MARINE SCIENCE INSTITUTE

DISCOVERING OUR BAY SINCE 1970

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Marine Science Institute seeks an experienced, dynamic Executive Director to lead strategic and business growth, oversee operations, and build on a 50-year legacy of exceptional marine education on the San Francisco Bay.

Search Conducted By

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ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The Marine Science Institute (MSI) was founded by Robert and Carolyn Rutherford in 1970, around the time the issue of water resources became a major concern for many residents of the San Francisco Bay Area.

MSI's philosophy is based on the idea that putting students in direct physical contact with their local bay environment will help cultivate their natural sense of curiosity, enrich their understanding of science, and foster an ethic of responsibility to protect the environment. Prior to 1970, few opportunities existed for students to get hands-on experience with the flora and fauna of San Francisco Bay, and bridge the gap between environmental concerns and education. As one Bay Area professor remarked at the time, *"On a clear day we can see the Bay, but there is no way for my students to get their hands wet—in real water."*

MSI's first program, the Discovery Voyage, was a great success. Students were taken aboard the 65' research vessel, *Inland Seas*, and ventured out onto the water where they came in contact with live animals, used scientific equipment, and participated in hands-on science. In 1992, MSI created land-based programs to accommodate more students and welcome younger participants. These included the Shoreside, Inland Voyage, and Tidepool programs. Over the following decades, MSI has continued to grow—expanding programming to include new topics and themes, and keeping up with ever-changing educational standards and environmental topics.

Located on the bay shore in Redwood City, CA, MSI is led by a staff of 14 working with approximately 12 full-time field instructors, and is governed by an 11-member Board of Directors. MSI operates with a $3M annual budget and a revenue mix that is roughly 75% earned program service revenue and 25% contributed revenue.

In its first year, the Discovery Voyage program served about 4,000 students. Today, MSI educators work with roughly 40,000 students and adults annually across a range of programs. It has become a leader in environmental education and remains true to its founding philosophy of inspiring respect and stewardship through experiential learning and getting one's hands wet.

Mission

- To inspire environmental stewardship through hands-on learning and exploration of San Francisco Bay ecosystems.

Vision

- A future where every individual is deeply connected to marine life, fostering a culture of ecological responsibility.

Values

- We will continue to build a flexible, **RESILIENT** organization, ensuring adaptable leadership, and encouraging self-sufficient teams while delivering our programs with passion, excitement, and commitment to our communities.
- We will uphold the highest standards of **INTEGRITY** by demonstrating fairness, transparency, and accountability in our work. Guided by our moral compass, we will act with honesty, responsibility, and respect, fostering trust within our team and the communities we serve.
- We will strive to create lasting **SOCIAL IMPACT** by empowering communities through marine science education, conservation, and advocacy. Through environmental stewardship and inspired action, we drive positive change for our oceans and future generations.
- We will continue to build an **INCLUSIVE** organization, ensuring access to culturally relevant, meaningful environmental education programs, and accommodating all participants.

POSITION OVERVIEW AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Executive Director (ED) is responsible for the overall leadership and management of the organization and ensures its fiscal health and sustainability. The ED works in close partnership with the Board of Directors and provides professional, strategic leadership to achieve MSI's mission and strategic objectives.

It is essential that the ED position be held by a trusted visionary leader and ambassador who embodies MSI's commitment to experiential education, personal development, and organizational excellence. The ED is responsible for leading and managing operations, coordinating staff, board, and partners, sustaining and expanding financial resources, and ensuring the high quality of MSI's hands-on educational programming. The ED is the public face, voice, and spirit of the organization, and its most visible champion, salesperson, and spokesperson.

For an organization of MSI's size and complexity, with its history of impact and learning, the ED plays a central role at the intersection of board governance and staff programming, supported by consistent funder engagement and heartfelt school, family, and community connection.

Executive Leadership and Strategic Vision

- Lead by example and embody MSI's mission, goals, values, and professional standards.
- Set the organization's long-range vision and lead towards strategic goals.
- Ensure MSI is financially healthy and maintains appropriate reserves.
- Develop and manage organizational and program budgets, ensuring financial sustainability and strategic resource allocation.
- Collaborate with the Board of Directors to develop and maintain engaged, accountable governance, advocacy, and financial accountability.
- Develop and strengthen relationships with key stakeholders from local communities, government, foundations, corporate partners, major donors, and schools.
- Represent MSI in media engagements, public speaking events, and strategic partnerships.
- Lead the action plan to achieve a long-term land lease, ownership, or relocation.

Fundraising and Resource Development

- Act as the primary brand ambassador for MSI.
- Identify, develop, and maintain multiple mission-aligned revenue streams.
- Oversee all fundraising, including major gifts programs, capital acquisition, institutional giving, and endowment development.
- Partner with development staff to set and achieve annual and long-term contributed revenue goals.
- Identify resource requirements and establish strategies to secure funding through grants, partnerships, and donor engagement.
- Maintain regular, timely communication with major donors, partners, foundations, and corporate sponsors.

Team Leadership and Operations

- Oversee office staff and ensure operational excellence and accountability across all business areas and programs.
- Oversee all educational programs and facility operations, and ensure a consistently high level of quality and effectiveness.
- Maintain high performance standards and develop staff with intentionality.
- Enhance MSI's recognition as a thought leader for marine science education.
- Oversee marketing and sales planning and expand execution and audiences.
- Maintain current partnerships and develop additional opportunities to secure new and repeat program contracts.
- Ensure all applicable programs continue to align with California science standards.

DESIRED EXPERIENCE AND COMPETENCIES

The ideal ED is an experienced organizational leader with a minimum of 20 years of experience in experiential education or related situations, with at least 10 years of executive leadership experience.

The ED will have a deep history of values-based leadership, high-level fundraising and relationship skills, and the proven ability to navigate complex, changing organizational and mission delivery environments. They lead with an engaging, authentic personality and the confidence, humility, and emotional intelligence to work with a talented staff and engaged board at an important time in MSI's evolution.

The ideal candidate will have outstanding interpersonal and relational skills and excel at developing, leveraging, and advancing education and stewardship work with integrity, accountability, and humanity. The position works with a wide variety of people, including MSI staff and board members, as well as school leaders, donors, partners, government agencies, and community leaders. Additionally, the ideal candidate will be creative and entrepreneurial in achieving MSI's mission and maintaining the organization as a leader in the field of science education in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Executive Leadership and Strategic Vision

- Significant executive leadership experience in similar or equivalent nonprofit situations
- Ability to communicate MSI's mission, purpose, and impact with clarity and authenticity
- Vision to build on MSI's legacy of success and impact and take the organization beyond current horizons
- Demonstrated success in leading and executing complex multi-year strategic plans focused on organizational maturity, sustainability, and growth
- Experience collaborating with a board to develop and support thriving governance, including establishing committees and improving board skills through targeted training
- Proven ability to attract, retain, and engage a highly qualified staff
- Strong business and financial management skills, including oversight of earned income generation, budget development, and providing fiscal oversight for facility and program operations
- Presence, gravitas, and communication ability to serve as MSI's primary brand ambassador and spokesperson

Fundraising and Resource Development

- Demonstrated high-level fundraising success, including experience leading major gifts programs, institutional giving programs, and endowment development
- Experience leading or managing projects involving infrastructure investment, land acquisition or lease issues, and major capital campaigns

Team Leadership and Operations

- Proven ability to lead high-performing teams to achieve mission-driven business outcomes
- Experience developing career path frameworks and professional development plans to address internal needs and staff turnover
- Demonstrated success in developing, leveraging, and advancing strong partnerships with diverse constituents
- Experience leading operations, simplifying operational processes, and enhancing efficiency

Attributes

- A genuine passion for education and stewardship in the marine environment
- Strong affinity for MSI's mission, vision, and client population
- Adaptability and flexibility in the face of changing conditions and organizational uncertainties
- Strong interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, and the ability to resolve conflicts and find common ground among diverse perspectives
- Proactive decision maker with a willingness to change course
- Enthusiasm for thinking about the future with an entrepreneurial and creative spirit
- Integrity and a commitment to high ethics and standards
- Comfortable in outdoor settings in all types of weather and physical conditions
- Sense of humor, playfulness, and humanity

Compensation

This is a full-time, exempt, benefit-eligible position. The anticipated annual salary range for this position is $195,000–$240,000, commensurate with experience. The range provided is an estimate and will be evaluated on an individual basis, taking into consideration the candidate's knowledge, skills, abilities, experience, and education.

MSI's full-time employee benefits package includes:

- Two weeks paid time off and 10 sick days annually
- One additional week paid time off during year-end holidays
- Health insurance coverage through Kaiser Permanente and $170/month toward employee health coverages
- 403(b) retirement plan with 5% employer match

Location and Requirements

The Executive Director works from the Marine Science Institute headquarters in Redwood City, California.

The position requires the ability to be on-site on a regular basis. Travel is required to program sites and partner locations throughout the San Francisco Bay Area and coast. Occasional night and weekend work is necessary in coordination with program and operational needs. The Executive Director must be comfortable working indoors and outdoors, including on the water and along the natural coastal landscape.

Start Date

Late Spring 2026

To Apply

Visit potrerogroup.com/msi and select "Apply Here." Please include a resume and a cover letter describing your qualifications that match the position criteria.

Interested and qualified candidates should apply by January 9, 2026, for priority consideration. The position is open until filled.

Additional Information

More information about Marine Science Institute can be found at sfbaymsi.org.

For additional information regarding this opportunity, please contact:

Andrew Leider
Managing Director and Search Lead
Potrero Group
aleider@potrerogroup.com

Marine Science Institute is an Equal Opportunity Employer
Marine Science Institute is an Equal Opportunity Employer committed to building an inclusive workplace where all individuals feel welcome and respected. We encourage candidates from all backgrounds to apply, especially those from communities historically underrepresented in the environmental field. MSI does not discriminate based on race, color, religion, national origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, ancestry, disability, veteran status, or any other protected characteristic. Reasonable accommodations are available as required by law.

Studies show some candidates may hesitate to apply if they don't meet every qualification. If you are excited about this role, we encourage you to apply.

POTRERO GROUP

Potrero Group is honored to coordinate this search on behalf of Marine Science Institute. We support innovative leaders and organizations making a difference in the world with strategic planning, facilitation, organizational development, and board and executive search services. We are committed to equitable and inclusive practices in all of our work.

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