



### Dean and Margaret Lesher Foundation Executive Director Position Description

***Painter Executive Search is supporting the Dean and Margaret Lesher Foundation in their search for a new Executive Director dedicated to improving the lives of Contra Costa County residents through engaged, informed philanthropy.***

The Dean & Margaret Lesher Foundation (the Foundation) has a clear and simple mission – to enhance the quality of life for the residents of Contra Costa County, California. Established in 1989, the Foundation focuses on strengthening the nonprofit community’s capacity through grantmaking in support of programmatic, operating and capital needs in three broad program areas, Children and Families, Education, and Visual and Performing Arts. The Lesher Foundation also invests in development of the national philanthropic sector and actively supports nonprofit leadership development across the county. The Foundation is widely recognized as a trusted leader among nonprofit, government and philanthropic organizations in the county and across the region.

As a private funder focused exclusively on impact within the county, the role of the Executive Director (“ED”) and the Foundation occupy an important place in the fabric of philanthropic support and regional leadership. Kathleen Odne, the founding Executive Director, is stepping down this spring after 22 years of service. The new Executive Director will continue the current programmatic focus while leading and executing key operations of the Foundation. The ED will support the Lesher family, specifically the Board of Trustees, by informing their philanthropy with knowledge of nonprofit organizations and local issues, as well as understanding of philanthropic best practices. Working together with a small staff (currently one Senior Program Officer) the ED will be both a strong community asset and hands-on grant maker providing the steady, informed leadership that has defined the Foundation’s style for the last two decades.

Today, the second and third generations of the founding members of the Lesher family oversee the Foundation. Supported in their grantmaking by staff, the Foundation stewards approximately \$4 million annually in grants flowing from a \$80 million-dollar portfolio. The portfolio is expected to increase to around \$100 million in the coming years, but the programmatic thrust is not anticipated to change significantly.

#### **POSITION SUMMARY**

The ED reports to the Board of Trustees and holds responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the Foundation, as well as shaping the future of the organization through vision, values, leadership and strategy. The ED is the primary face of the Foundation and is an important conduit of information about the health and effectiveness of its nonprofit partners, the needs within various regions of the county and is an expert in good philanthropic practice. By participation and engagement across the county in discussions of issues, policy and capacity, the ED will assess and respond to opportunities to provide

funding to strengthen nonprofit partners in keeping with the Foundations' strong commitment to supporting a more vibrant local community.

The ED must be able to cultivate, build, and maintain strong and authentic relationships with a wide range of partners and community leaders including nonprofit executives, agency, government and elected leaders, as well as other funders. A deep understanding of applied philanthropy, seasoned nonprofit leadership, a deep willingness to learn from partners and to inspire creative solutions will serve the ED well in this role. Significantly honed communication skills including public speaking, written communications, and knowledge of public relations, social and traditional media skills will be beneficial in building visibility of the Foundation while safeguarding the privacy of the Family and the effectiveness of the grantmaking. Unassailable integrity, deep commitment to the vision and values of the Founders and a good sense of humor will be important for the role.

Additionally, the ED will lead, inspire and support the Board of Trustees and the Lesher Family in their philanthropic work; communicating so that each member is heard, valued and understands their part in the Foundation's work. Success requires understanding of the dynamics of family foundations, ability to honor the history and vision of the Founders, and a willingness to adapt to and embrace the varied communication styles, interests and personalities resident within the Family.

## **ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND**

### **Contra Costa County**

Contra Costa ("County") is a large, diverse county located east of San Francisco Bay. Contra Costa covers over 800 square miles and is home to over one million residents. From Mt. Diablo, the iconic backdrop of the busy business center of Central Contra Costa, to the fertile agricultural flatlands of East County, and the dynamic Baylands and industrial center of West County, Contra Costa is rich in diversity. It encompasses the meandering waterways and shores of the Delta as well as growing cosmopolitan cities and small historic towns.

The County has pockets of significant wealth, as well as urban and rural poverty. Challenges in the county are many and varied and include food insecurity, a significant lack of affordable housing and persistently unacceptable high school drop-out rates in some areas.

### **Foundation History and Culture**

The Foundation was established in 1989, by Dean Lesher, Founder of Lesher Communications, Inc., a privately held company which was the publisher of the Contra Costa Times and several other daily and weekly newspapers in the region, and his wife, Margaret Lesher, a strong supporter of the nonprofit community. The Lesher's were known for their philanthropy and the Lesher name can be found on a few key buildings in the county including the Lesher Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek, the Margaret Lesher Student Union at Diablo Valley Community College, the Lesher Foundation Children's Library at the Walnut Creek Library, as well as Lesher Rotunda in the Orinda Library; all of which reflect the Founders' sense of community centered around learning and the arts.

True to the original wishes of Dean and Margaret, the Foundation continues to build on the strengths of the community by supporting organizations and programs that provide help and support to people in need, enhance and enrich the lives of all citizens, and promote a healthy and exciting future for the community. Since its inception, the Foundation has granted over \$70 million dollars in support to local nonprofits.

Both founders are deceased, Dean Lesher in 1993 and Margaret following in 1997. Currently the Board of Trustees consists primarily of family members and longtime family friends. The President of the Board of Trustees is Cynthia Ann Lesher, a daughter of Dean Lesher, and Steve Lesher, grandson of Dean, has been named as her successor. Linda Davis, longtime board member and CPA, provides active oversight of the professional investment managers.

Currently the Board meets eight times a year for grantmaking purposes to review Letters of Inquiry and approve grantmaking dockets. Additionally, twice per year the foundation reviews the investment portfolio with their professional advisors and authorizes adjustments, as needed, for asset allocation purposes.

### **Program Summary**

Grants of the Foundation have touched many lives and communities. From computer grants in the schools to funding for day care centers, homeless shelters, and performing arts venues – the mission of the Lesher Foundation is to support nonprofit partners and join with them to create a better place. The Foundation carefully considers the range and impact of grants across the county with the intention of supporting the safety net of services, enriching the lives of residents through the arts and enhancing educational opportunities for youth and to put that support where it is most needed.

A majority of grants are awarded to current or prior grantees, but new Letters of Inquiry are reviewed monthly and invitations for full proposals extended routinely. Letters of Inquiry, grant applications and awards are tracked electronically. The Foundation does not require arduous reporting, but maintains strong productive relationships with grantees. Site visits and other due diligence activity is shared between the ED and staff with occasional Board participation. A full list of grantees is available on the Foundation's website.

The Foundation has broad goals around impact focusing on the specific needs of different areas of the diverse county. The strategy has developed into a matrix of small to medium size grants often operational support grants and new program grants that provide leverage for other funding.

#### *NEWSMAKERS: Lesher Speakers Series*

It was Dean Lesher's vision that Walnut Creek become the cultural hub of the East Bay. He hoped that the Lesher Center for the Arts would be a center of public discourse in addition to providing quality arts and cultural programming. Since 2004, the Foundation has underwritten NEWSMAKERS: Lesher Speaker Series. Each year, speakers are presented from the fields of politics, international affairs, journalism, sports and entertainment to present a broad array of engaging topics. Past speakers include notable figures such as Colin Powell, Doris Kearns Goodwin, Dr. Neil deGrasse Tyson, and Madeleine K. Albright. In addition to promoting public discourse, it is the goal of NEWSMAKERS: Lesher Speaker Series to promote the East Bay's nonprofit community. For each lecture, a nonprofit is selected as a partner to

highlight and support. The ED is often part of these public presentations and has been called upon to introduce speakers, facilitate discussions and generally support the success of each event.

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ESSENTIAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Leadership; Community and Family Engagement**

- Represent the Foundation by effectively communicating the organization's mission, vision and program priorities to nonprofit partners and the public at large;
- Create and maintain strong relationships with nonprofit organizations and community leaders throughout the region in order to understand and articulate evolving needs in the county and region;
- Continue to provide leadership, influence and support to the County's nonprofit community and appropriately manage the well-regarded reputation of the Foundation for being an indispensable part of the regional leadership;
- Work closely with the Board Chair to understand and advance appropriate board governance; maintain clear lines of communication and provide well-defined opportunities for board engagement;
- Offer the Board opportunities to become involved in issues of importance to the grantmaking and philanthropic strategy of the organization;
- Be a respected leader representing the Foundation in local, regional and national philanthropic circles, and bring to the region the best ideas and practices for building effective responses to community needs;
- Maintain a high level of knowledge on issues and regulation applicable to charitable giving (accounting, legal, investment, etc.);
- Work with the Board Chair to inform and engage the Family in grantmaking and social impact models; for example, invite their participation in conferences and convenings or provide expert speakers or partners to address the Board;
- Represent the Foundation in the community at large; at public and private events, grantee events, public hearings, panels and various other engagements in the region, including (if desired,) board service for other community nonprofits or philanthropic organizations.

### **Grantmaking and Related Activities**

- With program staff, evaluate Letters of Intent, Grant Applications and conduct due diligence, including interviews, site visits, and review of budgets and financial information. Prepare summaries and make recommendations to the Board concerning grant proposals;
- Research and keep abreast of issues, trends, exemplary programs and best practices (nationally as well as locally) in the Foundation's major program areas;
- Expand the Foundation's capacity to develop programs to strengthen and support the nonprofit and public sectors responsible for the needs of the region;
- Collaborate with the Board to consider new philanthropic initiatives and design grant programs as needed;
- Monitor grantee performance by reviewing and summarizing grantee reports, maintaining positive relationships with grantees, following up with grantees as needed to obtain necessary information, providing technical assistance, and engaging in problem-solving. Work with grantees to ensure compliance with grant agreements and successful program implementation;
- Communicate with nonprofit agencies, public and private funders and the public about the Foundation's grantmaking priorities, guidelines, and proposal review process;

- Provide overall direction to grantmaking initiatives/strategy; Develop and implement grant-making policies and procedures in conjunction with the Foundation Board, as appropriate.
- Oversee evaluation of funded programs, periodically report to the Board on the effectiveness of funding strategies;
- Provide technical assistance to grant-seekers, including guidance in fundraising, planning, organizational development, program design and volunteer leadership development;
- Develop new programming ideas and initiatives which assist the Foundation in fulfilling its mission. Including assisting the Board/Family to identify and vet of charitable causes of interest.

### **Administration**

- Manage the day-to-day operations of the Foundation including overseeing grant administration and operations and ensure compliance with all policies, as well as legal and contractual obligations;
- Oversee budgeting, investments, the annual financial audit, tax filings, and maintenance of correct and complete records required for the healthy operation of the Foundation;
- Work with the Board and investment advisors to ensure that the Foundation's investments and financial management are effective and appropriately aligned with the Foundation's vision and mission;
- Retain a highly-qualified and motivated professional staff; delegate specific responsibilities with appropriate authority and establish accountability; foster open communications;
- Arrange and attend board meetings and activities including preparing facilities and agenda; oversees materials development; implement board directives; communicate with the Board between meetings; prepares drafts of minutes of board meetings;
- Leads the Board in its strategic planning and establishes objectives based on goals and budget considerations agreed upon by the Board;
- Supports board continuity and development of leadership capacity within the Board, including developing/overseeing board engagement activities, specifically among the next generation, development of family/foundation internal communications, and presentation of other educational opportunities;
- Supervises the preparation of the public and regulatory reports, content on the website, and other communications and outreach activities.

### **EXPERIENCE**

#### ***A successful ED candidate will likely have:***

- Significant experience with a grantmaking Foundation and/or broad experience leading a well-respected nonprofit;
- Familiarity with Contra Costa County's nonprofit landscape;
- Prior experience with family philanthropy or similar experience;
- Experience as the face of an organization; well-developed interpersonal skills; superb oral and written communication skills; able to listen and present ideas clearly and persuasively;
- Ability to accurately assess nonprofit leadership, operational, and financial capacity and perform other due diligence required;
- Strong financial and organizational management experience; knowledge of financial instruments, rules, regulations and standards for Family Foundations;
- Evidence of developing and implementing strategy- a strategic thinker, planner and executor with an operating style that encourages cooperation;
- A history of strong collaboration; someone who actively seeks strategic partnerships;

- Well-schooled in nonprofit management and willing to be resource for the nonprofit community;
- Excellent analytical ability including the ability to summarize complex issues clearly and concisely and to develop and convey cogent recommendations;
- Ability to manage and track multiple projects and activities to successful conclusion;
- Bachelor's degree at a minimum, advanced degree preferred.

## ATTRIBUTES

- Has sound judgment, tact, humility, and discretion required to work effectively with the Board of Trustees, family members, other funders, thought-leaders, grant applicants, grantees, and program beneficiaries;
- Exhibits the qualities of a “servant leader”—listens first, seeks to understand and works in the best interest of the community, the Foundation and keeps the mission as a guidepost;
- Understands that building a reputation of high ethics requires that values are lived every day, and in every way--acting always in the best interest of the community and reflecting the values of the Foundation;
- Emotionally mature with a good sense of humor, someone who is at ease in many places and with all people; able to interact with diverse communities with grace and confidence;
- Extremely proactive approach to work; solutions-oriented with attention to detail;
- A good listener and strategist; comfortable receiving input from many sources and able to bring others together, building consensus and creating cohesive and well-supported plans;
- Inspires trust, creativity and unity;
- Strong work ethic coupled with an enthusiastic and optimistic approach to one's work.

For additional details or to submit your experience for review, please contact;

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