



NEW  
YORK  
CITY  
CENTER

## **Position Specification**

New York City Center

President and Chief Executive Officer

## Our Client

New York City Center has played a defining role in the cultural life of New York City since 1943 when it was founded by Mayor Fiorello La Guardia with the mission to make the best of the performing arts accessible to all. City Center's distinctive and recently renovated neo-Moorish theater, juxtaposing original and forward-looking design, welcomes 300,000 visitors annually to experience internationally acclaimed artists on the same stage where legends like George Balanchine, Leonard Bernstein, and Barbara Cook made their mark. Its landmark 75th Anniversary Season (2018 – 2019) paid tribute to this rich history while celebrating the institution's singular role in the arts today.

For nearly 30 years, the treasured, Tony-honored Encores! series has given new life to the American musical theater canon (allowing musicals like *Chicago* to start anew at City Center and become an international commercial Broadway hit), complemented in recent years by the Encores! Off-Center series, which brings today's innovative artists into contact with groundbreaking musicals from the more recent past. Along with musical theater, dance is a critical component of City Center's mission. The organization promotes this work through programs like the annual Fall for Dance Festival, which exposes new audiences to an international array of artists by offering subsidized tickets for the price of a movie ticket. Through its commissioning program, City Center allows renowned and emerging dance artists to incubate commissioned dance works and provides artists with both a nurturing refuge and a place to develop new projects.

City Center is also home to a roster of renowned national and international companies and programs, including Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (City Center's Principal Dance Company), Flamenco Festival, Matthew Bourne's New Adventures, and Manhattan Theatre Club. In addition to its mainstage programming, City Center activates all areas of the building with talks, master classes, art exhibitions, and intimate performances that provide audiences an up-close look at the work of the great dance artists of our time.

City Center has a robust education and community engagement program, bringing the arts to over 11,000 New York City students, teachers, and families in New York City public schools and community centers across New York each year. For example, City Center Education hosts school-time matinees for school groups in all five boroughs featuring artists who appear on the mainstage. Each year, this extremely popular program allows over 6,000 students and educators to enjoy world-class performances that enhance students' learning experiences. City Center also offers myriad professional development workshops and resources for teachers. As part of its commitment to building a pipeline for tomorrow's arts administrators, creative personnel and theater production staff, City Center annually offers paid apprenticeships to young professionals from underrepresented communities.

## Mission and Programmatic Priorities

New York City Center is a leading center for dance and musical theater in New York City. Dedicated to making the arts accessible to the broadest possible audience, City Center creates a welcoming environment and engages all audiences with inspiring programming that reflects the eclecticism, energy, and spirit of New York City.

The key pillars of City Center's Dance Program include:

- Fall for Dance Festival: The Fall for Dance Festival, launched in 2004, was created with the goal of presenting unforgettable dance performances from around the globe at an accessible price to build new and diverse audience for dance. Companies and artists have ranged from the New York City Ballet and Mark Morris Dance Company to Michelle Dorrance and Savion Glover to Vuyani Dance Theatre (South

Africa), Nrityagram (India) and National Ballet of China. The central tenets of the Festival remain consistent: to offer wide access to the highest-caliber dance, to develop new audiences for the art form, and to provide a unique showcase opportunity for a broad range of dance artists. The incomparably low ticket price of \$15 for every seat in the house opens up the Festival to people of all income levels, including those who might not otherwise be able to afford or access live professional dance performances.

- **Commissioning:** Each season, City Center expands the dance canon and supports the field’s most exciting choreographers, such as Kyle Abraham, Annabelle Lopez Ochoa and Justin Peck, by commissioning new work to premiere in the Fall for Dance Festival and throughout the dance season.
- **Artists at the Center:** Beginning in the 2021-22 Season, City Center launched a new initiative called Artists at the Center, which places some of today’s most important artists like Tiler Peck and Ayodele Casal at the center of the curatorial process. Artists at the Center serves to promote more artist-initiated presentations across City Center’s programming, to support the development of new work with City Center commissions, and above all to offer artists a level of creative freedom and opportunity they could find only at City Center.
- **City Center Dance Festival:** In March of 2022, New York City Center launched the City Center Dance Festival, a springtime complement to its long-running Fall for Dance Festival. This spring engagement brings artists together around a single theme or genre of dance. The inaugural year focused on paying tribute to the iconic New York dance companies including Paul Taylor, Ballet Hispanico and Dance Theater of Harlem who had been absent from the stage for so long due to the pandemic.
- **Mainstage Presentations:** Beyond these annual initiatives, City Center presents a wide range of high-profile dance engagements every year. For example, this season City Center presented Twyla Now, a celebration of legendary choreographer Twyla Tharp on her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday with commissioned new work by Ms. Tharp performed by some of today’s most acclaimed dancers. Each season is highlighted by City Center’s Principal Dance Company Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, who perform their annual winter season here at City Center.

**Studio 5 Series:** Studio 5 is a behind-the-scenes series that features intimate performances and illuminating conversations about dance with leaders in the field. Presented in the Barbara and David Zalaznick Studio, this program welcomes audiences into the creative process in the very spaces where artists create.

City Center’s Theater Program currently encompasses, but is not limited to:

- **Encores!** The Tony Award-honored Encores! series has been a pillar of City Center’s programming since 1994. Each season, Encores! celebrates the tradition of American musical theater with revivals showcasing original orchestrations as they were meant to be heard. With only a brief rehearsal period, these classic shows are presented for only one week. They feature today’s most exciting talent on stage and behind the scenes, with the Encores! Orchestra at center stage. From its loyal, passionate audience base to the theatergoers of tomorrow, Encores! provides generations of New Yorkers with the rare opportunity to experience classic Broadway musicals seldom produced at this scale. Encores! has featured theater greats including Patti LuPone, Joel Grey, Kristin Chenoweth, Vanessa Williams, Nathan Lane, LaChanze, Victoria Clark, Megan Hilty, Kelli O’Hara, and Brian Stokes Mitchell. Seven Encores productions have transferred to Broadway.
- **Annual Gala Presentation:** Beginning with *Annie Get Your Gun* in 2015, City Center has presented a Gala production each year, which utilizes the Encores! production model to showcase a popular title from the

American canon. The addition of a Gala presentation enables City Center to engage its musical theater audiences year-round and to broaden its base. Subsequent productions have included *Sunday in the Park with George* (2016) starring Jake Gyllenhaal and Annaleigh Ashford; *Brigadoon* (2017) starring Kelli O'Hara, Patrick Wilson, Aasif Mandvi, Stephanie J. Block, and Robert Fairchild; *A Chorus Line* (2018) featuring Tony Yazbeck, Leigh Zimmerman, and Robyn Hurder; and *Evita* (2019) starring Solea Pfeiffer, Maia Reficco, and Jason Gotay. *Sunday in the Park with George* transferred to Broadway, highlighting City Center's prominence in shining new life and artistic relevance for a commercial audience.

### **Organization and Governance**

New York City Center has an annual budget of approximately \$29 million (approximately one third of which is raised annually through philanthropic and government funding), a team of 55 administrative staff (at full capacity), 150-200 unionized and seasonal staff, a world-class team of artistic leadership and advisors, and endowment and quasi-endowment funds in excess of \$26 million. The organization is governed by a 40-person Board of Trustees and benefits from the advice and guidance of its Emeriti Council and ex-officio members. The artistic leadership and advisors of City Center includes Tony-Award winning composer Jeanine Tesori and acclaimed director Lear deBessonet, and the Board includes artists of great stature and influence including Victoria Clark, Jake Gyllenhaal, David Hallberg, Damian Woetzel, and Kelli O'Hara. A strong sense of community and collegiality is a hallmark of City Center and is deeply appreciated among its constituents.

For more information about New York City Center, please visit: <https://www.nycitycenter.org/>.

### **The Opportunity**

Under Arlene Shuler's leadership, City Center has accomplished substantial artistic, programmatic, and institutional growth and achievement. During her tenure, the organization has been transformed into a producing house that commissions and presents, on average, 60 percent of its annual programming; the organization's budget has grown from \$10M to nearly \$30M. The organization's next leader will be challenged to honor this legacy and continue this work, to harness the core values that have fostered City Center's growth over the past 75+ years as the People's Theatre, and also to define and lead the path forward at a time when performing arts organizations must review and rearticulate their role and relevance in society.

The next President and CEO of New York City Center will join the organization at a moment of significant financial and critical success. Working in close collaboration with the Board of Directors and senior management team, the President and CEO will lead the organization forward boldly and responsibly. Starting from an excellent financial position, they will lead City Center to achieve its mission in a post-COVID environment where creativity, collaboration, and flexibility will be more important than ever. The new leader must define their own voice and vision for City Center, furthering its reputation of innovation, accessibility, and artistic excellence.

### **The Role**

Reporting to the Board of Directors, the President and CEO works in tandem with the executive leadership team and staff to ensure that New York City Center fulfills its mission and realizes its goals for artistic, financial, and organizational success. The President and CEO is the driver of City Center's creative vision, as well as long-term planning and goal setting. They have overall responsibility for internal leadership, including senior team management, program development and administration, fundraising, institutional marketing, operational

business management, and financial sustainability. They also play the lead role in representing City Center externally to the New York artistic and philanthropic communities. The President and CEO will build and sustain new and existing relationships with a wide range of individuals who are part of the City Center community, including individual donors, artists, New York residents, as well as cultural, business, education, and civic leaders.

The President and CEO is responsible for inspiring, leading, and managing a senior team that includes the Vice President and Chief Operating Officer; Vice President and Chief Financial Officer; Vice President of Development; Vice President & Artistic Director, Dance Programs; Encores! Artistic Director; Vice President of Marketing & Communications; and Vice President of Education and Community Engagement.

Specific responsibilities of the President and CEO include:

- The President and CEO fosters and maintains an environment that supports creativity, programmatic excellence, support for artists, community partnerships, and relationships with local audiences – existing and new. Together with staff, they develop partnerships, programs, and collaborations that advance the mission of City Center while providing the best performing arts experiences for New York’s diverse audiences of all ages.
- Working with the Board and staff, the President and CEO shapes City Center’s strategic priorities, internal organizational structure, and resource allocation to support the organization’s mission and vision, and they ensure that its strategic and programmatic objectives are fully articulated, and transparently and effectively pursued.
- The President and CEO serves as the public representative and spokesperson for City Center with external and internal stakeholders. The CEO develops and promotes the City Center brand to increase public awareness of its programs and grow visitation. The CEO productively and effectively partners with a wide range of artists, creative producers, and resident companies.
- The President and CEO implements sound fiscal management and assures the financial sustainability of City Center, including strong financial and operational systems and budgetary processes; they make decisions efficiently and communicate them with transparency. They approach the financial oversight of City Center with discipline and balance, exerting an even-handed and reasoned approach to budgetary decision-making in full transparency and collaboration with the Board of Trustees.
- The President and CEO supports a culture of diversity and inclusivity at all internal and public-facing levels, from programming, to staff training, to Board development and community relationships. They take action to prioritize diversity, equity, and anti-racist principles and work actively to attract diverse talent to City Center’s staff, Board, and stage, to create an equitable and inclusive culture, to include diverse perspectives in strategy and decision-making, and to be a champion for equity and access at City Center.
- The CEO is the organization’s chief fundraiser. Working with the Vice President of Development, the President and CEO provides guidance, impetus, and support to the fundraising efforts of the Board. The CEO establishes and maintains productive relationships with individuals, foundations, corporate sponsors, and local civic funders to ensure that City Center achieves or exceeds its contributed income goals from all sources. Expanding and diversifying the organizations’ donor base is critical.
- The CEO works closely with the Board Chair and other Board Directors to identify and recruit board members, to ensure effective governance, and create continuity of leadership for the organization. The CEO provides staff support to the Board and its committees and ensures that the Board has the timely

and accurate information it needs for decision-making. The CEO will prioritize Board cultivation and engagement, understanding that Trustees are key partners and ambassadors that are critical to not only City Center’s financial stability, but in ensuring its visibility and promoting City Center.

- The CEO recruits, motivates, supervises, evaluates, and provides leadership to a high caliber staff in an organization that values teamwork, is committed to transparency, welcomes new ideas, and encourages personal development. They will promote an open environment of curiosity and experimentation among staff, and continue to foster a culture that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive.
- The CEO balances best business practices with risk-taking and innovation. They encourage entrepreneurial thinking and support, both artistically and through fundraising, the creation of innovative and exceptional programs of the highest caliber.

## **Candidate Profile**

New York City Center seeks an innovative, collaborative, thoughtful, strategic, and inspiring leader with a demonstrated passion for the performing arts. The next President and CEO will be a strategic thinker and skilled decision-maker with a big-picture view of the performing arts industry and a track record of evaluating options and achieving positive outcomes. The candidate will possess the ability to work effectively with creative talent, to engage diverse audiences, and to champion education – formal and informal – through the performing arts. The ideal candidate will have a deep appreciation for the mission of City Center and both the desire and the ability to advance a vision for the years ahead.

In terms of professional experiences, the Board seeks to identify candidates who bring experience leading organizations or multi-faceted and complex departments through change. Furthermore, the Board is looking for someone with a broad enough perspective in the performing arts to strengthen City Center’s various artistic programs and the synergy between those programs. The candidate will bring established relationships within the artistic community.

The next President and CEO will bring an authentic interest in and commitment to expanding audiences for the performing arts – specifically, for musical theater and dance – and deep relationships across the performing arts community. They will be able to continue to strengthen a tight-knit and collegial environment where people can do their very best work. The next President and CEO will also continue to amplify and strengthen City Center’s commitment to education in the arts.

The ideal candidate will have excellent communication skills, including the ability to be an articulate advocate for the performing arts, education, and community engagement. They will be an enthusiastic fundraiser, with the ability to build ideological and financial support for major initiatives, to cultivate and maintain relationships with donors, to solicit funds effectively, and to provide excellent stewardship for all gifts.

*In terms of the performance and personal competencies required for the position, we would highlight the following:*

### **Strategic Acumen**

- Ability to continually guide, shape, and evolve City Center’s organizational identity while protecting the integrity of its unique culture and reputation for partnership, artistic excellence, and accessibility.

- Possesses the executive skills to lead City Center forward during a time of great change and transformation across the field of performing arts; sets clear priorities and makes difficult decisions with transparency; listens, seeks data from a variety of sources to support decisions.
- Demonstrates a deep and current knowledge of the key trends in performing arts influencing City Center’s mission and ability to achieve impact.
- Track record of strong fiscal and strategic discipline and outcomes; results-oriented, thoughtful, and courageous; will take calculated risks and use resources creatively in terms of innovation while demonstrating pragmatism with respect to both expenses and revenues.

**Fundraising and Resource Development**

- Experience in building an institution’s funding base – including from individual, corporate, and foundation funders – as well as through fresh pathways for earned income; demonstrates an ability to engage prospective funders and partners.
- Proven success forging and maintaining mutually productive relationships with peer institutions and partners to further an organization’s impact.

**Management and Operational Excellence**

- Demonstrated success enabling a team to translate organizational strategy into clear goals and objectives as well as aligning key constituents around key institutional decisions.
- Proven ability to carefully steward organizational assets, balance budgets, and make smart decisions within financial resources.
- Comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty, and able to adapt quickly and flexibly to unforeseen challenges and lead others through complex situations; capable of flexing between practical and operational problem-solving and long-term strategy.
- Recruits and develops top talent, delegates effectively, and manages performance with accountability; widely viewed as a leader who develops others, and who trusts and leverages the expertise of staff; fosters a culture of collaboration, respect, and empowerment.
- Brings deep personal commitment to diversity, equity, access, and inclusion in all aspects of the organization’s work.

**Collaboration and Building Relationships**

- Exhibits a consensus-seeking, but decisive approach to problem solving that enables them to effectively build support for City Center’s programs initiatives.
- Able to communicate superbly and inspire trust through both powerful charisma and humility; demonstrates strong emotional intelligence; makes others feel welcome and at ease.
- A truly skilled internal and external communicator with an ability to engage effectively and inclusively with a diverse range of audiences, partners, and audiences. Can build cohesion and collaboration among artistic leadership, resident companies, and City Center’s non-profit and Broadway partners.
- Able to actively bring City Center into the community, and new communities into City Center.

**Contact**

Russell Reynolds Associates has been exclusively retained for this search. Given the need for confidentiality throughout this process, prospective candidates are invited to reach out directly to our search consultants at [NewYorkCityCenter@russellreynolds.com](mailto:NewYorkCityCenter@russellreynolds.com) with a resume and brief explanation of interest.

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