

A photograph of several young children in costumes, including tiaras and dresses, standing in a line. In the foreground, a child in a light blue dress is holding a book. The background shows other children and museum displays.

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AND ASSOCIATES

OMAHA
children's
MUSEUM

Chief Executive Officer

The Organization: Past, Present, and Future

For almost 50 years, Omaha Children's Museum (OCM) has engaged the imagination and created excitement about learning. This cherished institution is a special place where children can challenge themselves, discover how the world works, and learn through play. Since 1976, when a group of Omahans filled a station wagon with art supplies and traveled to events to offer educational programming to area children, OCM has been community-driven. Today, it is one of the most visited museums in the State and welcomes around 300,000 guests from across the region each year, about a quarter of whom reside outside Nebraska. In 2023, nearly 342,000 people experienced OCM's hands-on exhibits, workshops, programs, presentations, and special events that help children understand their ever-changing world.

The imaginative, enriching environment and programs at Omaha Children's Museum nurture growth and development as young children and their caregivers explore the world together. The Museum's experiential exhibits encourage curiosity, experimentation, self-expression, and play. Permanent exhibitions include the Super Gravatron, a massive ball machine featuring pneumatic, hydraulic, and mechanical sections showing science in action; an art center that sparks creativity; the Tinker Factory, where children can build what they dream up; a space to envision their future selves; a venue for daily science shows; the STEAM Cave, where kids learn about science, technology, engineering, art, and math concepts and key figures; themed play areas that offer worlds of pretend work and fun; a train ride; a carousel; playgrounds; and outdoor spaces. Unique temporary exhibits ensure there is always something new to experience and feature traveling shows from other museums and OCM-created ones that debut in Omaha before touring the nation. The Omaha community has come together to support the Museum's goals of improving access for under-resourced members, and the donor-supported Welcome Fund grew from 1,200 to over 1,700 family memberships by the end of 2023. The Museum enjoys the support of 8,600 member households, with 1,300 offered at low or no cost to ensure access.



Building on this legacy of impact and community support, Omaha Children's Museum is set to celebrate its 50th anniversary next year by starting construction on a vibrant new building at Omaha's river front. This new museum represents a vital investment in Omaha's future. It will be shaped by best practices in early childhood development, providing enriching tools and environments during the crucial first years of life. To this end, OCM is partnering with Heritage Omaha on a \$110 million capital campaign through the Omaha Children's Trust to design, build, and fully activate a purpose-built space at The RiverFront. Omaha's close-knit civic, business, and creative community has invested over \$1 billion in revitalizing The RiverFront and downtown areas. OCM's new site will be at the corner of 8th and Douglas Streets on The RiverFront, adjacent to this transformational investment, surrounded by cultural institutions, and visible from Gene Leahy Mall, Heartland of America Park, and Lewis & Clark Landing. The new site integrates with nearby neighborhoods, parks, and attractions, prioritizing access and connectivity. OCM's focus on serving visitors from birth to age eight will complement the neighboring Kiewit Luminarium, which offers STEM educational content for ages seven and up, further strengthening Omaha's early learning continuum. Omaha Children's Museum's new location and The RiverFront developments contribute to Omaha's livable community, positioning the city as a family-friendly hub for innovative and enriching childhood education. Project exploration, schematic design, and fundraising are on track, and groundbreaking for the site's structural foundation is set to begin this December.

Governance and Financial Health

Omaha Children's Museum, a 501(c)(3) organization, is governed by an 18-member Board of Directors of influential Omaha leaders, eight of whom serve on the Executive Committee. Their efforts are augmented by the over 50 OCM Rainbow Connectors Guild volunteer members who help advance the Museum's mission through fundraising and friend-raising projects throughout the year. The organization additionally benefits from the support of a constellation of partners associated with the new location, including an early childhood education advisory group, the Omaha Children's Trust Board, and contributing organizations. The capital campaign's first year has garnered generous support from Omaha's engaged philanthropic community, and OCM is poised for future growth and success.

The Museum's annual operating budget is \$5.5 million for the current fiscal year; this will escalate to \$7.2 million by 2028, slated to be the first full year of operations in the new building. Earned funds from admissions, memberships, programs, and other operating revenues provide more than two-thirds of OCM's income, with the remaining supplied through contributions such as grants, fundraising, and other philanthropic support. The most recent audited financial statements provide more detailed information.



A vibrant background image showing children playing with colorful balloons (yellow, red, green) on a blue surface. Two children are prominently featured in the foreground: one on the left wearing a blue and white striped shirt, and one on the right wearing a green and white checkered shirt, both looking up and reaching for the balloons.

Fun

Fun and play are at the heart of what the Museum does, and they are contagious. Play is a significant way we learn; for the early childhood audience, it is critical to learning and development. OCM is committed to being a positive place for its guests, employees, and all other stakeholders. It believes in the power of play and the strength of happiness.

Values

Growth

Omaha Children's Museum is committed to their young guests' cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and intellectual growth. They recognize the importance of sharing the value of this growth with parents, educators, and their community. OCM is committed to creating an environment where children, families, and their caregivers can strengthen their bonds through learning, exploration, and time spent together. The Museum recognizes that the organization will continue to flourish only with growth and innovation. They believe in their staff's personal and professional development and the positive growth of OCM as an organization.

Respect

The OCM community believes in treating others as they would like to be treated and respecting other people's feelings. It recognizes the value of people, property, the environment, and ourselves. It treats its team members, guests, and all others it encounters with respect and sensitivity. In addition, it respects what is taking place at its organization and in each individual's life.

Well-Being

The Museum believes in the importance of the well-being of its employees, guests, Board of Directors, community, and the organization. OCM is committed to doing its part to promote well-being in the lives of the people it impacts. The organization strives to be a safe harbor where individuals can express themselves freely and expect to be safe from harm. OCM recognizes that behind every great organization are great people. When well-being is thriving among people involved in and associated with the organization, the organization can succeed.

Location

Situated on the bank of the Missouri River, Omaha has long attracted a diversity of residents who value the city's culture of friendliness, strong work ethic, and Midwestern grit. Residents enjoy the vibrant arts scene, sports (Omaha is home to the College World Series), varied and exciting restaurants, and nightlife that gives the city a unique personality while retaining a low cost of living. Omaha provides many job opportunities in organizations as wide-ranging as start-ups to the four Fortune 500 and four Fortune 1000 companies headquartered there. The Omaha metropolitan area has a population of one million people. The city benefits from an active community devoted to the public good, with a large group of local corporations dedicated to playing a substantial role in Omaha's growth, one of the country's largest and strongest chambers of commerce, and philanthropic activity that ranks the city in the top 3% in per capita giving. Sustained transformational investments have created vibrant destination neighborhoods and accessible, amenity-rich open spaces that unify the community.



The Opportunity

In this moment of promise and potential, Omaha Children's Museum seeks a Chief Executive Officer to provide strategic and visionary leadership as the organization builds its future. OCM is a place of fun and inspiration for Omaha's children; its current location is across from a public elementary school and close to Omaha's only children's theatre. In the heart of the business district, the current museum offers the only grass-covered playground accessible to neighboring residents. The new site at The RiverFront will enable OCM to expand its impact, evolve its play-based learning model, and enhance its efforts toward accessibility and affordability through intentional and inclusive building and experience design, operations, and community partnerships. The CEO is accountable for creating optimal conditions for fundraising success in the ongoing capital campaign, ensuring project achievement. Specifically, this advocate will build alignment throughout the organization and serve as a compelling and strategic storyteller, generating excitement among sophisticated donors about various projects and initiatives. The Museum's connection with Omaha is crucial, and the next leader will utilize existing relationships and work to establish new ones. To enhance community awareness of the Museum's initiatives, the CEO will nurture partnerships with various organizations and individuals to expand impact and improve Omaha's early childhood educational and enrichment opportunities. This represents a remarkable chance for an experienced and visionary civic leader enthusiastic about educational and economic equity, creative models of impactful learning, and investing in the region's future.

The construction of the new building is set to coincide with the Museum's 50th anniversary, making 2026 a pivotal year. Designed by Snøhetta in collaboration with local leader Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture and ROTO exhibition partners, the planned 75,000-square-foot building will increase OCM's space by 25% and prioritize sustainability. Attendance and income are also expected to rise, with 325,000 annual visitors anticipated and a 31% revenue boost projected for 2028. OCM will continue to operate its current location during construction, transitioning to the new site in late 2027. This engaging location will feature inclusive exhibits and programming that spark joy, curiosity, and connection. The Museum's comfortable spaces will give children the agency to explore and play safely without rigid constraints. Thoughtfully designed for young children and their caregivers of various physical and intellectual abilities, developmental stages, and cultural backgrounds, it will also honor Omaha by celebrating OCM's legacy, the city's neighborhoods, and Nebraska's landscape, wildlife, community life, and art. An exciting time lies ahead.

Reporting to the Board of Directors, the CEO will work to secure OCM's position as an innovative leader in children's informal education and early learning, ensure that the organization actively contributes and acts as a catalyst at all levels, and attend to the operational and financial needs of the Museum, including serving as the institution's chief fundraiser. The CEO will leverage Omaha Children's Museum's robust community support and momentum while being a thoughtful and creative steward of existing resources and maintaining a sustainable business model. The CEO will actively shape the development of organizational structures, policies, and processes as the Museum community envisions its transformed future in its new location. In addition to establishing day-to-day practices that foster an adaptable and resilient organization, this leader will act with strategic urgency.

OCM's leadership strives to become known as an exemplar in the early childhood sector. By employing a strategic mindset, the CEO ensures operational excellence, philanthropic success, and financial sustainability, enabling OCM to fulfill its mission while demonstrating best practices, innovation, and collaboration. An essential contributor to OCM's vision, programming, and engagement, the CEO will embody curiosity and showcase a passion for creative, experiential learning that inspires others. By developing and utilizing OCM's platform, the CEO will strengthen operations and build community trust to realize a cutting-edge educational and entertainment destination that embodies Omaha's spirit and creativity, reflecting its rich tapestry of diverse cultures to help children learn from and about the world surrounding them.

As an experienced relationship builder who can enhance a culture that emphasizes visitor and employee engagement, empowerment, and transparency, this collaborative and inspiring leader will excel in partnering with the Board, community stakeholders, and the OCM team to continue providing outstanding guest experiences at the current location while leading the development of a transformative institution that will engage the next generation of audiences and encourage visitors to return again and again. They will cultivate a mission-driven culture by guiding, collaborating, and motivating the staff. The next CEO will be a visible presence whose hands-on leadership is a model for ethical and empathetic management, exemplifying OCM's values of growth, respect, fun, and well-being.





Key Relationships

Omaha Children's Museum seeks an experienced and strategic Chief Executive Officer to deliver outstanding leadership and define the institution's future. This individual will be responsible for managing an organization with over 60 staff members through five direct reports: the Vice President of Finance & Operations, who manages directors over Facilities, Administration and Accounting, and Human Resources; the Vice President of Education, Exhibits & Guest Experience, who leads directors over each area; the Vice President of Marketing & Communications, who directs digital media and group sales; and the Vice President of Development & Engagement, who oversees fundraising, grants, community partnerships and engagement, and membership; and the Executive Coordinator. The CEO will be expected to enhance efforts to make the Museum a sustainably operated organization, implementing best practices throughout. This dynamic and charismatic leader will act as the chief relationship officer by fostering personal connections with Board members, employees, donors, city leaders, project partners, and the surrounding community. The CEO will collaborate with direct reports and team members at all levels to achieve this goal while nurturing an engaged, inclusive, and accountable culture.



Essential Functions

The CEO will ensure the highest levels of excellence while advancing the Museum's priorities and increasing the enterprise's mission impact. This will be achieved through the following essential functions:

Vision and Strategic Leadership

- Embracing and elevating the current vision, the CEO will contribute inspiring and forward-thinking leadership to advance the organization's mission and goals, adapting strategies as needed to ensure Omaha Children's Museum continues serving the region's next generation while realizing its potential in this time of growth and change.
- Work closely with the Board to develop and implement strategic plans articulating institutional annual and long-term priorities and the path to their achievement. Collaborate with the leadership team to implement plans and surpass goals.
- Foster a mission-driven culture that supports innovation, collaboration, staff achievement, engagement, and empowerment. Support this with the infrastructure needed to achieve strategic goals, creating an innovative organization dedicated to continual improvement and setting new standards for children's museums.
- In concert with staff and the Board, formulate policies informed by governance best practices, provide guidance, and ensure compliance with legal and ethical standards. Ensure that OCM's annual operating plans are aligned with organizational resources and long-term strategy.
- The CEO will serve as the organization's primary champion and a leader in the cultural and educational community. The CEO must be visible and accessible to internal and external constituents and continue to build cooperative relationships with other organizations. The CEO will collaborate to engage different educational and cultural institutions, community organizations, and potential partners in Omaha and the region in activities of mutual benefit.

Financial Oversight and Resource Development

- The new CEO will maintain financial accountability through innovative and ethical business practices, such as budget management, fiscal responsibility, and active involvement in fundraising efforts.
- Diversify and expand OCM's resources to support mission objectives and establish the Museum as a regional and nationally leading organization. In collaboration with the Vice President of Development & Engagement, establish financial sustainability by nurturing donor relationships that generate contributed revenue and demonstrate results; play an essential role in increasing philanthropic contributions from corporations, foundations, and individuals by facilitating and participating in planning, orchestrating, and implementing fundraising practices that provide ongoing operational support and sponsorships while building the endowment.
- The CEO will be OCM's lead spokesperson and cheerleader, including others in this work while supporting and celebrating their success and organizational achievements. The CEO will effectively advocate for OCM in the ongoing capital campaign and function as the organization's representative in the Omaha philanthropic community.
- Continuously review and enhance the organization's operations to maximize all earned income opportunities. Develop strategic, long-term business plans utilizing market intelligence to increase engagement with members and visitors.
- Collaborate with colleagues to reach new audiences and boost attendance, membership, repeat visitation, and market share.
- In conjunction with the Vice President of Marketing & Communications and their team, continue to build recognition of OCM's value to the community by supporting branding strategies that drive marketing and visibility on media channels, speaking engagements, and participation in associations and clubs. Collaborate to unite entities to enhance the organization's success in Omaha and heighten its reputation.
- With the Vice President of Finance & Operations, evaluate and predict performance through accurate reporting and analysis. Oversee all management policies, procedures, and systems to ensure quality and operational efficiency through resource optimization and successful budget management. Ensure that all budgetary goals are met and communicate proactively with the Board on all financial matters consistently and transparently.





Human Capital Leadership and Development

- The CEO will foster teamwork by maintaining a work ethos that values creativity, cooperation, growth, openness, mutual respect, and well-being. Engage, support, and develop talented, motivated staff through inspired leadership, open communication, integrity, and humility. Build strong relationships with colleagues, model and expect positive workplace behaviors and values, and provide mission-centered work experience that invests in team members, leverages staff expertise, and prioritizes professional development. Contribute to a collegial atmosphere that promotes innovation and cross-functional achievement among all departments, preparing the team and the organization for future growth.
- Proactively using analytics to ensure sound management, the CEO will make and communicate hard decisions transparently, delegate responsibilities, and implement straightforward methods of accountability, ensuring that they are applied fairly at all levels. Conduct an in-depth enterprise-wide organizational analysis to identify improvement opportunities. Strategic planning will be an element of this evaluation and foundational work.
- Continue efforts to make engaging educational experiences more accessible and welcoming to all of Omaha's children and their caregivers.

Program Development and Operations

- Working collaboratively with the Vice President of Early Childhood Education, guide the delivery of an industry-leading family experience that inspires and educates. Collaborate with the team to facilitate smooth day-to-day operations, using a nuanced understanding of the economic and regulatory factors influencing a complex commercial operation with multiple revenue streams. Evaluate the organization's overall operations to coordinate efforts effectively.
- Ensure all offerings are aligned with OCM's mission, plans, and aspirations to be a model of innovative and effective play-based learning. Encourage and ensure an elite exhibition program and fun new exhibits designed to engage, provide memorable experiences, and foster curiosity.
- Develop and enhance the organization's position as an accessible resource for early childhood development, education, and engagement for all the region's children, caregivers, educators, and academics.



The Candidate: Professional Qualifications and Personal Traits

The CEO will be an inspiring, visible, and community-driven leader passionate about and committed to Omaha Children’s Museum’s history, mission, and vision for its future. Versatile and people-oriented, they will value effective communication, maintain high visibility, and engage with the community while serving as an ambassador and advancing the organization's work. The CEO will lead by example, applying practical, business-minded thinking and judgment to every aspect of the organization’s operations and initiatives. This energetic and engaging leader will aim to expand the organization’s reputation and reach by communicating priorities to staff, Board members, and stakeholders. Receptive to new ideas, methods, and opportunities, they will make challenging decisions with confidence and compassion. The CEO will actively engage with Omaha’s culture and education communities. They will also have a track record of leading successful fundraising initiatives with a strong ability to grow contributed revenue in a way that emphasizes people, relationships, and sustainability.

While no candidate will meet all the desired qualifications, the ideal candidate should possess most of the following attributes and traits while prioritizing critical objectives:

- OCM seeks a dynamic, innovative, and proactive leader with executive-level oversight in an organization with multiple revenue streams. The successful candidate will combine a passion for creative engagement and play-based learning with proven managerial expertise and operational skills. They may come from various backgrounds, including but not limited to museums, nonprofits focused on early childhood education, and other successful commercial organizations recognized for delivering an exemplary guest experience. Executive nonprofit management experience working with a Board of Directors is required. Experience in a mission-aligned organization and managing a new operational museum would be highly beneficial.
- This adept fundraiser will have the experience and vision to form strategies and take action that secures philanthropic support. This engaging communicator will embody organizational values, capably tell the organization’s story, and bring a record of success in development, relationship cultivation, and donor satisfaction. Fluency in the nuances of building relationships with donors is essential. Experience with multi-million-dollar capital campaigns is strongly preferred.
- By striking a balance between confidence and humility, the CEO will effectively embrace Omaha’s community and culture. Eager to achieve mission-driven outcomes while broadly sharing the credit with all involved, they will command respect and possess the gravitas to engage with diverse stakeholders. As a natural public speaker and connector, the CEO will inspire others with their passion for the mission. This dynamic leader will excel at fostering collaboration and generating support.

- Expertise in effective change management acquired within a complex organization undergoing planned transformational growth while remaining committed to the mission and fiscal responsibility. Proven success in guiding an entity toward increased operational efficiency and significant growth. Emotional resilience and the ability to adapt to the uncertainties of assisting any ambitious enterprise in defining and redefining its boundaries are essential.
- The CEO must create an environment where every child, family, and caregiver feels valued, respected, and embraced. This role requires dedication to reaching children from all backgrounds and ensuring that the Museum's programs, partnerships, and community engagement efforts reflect the richness of the communities OCM serves. The CEO will work to remove barriers to participation, foster a culture of belonging, and ensure that all children, regardless of circumstances, can play, learn, and grow.
- This skilled leader will thrive in building teams and organizing operations for maximum effectiveness. Self-aware and open to feedback, the CEO models organizational values and builds and maintains healthy relationships with the Board, staff, and partners to advance their efforts and OCM goals. This inspiring manager will engage and support the work of the Board and staff, creating suitable organizational structures to leverage the talent within the team.
- The CEO will bring meaningful, successful experience cultivating mutually beneficial and mission-aligned partnerships. As Omaha Children's Museum's representative to multiple audiences, the CEO will be a visible and active leader in Omaha, regionally, and nationally, developing relationships in the educational, cultural, and civic communities. This includes the public, county, city officials, and community leaders central to the Museum's mission.
- Committed to training, developing, and motivating their team, this executive understands that the organization can only flourish when all staff members are supported holistically as individuals and professionals and grasp their role in achieving the Museum's mission. Delegating and empowering OCM's staff to act, the CEO will acknowledge each team member's contributions while promoting mentorship, professional growth, and accountability. The CEO will have an appetite to roll up their sleeves and work with the OCM team, understanding that the daily work achieving a shared mission provides the knowledge needed to support and celebrate staff.



- Drawing on experience developing and managing budgets, the CEO must evaluate and take calculated risks, balancing ambitious goals and innovation with practical stewardship and financial realities.
- The CEO will understand how the Museum's operations and opportunities enrich the region's education and entertainment resources. While this person does not need to be an expert in early childhood development or family engagement, they should be excited to connect ideas, themes, and skills across disciplines to advance early childhood engagement opportunities and education in the region.
- Bringing knowledge of museum planning and administration, this strategic thinker will lead the staff toward creating solutions for program advancement while cultivating a genuine guest-centered attitude.

Education

The successful candidate will hold a bachelor's degree, ideally in education, business, or nonprofit management, with an advanced degree preferred or a combination of professional experiences that optimize success in the role.

Work Location

This executive is expected to be based in Omaha and work onsite. The responsibilities include remote work for specific tasks.

Compensation

Omaha Children's Museum offers an annual salary of \$225,000 to \$250,000, augmented by a performance-based bonus, relocation package, and highly competitive benefits package that includes medical, dental, vision, life, accidental death, and disability, short- and long-term disability, flexible spending and health savings accounts, a retirement plan, and PTO. The salary offer will depend on several factors, including educational qualifications, training, years of experience, and performance in previous positions.





Process

As an Equal Opportunity Employer, it is OCM's policy not to discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, age, disability, familial status, marital status, predisposing genetic characteristics, actual or perceived domestic violence victim status, unemployment status, caregiver status, or any other category protected by law. We encourage applications from all qualified individuals. The OCM Board of Directors has retained Shelli Herman and Associates, Inc., an executive search firm, to assist in this search. Inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed to Shelli Herman, who is leading the search; all contact will be held in the strictest confidence.

This search was initiated on March 24, 2025, and the position will remain open until filled. We are actively reviewing applications and conducting interviews on a rolling basis. To ensure your candidacy gets full consideration, please provide your credentials as soon as possible and by April 21, 2025. Please apply on our [website](#) with your cover letter outlining your commitment to OCM's mission, how your experience aligns with the job description, and your resume, including all work experience. The Museum aims to conduct interviews with vetted finalists in late spring and have the new Chief Executive Officer identified by June 2025.

Please read your resume for accuracy before submitting it for this position. Shelli Herman and Associates, Inc. verifies academic credentials for its candidates, and OCM will conduct a background check before finalizing an offer.

About Shelli Herman and Associates, Inc.

Based in Los Angeles, Shelli Herman and Associates, Inc. is a fully retained executive search firm dedicated to helping exceptional organizations build C-suite teams. Our work is specifically tailored for executives and leaders functioning at the most senior level in their organization. We have extensive experience working with both mission-driven organizations and Fortune 500 companies. Our clients are diverse but share the common trait of being trailblazers in their respective fields. We have a strong track record of working with clients who need a flexible, experienced, and skilled search partner, and we are unmatched in our sector.

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