City of Aspen
Wheeler Opera House
Executive Director
For 125 years, the story of the Wheeler has been the story of the town. Through boom and bust and boom again, both building and town have proven a resiliency and tenacity that have defied the odds.

Organization
Located in Aspen, Colorado, the Wheeler Opera House (Wheeler) opened its doors on April 23, 1889 and has since become an integral part of civic life within this mountain community. Built during Aspen’s mining heyday in the late nineteenth century, the Wheeler was the dream of Jerome B. Wheeler. A well-heeled New Yorker, Mr. Wheeler turned his attention to Aspen in the 1880s to invest in mining. Eventually, Wheeler would build the four-story Hotel Jerome and the building that became known as the Wheeler Opera House. Originally, the building's first level housed the Wheeler Bank and a few other commercial outlets, with an elegant proscenium theater in the upper levels. After its opening, the Wheeler became a stop for traveling theatricals, vaudeville, and music events. The collapse of the silver market and two dreadful fires in 1912 almost destroyed the venue. The boarded up and forgotten building was purchased by the City of Aspen in 1918.

In the 1940s, Chicagoans Walter and Elizabeth Paepcke’s launch of the Aspen Institute and the Aspen Music Festival led them to discover the shuttered Wheeler building. In 1949, the community came together to clean out the performance space and complete a spare renovation under the architectural guidance of Bauhaus master Herbert Bayer. A second renovation led by Bayer in the 1960s did not address the structural issues that plagued the nearly 100-year-old building. In the mid-1970s, the Aspen Music Festival led the effort for the structural overhaul and renovation of this historic jewel. To fund the project, a visionary City Council established a taxing mechanism in 1979: a one-half of one percent Real Estate Transfer Tax (RETT) assessed to property buyers within city limits. A major renovation of the building was completed in 1984, returning the historic venue to its original Victorian grandeur. In 2015, the Wheeler completed the final phase of a $9 million renovation and technology upgrade project.

Today, the Wheeler continues to be at the heart of arts and culture in Aspen, hosting an array of performing arts programs through the year. The Wheeler Presents series features a full slate of music, comedy, and touring acts, as well as popular festivals, including the Aspen Laugh Festival, Aspen Mountain Film Festival, and Shining Mountains Film Festival. During the summer, the Wheeler hosts the Aspen Music Festival and School programs. The Wheeler operates Aspen Show Tix, a community box office that provides convenient, in-person phone and online access to tickets for the Wheeler and off-site clients throughout the region. A 2020 study commissioned by the City of the Wheeler’s programming and utilization in 2018 and 2019 showed that the venue hosted an average of 162 events per year, with an average utilization of 266 days (including load-in and out days, maintenance, installations, and event days). Aspen Music Festival is the most frequent user of the venue, with an average of 70 days annually. Wheeler Presents and co-productions accounts for 64 days. Other cultural partners combined with community groups use the space for an average of 94 days.
The Wheeler is a department of the City of Aspen, which owns and operates the 500-seat performing arts facility. Diane Foster serves as Assistant City Manager, providing oversight of the Wheeler. The nine-member Wheeler Advisory Board, appointed by Aspen City Council, is empowered to advise the City on the planning and policy related to the daily and long-term operations of the venue, including recommending scheduling policy, priority, and rates for the theater and commercial spaces in the building. The Wheeler employs 14 full-time staff members and 25 to 30 seasonal and part-time staff members. FY20 approved expenditures are approximately $3.8 million in operating expenditures, $975,100 in capital expenditures, and $633,300 in transfers to other funds. FY20 approved revenues are $5.9 million, with $4.5 million from the RETT and investment income and $1 million from earned income through ticket sales, rentals, and box office fees. This RETT is in place until December 31, 2039. The Wheeler Opera House Fund was budgeted to end FY20 with a fund balance of $26.9 million.

Community
Located in the Rocky Mountains in the heart of the White River National Forest, the City of Aspen is globally recognized for its spectacular landscape, outdoor recreational opportunities, and a vibrant arts and cultural scene. The city sits close to 8,000 feet from sea level, making it one of the most elevated cities in the United States. Aspen is the county seat and, with a population of 7,401 residents, the most populous city of Pitkin County.

Aspen has a fascinating history. For more than 800 years, the Roaring Fork Valley was the ancestral lands of the Ute people. With roots in silver mining, Aspen is one of three towns in Pitkin County that emerged during the Colorado Silver Boom of the late nineteenth century. The collapse of the silver market in 1893 led to a significant depopulation of the area for nearly five decades, known as The Quiet Years. Chicago industrialist Walter Paepcke and his wife Elizabeth led the development of the Aspen Skiing Company in the mid 1940s, developing Aspen Mountain into a premier winter resort. The Paepckes also helped develop the Aspen Idea—a vision for a community that is focused on the integration of mind, body, and spirit, which has guided the growth of this mountain community since the 1940s.

Today, Aspen Snowmass is consistently ranked as one of the top ski resorts in the world, attracting thousands of visitors each year. Outdoor pursuits are year-round, with hiking, fishing, and camping as popular options during the warmer seasons. Downtown Aspen’s shopping district features dozens of high-end retailers, restaurants, boutiques, and art galleries. The Aspen Saturday Market, a local farmers market operating from mid-June to early September, features Colorado-grown produce and artisan products. The Roaring Fork Transportation Authority is the largest rural transit system in the United States, providing bus service to Aspen and the surrounding region. Aspen/Pitkin County Airport is served by several major airlines, with direct flights to Dallas/Fort Worth, Salt Lake City, and Denver.

The arts and humanities flourish in Aspen. The Aspen Music Festival and School is one of the top music festivals in the United States, featuring an eight-week summer season with more than 400 classical music events and a world-renowned music training program for young people. The Aspen Institute hosts the renowned Aspen Ideas Festival, a forum for global leaders to present and discuss contemporary issues and ideas. The Aspen Historical Society interprets the earlier history of the region through three historic properties: the Wheeler/Stallard Museum, Holden/Marolt Mining & Ranching Museum, and the Ashcroft Ghost Town. The Aspen Art Museum presents exhibitions and programs of international contemporary art. Anderson Ranch Arts Center is highly regarded as a destination for visual artists’ professional development. The Red Brick Center for the Arts, also a department of the City of Aspen, hosts exhibitions by Colorado artists and diverse arts classes. Jazz Aspen Snowmass produces two major jazz events annually. Aspen Santa Fe Ballet performs in Aspen, tours internationally, and operates a well-established ballet school.

Sources: edited from cityofaspen.com, wheeleroperahouse.com
Position Summary
The Executive Director will provide leadership to the Wheeler, ensuring the historic venue’s role as the premier site for concerts, movies, festivals, lectures, community events, opera, and other arts and entertainment events in the Roaring Fork Valley. An energetic and enthusiastic leader with a passion for the performing arts and a firm commitment to public service, this individual will ensure the effective management and operations of the Wheeler for the benefit of Aspen residents and visitors. They will strive to present artistic and cultural programming of the highest caliber directly or in partnership with cultural and community organizations. The Executive Director will partner with local and regional artists and arts organizations. This position will report to the Assistant City Manager with dotted line reporting to the City Manager, guided by the policy decisions recommended by the Wheeler Advisory Board and ratified by the Aspen City Council. Thanks to Aspen’s RETT, fundraising will not be required of this role, allowing the Executive Director and staff to focus on building community through programming and partnerships rather than fundraising.

Roles and Responsibilities
Programmatic and Artistic Leadership
- Plan, produce, organize, and direct programs and events at the Wheeler, working directly and in partnership with arts and cultural organizations, artists, agents, promoters, and community groups.
- Set the artistic vision for the Wheeler Presents series and festivals while ensuring that the venue’s annual programming balances local, regional, and national acts as well as a combination of in-house productions, partners, and rental events.
- Develop and nurture creative relationships with Aspen cultural producers and presenters, identifying opportunities to collaborate or partner in innovative programs.
- Encourage nonprofit and for-profit community and professional arts producers, promoters, and presenters to use the Wheeler as a catalyst for the growth and development of Aspen’s cultural sector.

Organizational Stability and Venue Management
- Collaborate with the City Manager’s Office and other City departments in the development and implementation of strategic and long-range operational planning, capital asset management, budgeting, and procurement.
- Manage financial resources in adherence with City policies, maintaining internal controls and providing timely financial updates to City leadership.
- Prepare and present reports to the Aspen City Council as directed by the City Manager.
- Direct and supervise the Wheeler staff, establishing priorities, developing annual workplans, mentoring and supporting their development as performing arts venue professionals, and guiding the staff in the implementation of City policies and procedures to ensure that Wheeler resources are managed in an effective, efficient, and professional manner.
- Support and collaborate with the Wheeler Advisory Board, providing timely and accurate information to assist in the execution of its policy advisory responsibilities.
- Oversee the Wheeler schedule of programs and events, rentals, and partnerships, ensuring the adequate allocation of resources to support programs and operations.
- Establish and maintain sound venue management practices to provide a safe workplace for staff, guest artists, and contract personnel.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the venue operations, collecting and assessing data to support operating and programmatic decisions.
- Maximize earned revenue opportunities by analyzing audience participation and community trends that could impact attendance to Wheeler productions.
- Initiate and oversee capital projects that preserve the historic nature of the venue, as well as upgrades to technical systems and visitor amenities, working in collaboration with the appropriate City departments.

Communication and Community Engagement
- Provide the marketing direction for the Wheeler, leading staff and contract personnel in the development and implementation of effective promotional strategies for programs and events.
- Represent the Wheeler throughout the community, engaging with local organizations to increase the awareness of and participation in the venue’s programs.
- Expand opportunities for educational and community outreach programs that are aligned with the Wheeler’s performing arts season.
While fundraising is frequently part of role of a performing arts center Executive Director, thanks to Aspen’s .05% Real Estate Transfer Tax (RETT), fundraising is not required. Created initially by the Aspen City Council in 1979 and renewed by the voters of Aspen who extended the tax in 1997 and 2016, this RETT is in place until December 31, 2039. This allows the Wheeler Executive Director and staff to focus on building community through programming and partnerships, not fundraising.

**Traits and Characteristics**

The Executive Director will be a collaborative leader, passionate about the performing arts and community building. Forward-looking and innovative, this individual will be receptive to new ideas and approaches and keenly aware of emerging trends in the performing arts. With strong interpersonal and communication skills, they will be comfortable engaging with a variety of people. Thoughtful and sensitive, the Executive Director will be an agile negotiator. Their versatility and adaptability to changing circumstances will enable them to be fast acting and decisive, using intuition and past experiences to inform their decisions. They will value transparency in communication with their team, supporting team decisions and sharing responsibility for successes and failures. The Executive Director will leverage their networks to obtain support and achieve results for the organization.

Other key competencies include:

- **Leadership** – The ability to inspire others with a clear sense of purpose and direction, creating an environment that allows others to be successful while making decisions that advance the organization’s mission.

- **Diplomacy and Negotiation** – The capacity to listen to multiple points of view, tactfully handling sensitive or difficult issues and facilitating beneficial outcomes that are mutually satisfactory.

- **Teamwork** – The predisposition to work towards consensus, recognizing and appreciating team members’ individual perspectives and effectively guiding the team to resolve issues that may limit their effectiveness.

- **Personal Accountability** – The willingness to self-evaluate by utilizing and analyzing feedback and data and taking responsibility for their actions and results.

- **Self-Starting and Time and Priority Management** – The self-confidence to take initiative and prioritize and complete tasks while meeting deadlines, creating an environment that is results-oriented and conducive to effectiveness.

**Qualifications**

At least five years of progressive senior management experience in a performing arts or theatrical venue, with at least three years of direct supervisory experience, is required. Knowledgeable of new trends and ideas in the performing arts, qualified candidates will have demonstrated experience collaborating with resident companies, agents, and promoters. Expertise in maximizing ticket revenue and creating multi-disciplinary seasons for diverse audiences is necessary. Excellent speaking, writing, and public presentation skills are needed. Ability to manage complex budgets and interpret policies and procedures is highly desired. A bachelor’s degree in theater management, arts administration, or a related field are required.
Compensation and Benefits
The City of Aspen provides competitive compensation with a comprehensive benefits package that include medical, dental, and vision insurance; health savings and flexible spending accounts; 401(a) employer retirement contributions; paid time off; tuition reimbursement assistance; and wellness incentives. The City also provides employees with several options related to housing, relocation assistance and city employee housing may be available. The hiring salary range for this position is between $115,000 and $126,000, depending on qualifications.

Applications and Inquiries
To submit a cover letter and resume with a summary of demonstrable accomplishments, please click here or visit artsconsulting.com/employment. For questions or general inquiries about this job opportunity, please contact:

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