



Position Specification

National Building Museum

Executive Director

Our Client

The National Building Museum, the only museum in the country dedicated to the built environment, with a mission to inspire curiosity and knowledge about the world we design and build. The Museum transforms understanding of the history and impact of all aspects of the built environment, including planning, development, architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, construction, and design through exhibitions, educational programs, and special events. The Museum welcomes all ages to experience stories about the built world and its power to shape our lives, communities, and futures.

As the National Building Museum celebrates its 40th anniversary, and as a new decade unfolds, the Museum eagerly looks to the future and is well-positioned to sustain profound impact across its next era of leadership. The National Building Museum seeks a leader who will bring the executive skills to manage its complexity with discipline and transparency, as well as one who has the visionary, collaborative, and inclusive orientation to lead the organization into the future.

The National Building Museum hosts over 500,000 museum visitors and program attendees in a typical year, and offers a diverse range of exhibitions, programs, awards, and events. These include the outstanding summer installations, during which world-renowned architects and designers such as Jeanne Gang, Bjarke Ingles, David Rockwell, and Snarchitecture create summer installations in the Great Hall. Through the year the National Building Museum also creates its own cutting edge exhibitions, with a tradition of being at the vanguard of pressing issues of our times, including around sustainability, housing affordability, resilience, mass incarceration, gun violence, and broader social justice topics, among others. Some notable recent exhibits include the following:

- *Justice is Beauty: The Work of MASS Design Group* (2021) will introduce MASS Design Group’s extraordinary portfolio, committed to the idea that architecture is never neutral—it either heals or hurts. This body of work reflects the belief that design can, and should, improve people’s lives. Their projects—from schools and hospitals in Rwanda, to a cholera treatment center in Haiti, to a healthcare center for homeless people in Boston, to a “waiting village” for pregnant women in Malawi—reflect its mission to research, build, and advocate for architecture that promotes justice, healing, and human dignity. The exhibition will convey the firm’s groundbreaking approach to its architectural projects, and how its collective organizational structure supports its mission to address society’s most challenging problems through socially conscious design.
- *The Wall/El Muro: What Is a Border Wall?* (2021) examines the border wall from the perspective of architecture and design. By focusing on the built environment, visitors will understand that a border wall makes real – and internationally consequential – something that is otherwise relatively symbolic.
- *Evicted* (2018-2019), a collaboration with Matthew Desmond, professor of sociology at Princeton University and MacArthur “Genius” Fellow, offered an immersive experience bringing our visitors into the world of low-income renter eviction. Specially commissioned visual infographics and forward-thinking design introduced visitors to the data and statistics they need to know in order to understand the crisis. Working together, these elements amplified the stories of tenant families, as they explain in their own words and images the impact eviction has on them and their loved ones. Following its run at the National Building Museum, *Evicted* travelled to 10 cities in the U.S.

Building on its role as a convener and thought leader – and exemplifying its connectivity to the many and diverse fields and industries who shape the built environment – the National Building Museum gives out a range of awards, including the Honor Award, Vincent Scully Prize, and the Henry C. Turner Prize for Innovation in Construction. Each year the Museum hosts key influencers from different fields, connecting in meaningful ways with the leaders that are moving these industries forward. Last year’s annual gala welcomed more than 1300 people to the Museum. The Museum’s lecture series, *Spotlight on Design*, also features many of the premier voices in the design community. Programs in the series present the work of Pritzker Laureates, American Institute of Architects’ Gold Medalists, American Society of Landscape Architects’ Medal recipients, as well as works from emerging designers. The lecture series has featured iconic leaders ranging from Tadao Ando, Zaha Hadid, and Rem Koolhaas, to Moshe Safdie, Santiago Calatrava, Steven Holl, Laurie Olin, and M. Paul Friedberg.

The National Building Museum also provides schools and educators with training and learning opportunities to bring the built environment into the classroom through school visits, teaching resources. *CityVision*, a multi-visit program where middle school students spend one full school day for six weeks at the Museum, provides opportunities to work with Museum staff as well as volunteer professionals and university students in the fields of architecture, urban planning, or education. *Investigating Where We Live* is a five-week summer program at the Museum for teens from the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. Participants use digital cameras, creative writing, interviews, and their own observations to explore, document, and interpret the built environment in D.C. neighborhoods, and then use their findings to design and install an exhibition in the Museum. The program was awarded the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award in 2013.

The National Building Museum partners in the production and presentation of the Architecture & Design Film Festival. Over the course of four days, the festival screens films that explore design and its connection to a range of issues – including gender equity, income inequality, immigration, and religion – through the life and work of notable practitioners from around the world. The Museum also hosts a diverse range of other special events and programs, including *The Big Build*, a one-of-a-kind annual community day which introduces kids and adults to a wide range of building skills, while educating them in planning, creating, constructing, and improving the places where we live, work, and play.

The Museum also houses a permanent collection that illuminates the building process and documents changing architectural styles and construction techniques. The collections contain approximately 100,000 photographic images and negatives, 130,000 architectural prints and drawings, 100 linear feet of documents, and over 20,000 objects, including material samples, building fragments, and architectural toys. These include a wide array of unique and notable collections, such as the Washington National Cathedral Archives, the Alan Karchmer and Sandra Benedum Photographic Archive, the Ernest L. Brothers Interior Design Collection, the Wurts Brothers Photography Collection and the Woolworth Collection, among many others.

In the spring of 2020, the Museum completed a significant renovation. Under the management of the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA), the three-month-long project involved replacing the Great Hall’s concrete floor with a modern foundation. A new exhibition, *Alan Karchmer: The Architects’ Photographer*, was set to open at the same time, along with popular long-term exhibitions like *House & Home* and *PLAY WORK BUILD*. During the renovation, Museum staff took advantage of the closure to convert second-floor classrooms into exhibition space, and to create a new Visitor Center on the ground floor.

Housed in a renovated space with new lighting and electrical, acoustical treatment, and durable flooring, the Visitor Center features a display of objects from the Museum’s collection, a new ticketing desk, and a seating area. The Museum was ready to reopen its doors to the public on March 13. The COVID-19 pandemic delayed those plans, but the renovation was a great success and has positioned the Museum well for the future.

The National Building Museum has an operating budget of approximately \$7-9 million, which is differentiated from many museums by its diverse revenue streams – the museum currently receives approximately 44% of its revenue from contributions, 17% from admissions, 17% from Great Hall rentals, 8% from the museum shop, and 14% earned income from other sources. The National Building Museum Store is the only of its kind in D.C., and has become the go-to retailer in the area for architecture and design books and objects. Since 1885, the Great Hall has been the stage for Washington’s most elegant events, including Presidential Inaugural Balls.

History

The Museum resides in one of the most awe-inspiring spaces in Washington, D.C., the former Pension Building, with its soaring Great Hall, colossal 75-foot-tall Corinthian columns, and a 1,200-foot terra cotta frieze on the exterior. Designed by Montgomery Meigs and built between 1882 and 1887, the building served three distinct purposes: to house the headquarters of the United States Pension Bureau, to provide a suitably grand space for Washington’s social and political functions, and to commemorate the service of those who fought on the side of the Union during the Civil War. In 1969, the Pension Building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places and designated a National Historic Landmark in 1985.

Congress passed a resolution in 1978 calling for the preservation of the building as a national treasure, and a 1980 Act of Congress mandated the creation of the National Building Museum. After years of careful restoration, the Museum opened its historic home in 1985 with its inaugural exhibition, *Anatomy of a Bridge: Seven Steps in Constructing the Brooklyn Bridge*, and has presented more than 200 exhibitions since then. It was officially renamed the National Building Museum in 1997.

The Opportunity

This transition comes at a time of significant disruption and evolution for museums worldwide. The National Building Museum and all cultural institutions are called to introspection and action around issues of racism, social justice, and diversity, equity, access, and inclusion. Further, the Museum is adapting in real-time in response to the global pandemic, managing the cascading consequences and impacts of COVID-19 in 2020 and navigating new outlooks for the future. The National Building Museum, like so many other cultural institutions, has had to make extensive workforce reductions and manage ongoing revenue challenges. The next Executive Director’s role will include the mandate of leading the organization forward as it responds to this period of change and opportunity. This will include rebuilding the team and ramping the museum’s core functions back up to full scale and strength, such that the Museum has the capacity to fulfill its mission with vigor, efficiency, and clarity of focus.

The Museum is prepared to change and is poised to lead a vital progression of the museum’s strategy, its brand and business model, and how it engages broader communities. There is hard work to be done, and the challenges ahead present exciting opportunities for this organization. Transformational change is happening now, and the next leader of the National Building Museum will set a tone of innovation, collaboration, inclusion, and impact that echoes throughout the country.

The Role

The Executive Director of the National Building Museum reports to the Board of Trustees and oversees all aspects of the institution's strategy, exhibitions, programs, and operations, including management of fundraising, physical facilities, marketing, and finances. The Board seeks an engaging, innovative, inspiring, and fiscally responsible leader with a passion for the built environment.

The Executive Director will serve as the driver of the National Building Museum's organizational vision and strategy during a pivotal moment for the organization. Under this leader's guidance, the Museum aims to diversify revenue streams to ensure financial sustainability, increase and broaden its audiences and visibility, and both hone and cement its role as a truly unique organization and destination locally and nationally.

Implicit within this will be the ability to lead extensive fundraising activity in partnership with the advancement team and the Board, as well as to create collaborations and partnerships, particularly as they relate to major gifts, support from foundations, corporations, individuals, and community engagement.

The Executive Director will recruit, develop, delegate to, and lead an exceptional team, such that operations, capacity, and systems are strong. S/he will ensure that the right people are in the right roles with the bandwidth and expertise to take responsibility for their respective functions, and that they function highly as a team. This may include evolving the organizational structure and team size where appropriate, in a manner that will best serve the Museum's goals and mission. S/he will ensure that the strategic objectives are collectively agreed upon, effectively implemented, and realized in a fiscally responsible manner. In addition, the Executive Director will continue to foster a culture that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive.

The Executive Director will build upon the historic relationship the National Building Museum has with the communities in Washington, DC, and further cement the museum's role as the cultural focal point and gathering place for architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, and design nationally. This leader will inspire volunteers and partner organizations to work in concert with the strategic goals of the Museum and will approach the financial administration of the institution with resourcefulness, sound judgment, and a clear understanding of budgets.

Candidate Profile

The Executive Director of the National Building Museum will demonstrate a decisive and yet collaborative leadership style, entrepreneurial drive, and interpersonal gravitas, and diplomacy. The successful candidate will exhibit a deep knowledge of or passion for the built environment. S/he will have an understanding of and perspective on the important role that historical and cultural institutions play in the 21st century landscape. The Museum is open to candidates from a wide variety of professional backgrounds.

The next leader of the Museum will have demonstrated a high level of achievement in developing or contributing to a compelling and forward-looking strategy for an organization, building the financial, operational, and ideological support for its implementation, and skilfully balancing and aligning the needs of multiple interests. In particular, s/he should have experience defining strategic objectives, and will be energized by building a clear plan for the Museum's future, as well as advancing its brand, visibility, and audience engagement locally and nationally.

The next Executive Director will be an enthusiastic fundraiser, who proactively builds philanthropic relationships and enjoys making the case for support. S/he will have the capacity to expand the Museum's fundraising base and collaborating with others to raise significant funds. This individual will be an enthusiastic and energetic champion for the institution externally, and a credible ambassador who can build partnerships externally with important constituencies.

This person will have earned a reputation for effective management and leadership, as well as a positive track record of partnering with a Board and senior management team. The successful candidate will be a natural team builder with the energy, optimism, and drive to lead the National Building Museum into the future. S/he will bring a deep personal commitment to diversity, equity, access, and inclusion in all aspects of the organization's work, and seek to build an organization that is substantively diverse and reflective of the diversity of our community.

In terms of the performance and personal competencies required for the position, we would highlight the following:

Setting Strategy

- The ability to create and articulate an inspiring vision for the organization as a whole.
- The ability to seek and analyze data from a variety of sources to support decisions and to align others with the organization's overall strategy.
- An entrepreneurial and creative approach to developing new, innovative ideas that will stretch the organization and push boundaries, particularly in the current landscape.
- The ability to effectively balance the desire/need for broad change with an understanding of how much change the organization is capable of handling and at what pace, to create realistic goals and implementation plans that are achievable and successful.

Executing for Results

- The ability to set clear and challenging goals while committing the National Building Museum to improved performance; tenacious and accountable in driving results.
- Comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty; the ability to adapt nimbly and lead others through complex situations.
- A leader who is viewed by others as having a high degree of integrity and forethought in their approach to making decisions; the ability to act in a transparent and consistent manner while always taking into account what is best for the organization.
- Will approach the financial oversight of the Museum with an even-handed and reasoned approach to decision-making, as well as an entrepreneurial approach to revenue growth.

Resource Development

- Will be a proactive and enthusiastic fundraiser—in partnership with the Board—able to increase and diversify financial support from individual donors, foundations, corporations, and government funders, and bring enthusiasm around fundraising. This can be demonstrated by results achieved in different ways, including on behalf of your own organization, independent charitable work, and outside board involvement.

- The ability to inspire loyalty to and support of the National Building Museum and continue to carve out its distinct niche and leadership role in the broader cultural and philanthropic community of Washington, D.C. and beyond, as well as elevate the reputation of and excitement around the Museum.
- Will engage their professional network to substantively further the Museum's mission.

Leading Teams

- The ability to attract and recruit top talent, motivate the team, delegate effectively, celebrate diversity within the team, and manage performance.
- The ability to persevere in the face of challenges and exhibit a steadfast resolve and relentless commitment to high standards, which commands respect from team members.
- A leader who is self-reflective and aware of his/her own limitations; leads by example and drives the organization's performance with an attitude of continuous improvement by being open to feedback and self-improvement.
- Must have the ability to create excitement and lead with inspiration, balanced with the judgment to provide calm, consistent guidance and leadership to internal staff.

Relationships and Influence

- Naturally connects and builds strong relationships with others, demonstrating strong emotional intelligence and an ability to communicate clearly and persuasively.
- An ability to inspire trust and followership in others through compelling influence, powerful charisma, passion, and active drive.
- Creates a sense of purpose and meaning for the team and engages others to the greater purpose for the organization as a whole.

Personal Characteristics

- An energetic and inspiring leader who genuinely enjoys and excels in both the internal and external aspects of a museum Executive Director's role.
- Highly collaborative, but also decisive and relentlessly forward moving.
- Tirelessly and optimistically drives the Museum forward in clarifying and asserting its local and national identity and individuality. The new Executive Director will lead the institution with integrity, courage, and enthusiasm.

Contact

Russell Reynolds Associates has been exclusively retained for this search. Given the need for confidentiality throughout this process, prospective candidates are invited to reach out directly to our search consultants with a CV and brief explanation of interest.

To apply for the role or submit a nomination, please reach out to: nbm@russellreynolds.com.