

The Hands On! Discovery Center Executive Director

The Board seeks a fund-raising/friend-raising museum professional to engage Northeast Tennessee residents and visitors in joyous educational experiences, provide hand-on experiences of scientific methods of discovery, and promote a lifelong love of learning and education at all ages and in all forms.

BACKGROUND

The Hands On! Discovery Center ([HODC](#)) first opened its doors in 1987 as a children's hands-on education center, offering fun programs and experiences that include interactive exhibits, a musical Tesla coil, giant building blocks, a 3-story Paleo Tower, and an art studio. HODC relaunched in 2018 to include programs for adults and students of higher education at a new facility, which is managed and staffed in partnership with East Tennessee State University and is located at the [Gray Fossil Site](#) near Johnson City in northeastern Tennessee. HODC annually hosts 94,000 visitors from around the nation and world, groups from 40 school systems across four states, and a broad range of paleontological researchers and volunteers. Guests are invited to engineer a rocket, build a wind-powered car, create art and visit an active fossil dig, while trained volunteers and students can participate as docents, teachers, and site workers. Programs and exhibits feature plant and animal fossils unearthed at the Gray Fossil Site which has cataloged over 30,000 fossils dating back some 5 million years, including the remains of a 10-ton mastodon, and one of the best collections in the world of such material from Tennessee, the southern Appalachians and surrounding states.

With an annual budget of \$1.2m, assets of \$1.9m (not including the value of collections, facilities and land), 15 active board members, and 8 full and 15 part-time staff, HODC provides ticketed admission to adults and children. Free admission is provided to members and children under the age of 4. The region of Northeastern Tennessee has a population over 500,000 within easy driving distance of this important institution, and nearby interstate (the intersections of routes 81 and 26) and state highway system allow for convenient visits from neighboring Kentucky, Virginia and North Carolina. While there is no urgent need for a capital upgrade, there is significant potential to expand HODC's physical infrastructure, exhibition space and programs in partnership with East Tennessee State University. This region of Tennessee has substantial potential for further development, and there are expanding businesses in the area of logistics, manufacturing, hospitality, health and entertainment.

Using objects from the collections, the Gray Fossil Site and resources of other museum institutions, the new Executive Director will shape engaging in-museum and online programs, in the process advancing the museum's strong regional reputation as an exciting, thought-provoking place of learning and exploration.

BASIC FUNCTION

Reporting to the Board through its Chair, the Executive Director will lead the HODC as it delivers innovative, exciting, engaging, fun and enriching experiences for residents and visitors, students of all ages, educators, and community members. The Executive Director will advance the museum's strong regional reputation as a distinctive, thought-provoking place of learning for curious families and adults, and ensure that HODC delivers constantly refreshed avenues of scientific discovery.

This institution requires a master friend-raiser and fund-raiser who will develop strong relationships locally and regionally with business, nonprofit, educational and community leaders, and develop material support for the museum using conventional and evolving fundraising methods. The Executive Director will maximize earned income through ticket sales, rentals, retail operations, traveling exhibits, special event sales, and will work with schools, school districts and educators to promote funded field trips, summer camps, and remote learning opportunities.

The Executive Director manages all staff and volunteers, collections, operations, exhibits, programs, systems and processes to ensure financial strength, efficient operations, and experiential education excellence. An essential partner in this effort will be East Tennessee State University. The Executive Director must have an abiding interest in delivering entertaining, compelling programs for all ages.

HODC provides endless avenues of inspiration, learning, and story-telling. The Executive Director and the HODC Team will translate data from discoveries into stories, stories into visitor experiences, and visitor experiences into a lifelong love of learning.

ONGOING RESPONSIBILITIES

LEADERSHIP & GENERAL MANAGEMENT

- Lead, inspire and mentor staff in the vision and goals of the museum; hire, supervise, motivate, develop and evaluate staff, ensuring that staffing is appropriate to the organization's needs; ensure that Board-approved policies are consistently implemented; have a work environment and culture that encourages retention of qualified staff;
- Encourage a proactive approach in maintaining exhibits and facility, as an ageless, safe, and clean environment; oversee the preservation and maintenance of the museum's physical assets, including exhibits, collections, the building and infrastructure;
- Interpret HODC's mission into a Board-approved Strategic Plan that is updated and refined as needed; supply the Board with complete, accurate and timely reports and data required for informed decisions (inc. from external advisors/consultants); proactively bring recommendations to the Board of Directors in matters related to objectives, policies and long-term strategy;
- Develop supportive collaborations and partnerships in the communities the museum serves, and in particular with East Tennessee State University and area school districts, keeping informed of challenges, progress, activities and emerging community issues, along with offering recommendations and solutions as appropriate.
- Develop meaningful and ongoing productive relationships with government officials, corporate and community leaders and collaborations with educational institutions in Tennessee, regionally and nationally to advance the HODC's goals and strategies;
- 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;
- Identify and help recruit new Board members whose talents, interests and commitment will help to fund and advance HODC's mission and programs;

- Provide for efficient day-to-day management of all administrative operations, delegating work as appropriate;

EXHIBITS, EDUCATIONAL AND PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

- Provide direction for the development of new, fun, inspiring exhibits, outreach and educational programs; ensure that best practices are employed; leverage the facility in ways that deepen the visitors' experience;
- Work collaboratively with other like-minded, STEAM-focused organizations, and appropriately develop various relationships with other museums and attractions, thought-leaders in the field, schools, universities, patrons, volunteers and other community members; serve as an advocate for the organization, assuring that the interests of the Museum are advanced and fully understood;
- Understand the Gray Fossil Site, its resources, staff, physical attributes that can be leveraged for exhibition and audience interactions (in-person or on-line), collections and research; translate the work and activities of the Site into stories, programs and visitor experiences;
- Develop relationships that may lead to appropriate financial or in-kind gifts that strengthen the collection, public programming, K-12 and adult education offerings, and the quality of permanent and temporary exhibits.

CONTRIBUTED/EARNED INCOME AND MARKETING/COMMUNICATIONS

- Serve as the chief fundraiser for the museum; work with the Board, the Development Committee and senior staff to drive annual fundraising and campaign solicitations; expand and diversify revenue streams from admissions, licensing, facility rentals, concessions and other sources; set high expectations for increased financial support from foundations, corporations, individuals, governments and other philanthropic sources; strengthen fundraising systems, workflows and donor recognition;
- Grow the endowment, enabling HODC to continually upgrade exhibitions, enhance the facility, and provide for financial stability as the institution matures;
- Solidify HODC's reputation among regional, national and international audiences, most particularly members of the community, visitors and prospective visitors to Northeast Tennessee, as a top-of-mind, unique, not to be missed, repeat experience and valued science and paleontological education resource.
- Communicate to current and prospective supporters, members and resident and tourist visitors using conventional and new (social media, mobile, etc.) tools; actively seek opportunities to publically advocate for the organization and develop communication strategies for enhancing the reputation of the HODC as a treasured scientific and cultural resource; serve as and advocate for the museum, and as its public and media spokesperson when appropriate.

BOARD RELATIONS

- Improve and implement Governance Board policies, program goals and objectives; provide ongoing communication to the Board; with the Board Chair, coordinate the

efforts of various committees and encourage Board member involvement in fundraising, program evolution, financial and operations oversight;

- Proactively bring recommendations to the Board in matters related to objectives, policies and long-term strategies;
- Help identify and recruit new Governance Board members, whose talents, commitment, and fundraising abilities are congruent with the needs and mission of the Hands On! Discovery Center.

IDEAL EXPERIENCE AND QUALIFICATIONS

Candidates will have a combination of the following types of leadership experience, qualifications and skills:

- Senior management background in a museum, school or associated institution that is known for innovative programming, cultivating strong community ties, and fundraising success; strong operations management, combined with a track record of success in developing interesting exhibits and programs; advantageous would be personal understanding of natural history, paleontology and other scientific research, and experience making science and academic research accessible to the public;
- Experience working successfully with donors, community leaders and Board members to financially strengthen the HODC; measurable success increasing earned and contributed revenue; strong understanding of financial management practices;
- A bachelor's degree or equivalent is required, with a master's degree preferred in education, business, science or other related field; a minimum three years of experience directing business and program activities is required, preferably for a non-profit, cultural, research or educational organization;
- Experience shaping a highly effective 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 and has a passion for connecting the public with the HODC; someone who will enjoy engaging with residents and visitors to northeast Tennessee, and who wants to actively engage with the community 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 a good listener and strategist who cultivates trust; an individual who is straight-forward, shares information easily, receives as well as gives advice, and respects the abilities of others; someone who imparts trust, integrity and solidity;
- Someone who enjoys working in close collaboration particularly with the Board's Chair and with other Board members; a collaborator who thrives on entrepreneurial partnerships of community significance;

***Hands On! Discovery Center
Executive Director***

- A delegator who sets high expectations, values follow-through and recognizes accomplishments; a person that others want to work for, who possesses a sense of humor and perspective.

To apply, nominate others, or for further information, please contact:

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