS AND NOMINATIONS

The Denver Museum of Nature & Science is being assisted in this important recruitment by Spencer Stuart. If you wish to confidentially submit application materials or nominate someone for this role, please email: DMNSpresident@SpencerStuart.com