

MUSEUM DIRECTOR OPPORTUNITY

The State Museum of Pennsylvania (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission

SUMMARY

The State Museum of Pennsylvania (SMOP) seeks a strategic, collaborative leader to serve as its Director.

As a bureau of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC), the Museum brings Pennsylvania's natural and cultural history to life through collections of more than 12 million artifacts spanning cultural history, art, archaeology, geology, paleontology, and natural history.

Over the next several years, the Museum will undergo a \$58 million transformation — the largest investment in the complex since 1964. This is a rare opportunity for a mission-driven museum leader to guide a statewide institution through a once-in-a-generation renewal. The Director will shape a reimagined visitor experience, deepen community engagement, collaborate with staff and steward collections through the transition, championing the importance of Pennsylvania's history now and for the future. PHMC seeks a collaborative, experienced museum leader with a passion for public history who will serve as a visible, compelling spokesperson, sustain engagement during closure, build momentum for reopening, and thrive in the Museum's public-sector environment.

The Museum has an annual operating budget of approximately \$4 million, as well as a planned capital budget of approximately \$80 million over 10 years to support continued exhibition development. Salary begins at \$115,000 and includes a competitive Commonwealth benefits package. The start date is projected for late summer 2026. The search is being led by Syrah Gunning of the DeVos Institute of Arts and Nonprofit Management. [Apply here](#) or contact segunning@DeVosInstitute.net.

ABOUT THE STATE MUSEUM OF PENNSYLVANIA

Founded in 1905, The State Museum of Pennsylvania is the Commonwealth's flagship history museum and the only institution devoted to the full sweep of Pennsylvania's natural and cultural history. Considered by PHMC to be "the Smithsonian of Pennsylvania," it reflects the breadth and depth of its collections and plays a critical role as a statewide resource. The Museum welcomes approximately 95,000 visitors (including about 35,000 school students) and is often the first museum experience for many Pennsylvania youth. It houses nearly 160,000 square feet, and its programs include exhibitions, tours, classes, research, publications, and a fine arts program. Its programs address the following primary themes:

- Natural history of the Commonwealth, including geology, paleontology, zoology, botany, ecology, and astronomy.
- Cultural history of the Commonwealth, including stories of its people—where and how they lived, worked, and played. The Museum explores Pennsylvania's rich heritage and cultural diversity from pre-contact Indigenous communities to present-day people through a variety of collection areas including political, industrial, community and domestic life, pop culture, military and fine art.

Committed to reaching a culturally diverse audience with a focus on families, children, and students, the Museum partners with schools, colleges, universities, civic organizations, government, and private entities.

Harrisburg offers vibrant arts in Midtown, a historic downtown, scenic riverfront parks along the Susquehanna River, and extensive trails and waterways for outdoor recreation. It also benefits from quick and convenient train and highway connections to Philadelphia, D.C., Baltimore, and New York for regional travel.

THE OPPORTUNITY

During the upcoming period of renovation and renewal, the Director will have the opportunity to play a leading role in shaping the Museum's public identity and advancing its approach to sharing Pennsylvania's fascinating, complex, and important history. The Museum expects to be closed to the public from August 2026 to early 2029 and to stay visible during that period through virtual offerings and community-based outreach. During this renovation period, the Director will:

- Ensure a strong virtual and community presence during the closure and strong statewide engagement upon its reopening. Build and sustain high-impact partnerships across agencies, Tribal nations, cultural organizations, schools, and communities to broaden participation through this period.
- Collaborate with PHMC leadership and SMOP divisions (curatorial, education & operations, and exhibition management) to realize the exhibition, programming, and visitor experience plans outlined in the renovation and reopening plan. This will require the development of new standing exhibits, lesson plans, tours and programs.
- Lead the development of new web content and marketing collateral to share these renewed opportunities with visitors. These efforts will explore Pennsylvania's rich history through compelling stories, dynamic and immersive displays, and engaging and interactive experiences.
- Identify new or expanded opportunities for earned revenue that leverage the new exhibits, programs, experiences, and spaces. The renovation will include reimagining the museum stores and developing a facility management strategy that maximizes use and rental of the new spaces.
- Strengthen organizational sustainability by analyzing and improving internal systems including benchmarking new initiatives and developing supporting policies, procedures, and systems.
- Oversee collection stewardship priorities necessary in the renovation, including policy updates and plans for collections movement and preparation for new spaces.
- Expand access to collections and research through digitization and improved collections data and catalog systems.

The Director also serves as a member of the PHMC's senior management team and has the opportunity to participate in PHMC-wide leadership, coordinate cross-bureau initiatives, and serve as a liaison to other state agencies and partners.

[Click here to view the supplemental materials, which provide additional details on the Museum's mission, organizational structure, and plans for renovation and reopening.](#)

What SMOP seeks in its next Director:

A champion for a revitalized State Museum and Pennsylvania's history

The Director will embrace the vision for a reinvigorated State Museum, have a passion for public history, and believe deeply in the relevance and importance of Pennsylvania's history. They will collaborate with PHMC

leadership and SMOP staff to translate the strategic vision into coherent exhibitions, programs, and visitor experiences upon reopening.

An engaging public-facing communicator and ambassador

The Director will serve as the Museum's primary public voice across the Commonwealth to visitors, funders, media, and the broader public—articulating a clear, compelling story about the Museum, why it matters now, and what its transformation will deliver. They will keep the Museum visible and engaging during closure through community presence, partnerships, and communications, and build strong interest and attendance for reopening. They will be enthusiastic about being an accessible and frequent presence in the Commonwealth's civic and cultural life.

An experienced and collaborative museum professional who can work effectively within a public-sector environment

The Director will have demonstrated museum leadership experience encompassing operational, financial, and programmatic management, with the capability, imagination, and enthusiasm to oversee growth and transformation associated with the reopening. They will bring relevant experience that will allow them to lead efficient operations within the Museum's governmental framework. They will excel at building strong, productive relationships with stakeholders across the Commonwealth and demonstrate patience and lateral, solutions-oriented thinking.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Provide strategic and operational leadership for The State Museum of Pennsylvania, aligning work with the Museum's Strategic Plan and PHMC's strategic plan to achieve designated goals and objectives and deliver high-quality public service. Establish long-range plans and annual goals and objectives, and designate resources accordingly.
- Maintain visibility and engagement statewide through coordinated marketing and communications, supported by clear measures of value.
- Oversee all Museum program operations, including collection development, storage, care, and use; exhibition development, design, and fabrication; and education, interpretation, and public programs. This includes oversight of the registrar's office.
- Collaborate with PHMC leadership and SMOP staff to realize the Museum's interpretive plan and steward the development of temporary and permanent exhibitions and interpretive experiences, including major gallery renewals, rotating exhibitions, and new high-quality lesson plans and educational programs. Ensure strong project management, clear decision-making, and high-quality outcomes.
- Lead, support, and supervise staff and volunteers. Set priorities, allocate resources, ensure professional development, and foster a service-oriented, supportive culture. Establish and direct the flow of work, including assigning special projects or studies. Review staff work through regular formal and informal reviews, conferences, and evaluation results.
- Oversee all Museum long-term and day-to-day financial and organizational operations, including fiscal affairs; facility and building operations; security; audiovisual services; and clerical and support functions. Evaluate and continually improve internal systems to ensure strong operations.
- Coordinate with partners to support earned income and external support activities, including Museum shops.
- Uphold PHMC's safety and security standards, ensuring a safe working environment and responsible care of the facility and the collection.
- As a member of the PHMC's senior management team, work with other PHMC Bureaus and units in strategic planning efforts of the Commission. Coordinate Museum plans with Agency goals to ensure the best utilization of Museum resources for public benefit. Serve as designated liaison to other agencies of state government for the development of programs to address Museum needs.

Who The Director Will Work With

The Director reports to the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) and serves as the operational lead for the agency's flagship museum. Direct reports include: Chief of Interpretation, Chief of Operations, Senior Curator of Zoology and Botany, Collections Manager, and Administrative Assistant. The Director oversees, directly or indirectly, a total of 35 full-time employees organized across three divisions: Curatorial, Education & Operations, and Exhibition Management, as well as external contractors in specialized areas.

Preferred Skills and Attributes

- Senior leadership experience in a professional museum context. Experience in a comparable public-serving cultural organization is valued but not required.
- Clear communicator and relationship builder who can represent the Museum publicly and collaborate across PHMC and with partners statewide, both orally and in writing.
- Comfort navigating complex, policy-driven organizations.
- Experience overseeing exhibitions, interpretive/education programming, and visitor-facing operations and ability to collaborate with staff and partners to advance these efforts.
- Experience overseeing and understanding collection stewardship, including care, storage, inventory, access, digitization, planning, conservation, and responsible use. Prior curatorial experience is not required.
- Strong people-management skills, with the ability to build trust, coach staff, and manage change.
- Ability to make data-informed decisions and use systems and databases to support planning and operations.

Employment and Compensation

- **Start date:** Negotiable; projected for late summer 2026.
- **Salary:** Compensation begins at \$115,000 and will be informed by a variety of factors, including but not limited to experience and qualifications.
- **Benefits:** The PHMC offers a comprehensive suite of benefits to all Commonwealth employees. Review details [here](#).

How to Apply

This search is facilitated by Syrah Gunning, Senior Consultant, Executive Search & Development, and Brett Egan, President of the DeVos Institute of Arts and Nonprofit Management, a leading provider of arts management services, training and thought leadership for arts, cultural, and educational sectors worldwide. Learn more [here](#).

To apply, please respond to the short answer questions and upload your resume [HERE](#).

Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis and accepted until the position is filled. All inquiries will remain confidential until necessary in the process. For questions or accommodations, email segunning@devosinstitute.net. No phone calls, please.

The Commonwealth is an equal employment opportunity employer and is committed to a diverse workforce. The Commonwealth values inclusion as we seek to recruit, develop, and retain the most qualified people to serve the citizens of Pennsylvania. The Commonwealth does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religious creed, ancestry, union membership, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, HIV status, disability, or any other categories protected by applicable federal or state law.