



**The Fabric Workshop and Museum
Search for the Executive Director
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

THE SEARCH

[The Fabric Workshop and Museum \(FWM\)](#) seeks a leader with entrepreneurial and creative drive to serve as their Executive Director (ED). For over 45 years, FWM has been recognized as a groundbreaking space for contemporary artists to challenge their own craft and create inspiring works of contemporary art. The next ED will be a passionate advocate for FWM’s pioneering vision, further connecting FWM’s spirit of artistic investigation and discovery to an eager audience, broadening access, and advancing FWM’s role as a catalyst and champion for innovation.

Founded in 1977 by Marion “Kippy” Boulton Stroud (1939-2015), FWM presents ambitious exhibitions which convey a story of contemporary art that unites process with finished works. FWM originally invited artists to experiment with fabric, and later with a wide range of innovative materials and media. From the outset, FWM has served as an education center for local young people who, as printing apprentices, learned technical and vocational skills along with approaches to creative expression. Today, FWM is an internationally acclaimed contemporary art museum, working in collaboration with artists coming from diverse artistic backgrounds and media including sculpture, installation, video, painting, photography, ceramics, and architecture. Research, construction, and fabrication occur on site in studios providing visitors with the opportunity to see artwork from conception to completion.

The next Executive Director will guide FWM to the next chapter in its story, taking advantage of an opportunity to enhance the influence and elevate the visibility of this consequential and singular arts organization. The ED will be a purposeful and forward-looking leader with a passion for experimental contemporary art. The successful candidate will understand the strategic issues facing arts and culture organizations and will have the foresight necessary to navigate the future of the field. The ED will lead and publicly represent a dynamic and influential institution grounded in collaboration and innovation. They will prioritize effective administration and work closely with the Board of Directors, staff, and key stakeholders to oversee artistic and educational programs, strategic goal-setting, financial and budgetary planning, fundraising and development efforts, and marketing and communications. As the organization’s leading voice and guardian, the ED will continue to build FWM’s prominence as a preeminent arts organization within Philadelphia and beyond.

The Fabric Workshop and Museum has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist with this search. Inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed in confidence to the firm as indicated at the end of this document.

THE FABRIC WORKSHOP AND MUSEUM

The Fabric Workshop and Museum has developed from an ambitious experiment to a significant contemporary art institution, featuring a museum collection documenting over 45 years of artistic innovation, highly acclaimed exhibitions, and an educational program featuring apprenticeships and a diverse range of public programming. From the outset, Marion “Kippy” Boulton Stroud envisioned an organization that combined the activities of the Finnish fabric printing company Marimekko—which promotes design excellence in everyday objects—with contemporary printmaking ateliers such as Gemini G.E.L. and Universal Limited Art Editions (U.L.A.E.)—which encourage artists to experiment with techniques unfamiliar to them, such as lithography or etching. With these models, Stroud established an unprecedented and unconventional space that continually challenges artists and creators to engage with new platforms and reveal new possibilities.

Within FWM’s workshop space, students and artists have mastered hand screen-printing on fabric, as well as exploring a wide array of new materials and new media. Working alongside FWM’s highly trained staff as part of its internationally acclaimed artist-in-residence program, artists have realized ambitious and experimental projects that they may not have been able to achieve on their own. The artworks resulting from this collaborative process have expanded the possibilities of contemporary art practice with the integration of new techniques, applications, and presentations. These artworks have also resulted in the creation of the FWM Museum Store, providing artists the opportunity to create special editions of their work across a range of media and visitors the opportunity to make these special objects their own. In 1996, the word “Museum” was integrated into the institution’s name to reflect its growing collection of contemporary art, as well as FWM’s commitment to the presentation and preservation of these holdings and related educational programming.

Programming

FWM invites contemporary artists to create new work using experimental materials and techniques. Its distinctive Artist-in-Residence (AIR) Program hosts emerging and established regional, national, and international artists who have a demonstrated commitment to exploration and collaboration. FWM residents have included Louise Bourgeois, Claes Oldenburg, Marina Abramović, Lorna Simpson, Bill Viola, and Rose B. Simpson, among others. The AIR Program serves as the creative nucleus of FWM and the genesis for the museum’s groundbreaking exhibition program. A key element for each resident is their work with FWM Studio staff—a team of artists trained in various disciplines—including a Project Coordinator paired with each Artist-in-Residence. Under the guidance of FWM’s Director of Studio Operations, Project Technicians and Studio Assistants also play an important role in testing ideas and materials; the team’s on-site studio work is often supplemented by field research in Philadelphia and beyond.

As one of the original programs of FWM, the High School Apprentice Training Program (HSATP) offers students the opportunity to learn all aspects of hand screen-printing on fabric in FWM's professional studios. HSATP was created to provide exceptional art education for teenagers from diverse economic and cultural backgrounds, with the specific goal of offering an opportunity unavailable to students in their schools. FWM also invites students, postgraduates, and emerging artists from the U.S. and abroad to apply to the College/Postgraduate Apprentice Training Program (ATP). The ATP is a holistic experience enabling artists to develop skills in screen-printing large-scale repeat patterns on fabric to enhance their studio practice. Apprentices have come to FWM from nearly every state in the U.S., as well as from China, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, India, Japan, Kenya, Scotland, and South Korea.

Collections and Archive

As a contemporary art museum that also facilitates experimental, collaborative artist residencies as a core tenet of its mission, FWM encourages and supports new directions in each artist's practice, providing an opportunity for residents to open up an aspect of their work with the highly skilled FWM studio staff. Numbering over 5,000 objects, the [Museum Collection](#) contains the results of many of these ambitious projects and by extension, traces many major movements in contemporary art. Included are significant works by artists such as Reverend Howard Finster, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Ann Hamilton, Anish Kapoor, Robert Kushner, Glenn Ligon, Robert Morris, Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, Nari Ward, and Carrie Mae Weems. Ranging from large-scale installations and sculptures to drawings and paintings to hand screen-printed fabric garments and textiles, the museum collection is as varied as the field itself.

In addition to completed works of art featured in the Museum Collection, [the Archive](#) includes important documentation and process materials relating to the development of projects by Artists-in-Residence. The Museum Archive falls into two categories: Photography and Video Archives and Artist Boxes. FWM has documented the creative process of its artist residencies. Documentation includes artist interviews and curator lectures, exhibitions, special fabrication techniques, and educational activities. Unique to FWM, the "Artist Boxes" serve as a time capsule for each artist residency. Assembled by FWM Studio at the completion of a project, these archival boxes include samples, prototypes, swatches, correspondence, and other related materials.

Leadership and Organizational Capacity

From its inception in 1977 until her death in 2015, founder Marion "Kippy" Boulton Stroud served as FWM's Director. Susan L. Talbott then served as Executive Director from 2016 through 2019, during which time FWM more than doubled its attendance and professionalized its operations. Christina Vassallo, who followed Talbott as Executive Director from 2020 through early 2023, spearheaded an effort to keep FWM an active leader among the Philadelphia community's institutions throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2023, Harry Philbrick joined FWM as Interim Executive Director after founding Philadelphia Contemporary in 2016 and serving as its Founding Director and CEO.

The 16-member [Board of Directors](#) is actively engaged in ensuring the vitality and sustainability of the organization and collaborating with the ED in advancing FWM's mission and vision. Along with the Board, the ED will be supported by the [Artist Advisory Committee](#), a group dedicated to supporting FWM's goal of collaborating with artists to develop an ambitious schedule of residencies, exhibitions, and programs. This group is composed of nationally and internationally recognized artists and museum leaders who serve as advisors, advocates, and ambassadors for FWM.

Governance and Finances

FWM has an annual operating budget of approximately \$4 million. The Marion Boulton Kippy Stroud Foundation (Kippy Foundation) has continued to play an integral role in the operation of FWM, providing significant operating support. The remainder of the budget is primarily supported by a mix of foundations, government sources, Board contributions, and individual donors, with some earned revenue generated from sales, space rentals, and corporate sources. The new ED will diversify and grow sources of contributed and earned income in order to build the long-term financial sustainability of the organization.

In August 2022, Creative Fundraising Advisors and Parenteau Graves were engaged by FWM to conduct a development assessment and consult on strategic direction. Through an intensive analysis of fundraising data, core messaging, and interviews with Board, donors, and staff, the goal of this assessment was to identify key areas of strengths and weaknesses in FWM's fundraising operations and programs. The assessment emphasized the need to revamp the funding model, developing operational steps to bolster short-term financial support and devising and executing a sustainable strategy into the future that restructures the relationship with the Kippy Foundation and deepens ties with the greater Philadelphia philanthropic community.

THE ROLE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Executive Director serves as the primary face and voice of FWM and works with the Board, staff, and other stakeholders to set the vision for its future. They will cultivate partnerships and funder relationships with other arts organizations, business and civic leaders, as well as provide leadership and management to staff, supporting active collaboration and high standards of performance to serve the overarching mission of FWM. The ED will be a charismatic leader that inspires collegiality and collaboration in achieving a shared vision. The ED will bring rigorous business and operational discipline to the organization, ensuring that FWM continues to build its financial health and sustainability, and leading a dedicated team of 6 direct reports and a total staff of 25. The ED will be a creative force aware of best practices and innovations in contemporary arts, drawing on that knowledge to ensure that FWM remains at the forefront of its field.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

FWM's Executive Director will address a set of consequential opportunities and challenges that include, but are not limited to:

Implement and expand the strategic plan, refining the artistic and educational mission in a way that honors the founder's legacy while also positioning FWM for a vibrant and influential future.

FWM is at an inflection point and ready for an entrepreneurial leader to think creatively about the future and how to best execute its mission. FWM will have an immutable commitment to its core purpose: to uniquely showcase and champion the creative process, providing a haven and laboratory for artists to stretch their imaginations. The ED will bring the vision and practical experience that will help illuminate this distinctive purpose and chart a sustainable course forward. This includes exploration of possible alliances with other organizations with shared purpose and values to maximize impact and reduce expenses. In that pursuit, FWM has had initial conversations with potential partners to examine possible benefits of organizational alignment. Fully leveraging the benefits of a new strategic partnership will be a key responsibility for the ED and an opportunity to define FWM's future. The ED's ability to navigate big picture strategic thinking with a pragmatic approach to change management will be essential.

Demonstrate strong business acumen and the ability to steward financial resources effectively and build a sturdy financial foundation for the future.

The financial model for FWM has been in a state of change since Kippy Stroud's passing in 2015. In transitioning from a founder-supported funding model and staying the course through the uncertainty of the pandemic, the organization must now determine the best model of financial support, governance, and internal structure to ensure a future of stability, growth, and achievement. Currently, FWM remains dependent on operational support from the Kippy Foundation. While the organizations are deeply connected, FWM must complete its work in establishing diversified sources of support that will make it financially independent and viable for the long-term. In partnership with the Board and the development manager, the ED is the chief fundraiser for the organization. With the information gathered from the recently conducted development assessment, the greatest target area for expanded financial support is in individual giving. The ED will be dedicated to stewarding existing donors and cultivating new relationships to achieve a broad base of giving. The exploration of new organizational alignment with a potential partner institution is an opportunity for FWM to engage with the philanthropic community in a new and exciting context for the future and with greater strategic impact.

Determine and build the organizational infrastructure necessary for FWM to excel.

Like many nonprofit organizations, FWM must assess its current capacity against its future goals. With dramatic change in the world, in the contemporary arts field, and for FWM itself, it is an opportune time to systematically assess FWM's programmatic commitments and priorities in light of staff capacity and

financial resources. The ED will evaluate right-sizing needs and opportunities, concentrating resources on activities that are mission-critical and have the highest impact.

FWM is in the process of evaluating its building and location. The building, owned by the Kippy Foundation, while highly suitable for some of FWM's needs, does not create an optimal visitor experience. The vertical layout leads to bottlenecks of visitor traffic and the artist workspaces are largely inaccessible to the public. Possible new locations are being explored as part of the strategic assessment that is underway. The ED will bring insight to considerations of design and construction management to result in the physical infrastructure necessary for effective FWM operations.

Elevate and expand the reputation and influence of FWM within the dynamic and diverse Philadelphia contemporary arts community.

The ED will take a proactive approach as spokesperson for FWM and will represent it to the Philadelphia community as well as to a national and international audience. The ED will be FWM's champion and ambassador in the greater community as an engaged arts and culture leader and partner. The ED will have a track record of meaningful and successful diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility efforts and will demonstrate a nuanced understanding of how DEIA can be manifested internally and externally. In addition to serving as the face of the institution, the ED will prioritize marketing and audience engagement to reach and attract new visitors and supporters.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The Executive Director role calls for an ambitious and forward-looking organizational leader with the drive to develop FWM institutionally, with an eye toward preserving its legacy and building a vibrant future in the contemporary art landscape. Rooted in a passion for contemporary art and artists, they will be a persuasive communicator with a record of successful partnerships across diverse constituencies, proven experience executing strategic plans with fiscal responsibility, and a natural zeal for building meaningful cultural partnerships.

While no single candidate will bring all of the desired qualifications, the successful candidate will possess many of the following qualifications and qualities:

- A track record of successful leadership of an enterprise undertaking profound organizational change, with the ability to grasp exhilarating opportunity, while managing risk and uncertainty;
- Deep engagement in and connections to the contemporary art world; able to leverage relationships with artists, donors, and other leaders in the art world for FWM's benefit;
- The ability to articulate and communicate a vision to widely varying constituencies;
- Solid fundraising experience with the ability to cultivate relationships and to close contributions from all revenue sources;

- Strong business acumen and experience managing organizational finances;
- Demonstrated experience aligning organizational mission, vision, and strategy with operational priorities in moments of complex decision-making;
- A proven commitment and track record in advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility;
- Success building an organization's visibility and reputation locally, nationally, and internationally;
- Excellent management and interpersonal skills and experience leading staff in ways that emphasize teamwork and growth;
- A track record of working with a board of directors, with the ability to deepen the partnership among board members and between board and staff, as well as partnering with the board in board development;
- Demonstrated success working in Philadelphia, or the ability to translate one's experience to the city's unique arts and culture nonprofit landscape;
- Experience in large-scale project management including building or capital improvement projects is a plus.

TO APPLY

Confidential inquiries, nominations, referrals, and applications should be sent electronically to the following:

Lisa Savereid (she/her), Partner | Search Co-Lead
Ryan Leichenauer (he/him), Managing Associate | Search Co-Lead
Miguel Santiago (he/him), Senior Associate
Christina Errico (she/her), Senior Search Coordinator
Isaacson, Miller

Apply online: <https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/fabric-workshop-and-museum/executive-director>

The Fabric Workshop and Museum is an Equal Opportunity Employer (EOE). All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability, or veteran status. FWM's culture embraces diversity within the workplace, and outside, and welcomes all candidates to apply, without fear of discrimination.