



**An invitation to apply for the position of**

**Director  
Folger Shakespeare Library  
Washington, DC**

The Folger Shakespeare Library (the Folger) seeks a seasoned and strategic director with energy and vision to lead the organization into its second century. This is an opportunity to join an organization with a proud history, a distinguished reputation, and transformational ambitions. The Folger boasts the world's largest collection of printed works of William Shakespeare, rare materials from the early modern period, and physical and electronic resources related to the understanding and interpretation of Shakespeare and his time. It offers advanced scholarly programs, national outreach to K-12 students and professionals, Shakespeare-inspired performances and programming, and family programs, all of the highest quality. Indeed, it is at the intersection of these activities where the Folger finds its strength and distinction. Each year, millions visit in person and virtually.

The Director will join the Folger at an auspicious time: in 2024 the institution will conclude a \$80.5 million comprehensive capital project more than 10 years in planning and four years in construction. The next Director will have the singular opportunity to guide, support, and shape the Folger as visitors return to the building for the first time since 2020. The reimagined Folger will have 12,000 square feet of new space, two new exhibition halls, a learning lab, and collaborative research spaces, as well as accessible entrances, a café, and a new gift shop. This renovation represents an expansion of the Folger's scope and ambition: to continue to serve and support the scholars and researchers who flock to the Folger to access its rich collections, and simultaneously to increase the Folger's level of engagement with the general public, the diverse communities of Washington, DC and the surrounding region, and visitors from across the nation and around the globe.

The Folger seeks a director with the imagination, passion, and leadership ability to guide the organization as it retains its position of excellence as a resource for scholars, students, performers, and audiences; builds and expands its programs and offerings; and becomes more inclusive, experiential, and accessible to general and specialized audiences. The next Director will bring vision, a strategic mindset, an orientation toward collaboration and generosity, curiosity about and determination to advance all activities contained within the Folger, a transparent and communicative leadership style, and a sophisticated understanding of the operational and financial requirements necessary to fulfill the organization's commitments and aspirations.

The Folger Shakespeare Library has retained Isaacson, Miller, the national executive search firm, to support the search committee in this recruitment. All inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed to the search firm as noted at the end of this document.

## THE FOLGER SHAKESPEARE LIBRARY

The origins of the Folger Shakespeare Library date to 1885, when Henry Clay Folger bought a facsimile copy of the 1623 First Folio of William Shakespeare's plays as a gift for his wife, Emily Jordan Folger. The spark of their interest in Shakespeare was kindled. Four years later they acquired their first rare book, a copy of the 1685 Fourth Folio. In the following decades, the collection grew, such that when the library was opened in 1932, the collection amounted to 200,000 items. The Folgers considered Stratford, England as an appropriate location for their extraordinary collection, but opted for Washington, DC, the nation's capital, as a gift to the American people. Emily Folger wrote of Henry Folger's belief that Shakespeare "is one of our best sources, one of the wells from which we Americans draw our national thought, our faith and our hope." This belief in the deep connection between Shakespeare and America is the reason the Folger Shakespeare Library is located in the nation's capital. In 1938, the Library acquired the collection of Sir Robert Leicester Harmsworth, comprising more than 8,000 rare books printed in England between 1475 and 1640. These collections were supplemented by another 20,000 editions dated between 1701 and 1800. Still growing today, the Folger's collection constitutes the ultimate resource for exploring and researching the early modern age.

The activities of the present-day Folger constitute four broad and overlapping pillars:

### ***Library: Development and Preservation of the Collections***

The Folger is a member of the Independent Research Libraries Association and boasts remarkable [collections](#), second only to the British Library in its holdings of books printed in England between 1475 and 1640. Among its numerous highlights are 82 copies of 235 existing First Folios of 1623, which represent the largest collection of First Folios anywhere. The Folger also holds 58 copies of the Second Folio, 23 copies of the Third Folio, and 38 copies of the Fourth Folio. Additionally, the Folger holds nearly 200 early modern quartos of Shakespeare plays and the only copy of the first edition of *Titus Andronicus* (1594). Shakespeare and sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English books constitute the heart of the Library's holdings, accompanied and extended by 60,000 handwritten (mostly English) manuscripts dating from the fifteenth century; rare English and Continental Renaissance books including a 1477 edition of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*; and 90,000 prints, drawings, photographs, paintings, and other works of art. The Folger collections also include a wealth of performance history, including playbills, films, recordings, and stage costumes.

### ***Research and Discovery***

[Research and discovery](#) are fundamental to the Folger; the collections are intended to be actively used. Founded in 1970, the [Folger Institute](#) serves as an international center for Shakespeare scholarship and the study of the early modern period. The Institute gathers interdisciplinary communities of scholars and artists for collections-based research, innovative scholarly programs and exhibitions, and Critical Race Conversations and is one of the largest direct funders of early modern scholarly work. It provides researchers access to the world's greatest collection of Shakespeare and related materials and delivers peerless support to scholars of all ranks who pursue important questions about the early modern period. Roughly 25 percent of the fellows supported by the Institute are scholars of Shakespeare; the balance

ranges across related fields of interest in early modern humanities. The Folger Institute's Consortium – a collaborative endeavor of the Folger and more than 40 universities in the US and abroad – takes a leading role in advancing research and teaching in the humanities.

### ***Performance***

Through professional [theater](#), [poetry](#), lectures, [music](#), family programs, podcasts, and other events, the Folger provides millions of people each year with opportunities to experience the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. The Folger Theatre annually performs a season of Shakespeare-inspired productions, featuring Shakespeare's plays as well as contemporary plays inspired by his work. The 2023-2024 season includes *The Winter's Tale*, *Where We Belong*, *Metamorphoses*, and a series of public readings of world-premiere plays and commissions accompanied by conversations with scholars, artists, and critics.

Folger Consort is the Folger's resident early music ensemble. Founded in 1977, the Consort performs medieval, Renaissance, and baroque music in its concert series. Since 1970, the Folger has also hosted contemporary poets for readings and moderated conversations. Upcoming events include the annual *Emily Dickinson Birthday Tribute*, acclaimed poets Camille Dungy, Linda Gregerson, and Hannah Louise Poston, and former poet-laureate Natasha Tretheway will deliver *The Eudora Welty Lecture*.

### ***Education***

Beginning with educational outreach in the 1970s, the Folger has grown to be a leader in K-12 performance-based education. In partnership with local schools, the Folger is working to revolutionize the way that Shakespeare is [taught](#) in classrooms. [The Folger Method](#) is a way of teaching complex texts that enables all students to own and enjoy the process of close reading, interrogating texts, discovering language with peers, and contributing to the ongoing human conversation about words and ideas. More than two million teachers and students benefit each year from in-person workshops, lesson plans, webinars, online field trips, and the best-selling Folger Editions of Shakespeare's plays.

## **LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE**

The work of the Folger is enabled by more than 150 full and part-time staff, with deep passion for, commitment to, and expertise in their respective fields. The annual operating budget is \$21 million, with approximately one million dollars allocated to acquisitions, approximately three million dollars to collections and preservation, more than one million to support scholarship through the Institute, nearly half a million dollars to exhibitions, more than three and a half million dollars to performance, and over half a million dollars to education. These constitute the major budgetary commitments. Annually the Folger raises three and a half million dollars in philanthropic and other external support. As of November 2023, the value of the endowment stands at \$440 million.

Dr. Michael Witmore has been Director of the Folger since 2011; in 2023, he announced his plans to step down in 2024. Under his leadership, the Folger expanded its public and education programming. He also led, in collaboration with the board and staff, the envisioning of the Folger of the future, with a

dramatically improved and expanded physical space and substantial growth in its public-facing mission and purpose. In service to that vision, he led the most successful fundraising campaign in the institution's history. Before arriving at the Folger, Dr. Witmore was a Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and he remains a recognized pioneer in digital textual analysis and the digital humanities broadly.

In 1930, the library was placed in trust of Amherst College, Henry Folger's alma mater. The College manages the Folger's endowment and Amherst students are eligible for scholarly fellowships to draw on the Folger's collections. The Folger remains proud of the continuing connection to Amherst and sees opportunities to deepen the programmatic relationship in the future. The Folger Shakespeare Library is overseen by an independent 23-member [Board of Governors](#), which includes two Amherst trustees. The Director of the Folger is accountable to both its Board of Governors and to the president of Amherst.

### **KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE NEW DIRECTOR**

The next Director of the Folger will inherit an institution that stands at a key juncture in its history, an institution that is in strong financial health, one that has built on its storied past and boldly taken on an expanded mission and physical footprint. The Director serves as the chief executive and administrative officer of the Folger. Working closely with the Board of Governors, staff, and stakeholders, the Director will lead with vision, energy, empathy, transparency, and a data-driven approach.

Presently reporting to the Director are the following senior leaders: Chief Financial Officer; Director of Development; Director of Education; Director of the Folger Institute; Director of Marketing and Communications; Director of Programming and Artistic Director of the Folger Theatre; Director of Talent and Culture; and the Librarian and Director of Collections.

As the Folger looks to the future, the Director will lead a dynamic and dedicated staff in achieving the following interrelated outcomes, all the while sustaining the original mission of the Library:

***In close consultation with the staff and the Board of Governors, articulate and advance an inspiring vision and strategy for the Folger's second century.***

The enterprise's core assets and offerings are rich and must be sustained and further animated. Soon the Folger will re-open with an expanded footprint and significant new exhibition space, welcoming back long-time users and drawing in new visitors. In this pivotal moment, the Director will lead the synchronization of programs across the Folger so that they present a compelling and comprehensive experience for visitors and scholars alike.

The Director will make investments in each of the Folger's pillars in the context of a clear, intentional, and ambitious vision so that each pillar will work in partnership with and strengthen the rest, all in service to humanistic inquiry and civic purpose. Drawing on what is learned through the re-opening, and informed by their own experience and

creative energy, the Director will frame a bold and unifying strategy for the next chapter in the Folger's story.

The future holds enormous promise. The Folger has extraordinary assets, including the treasures of its collection and its distinctions in scholarship, performance, and education. Located a block from the US Capitol, the Folger has embraced an audacious ambition to be an essential anchor institution in a diverse and vital city. It is deeply committed to active participation in challenging conversations that elevate shared humanity, explore culture, and strengthen American democracy. The Folger is poised for a future of greater impact and influence. As it approaches its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, the Folger is prepared to take additional steps and make new investments tethered to clear strategy, all while preserving and supporting its original purpose. Articulating and realizing the Folger's second century vision is the central opportunity for the Folger's eighth Director.

***Expand, diversify, and energize the Folger's broad array of communities.***

The Director will be highly attuned to each of the Folger's essential stakeholder groups. With the general public, the Director will increase engagement with and awareness of the Folger locally, regionally, nationally, and globally. The Folger will become a compelling cultural center for neighbors as well as visitors to Washington, DC. For scholars and researchers, the Director will steward and expand access to the world-renowned collection of materials relating to Shakespeare and the early modern period, welcoming and uplifting scholars who cross disciplinary boundaries and lines of difference.

With performance audiences, the Director will build on the foundation of and diversify the ardent cadre of patrons who have given the Folger's theater, poetry, and music offerings its broadest support from the general public. They will also expand the commitment to performance as a bridge between the collection and the present day. For students, teachers, artists, and performers, the Director will ensure the Folger remains a key educational and inspirational resource for innovative teaching and performance of Shakespeare and the early modern period, cultivating students and audiences of all ages to become passionate advocates for the role of the humanities in civic life.

***Raise the Folger's profile as the premier cultural organization engaged with the enduring relevance of the early modern period.***

The preeminent collection of Shakespeare and the early modern period and the use of the collection for research, performance, and education is, has been, and will remain fundamental to the Folger's mission. The Director will serve as the lead champion for Shakespeare and the early modern period among current stakeholders, and persuasively engage new audiences and communities to place Shakespeare and the era in which he lived in dialogue with a complex and changing world. The Director will also provide leadership for the growth of the collection and expanded access.

***Lead a cohesive, inclusive, and professionally supported team of staff.***

The new Director of the Folger must attend closely to culture and team leadership. They must invest personal and organizational energy to inspire collaboration and earn the confidence of the Folger community. The Folger is an enterprise filled with brilliant and intensely loyal people, and with multiple

and highly varied programs, aims, and stakeholders. Pandemic isolation, rapid organizational change, and years of hard work in aid of the physical and programmatic transformation of the Folger have made heavy demands on the team. This will call on the new Director to galvanize collaboration across a diverse and talented Folger community.

The Director will sharpen the definition of roles and responsibilities, and increase clarity and transparency, at all levels across the Folger. The Director will also enhance a sense of care, stability, and purpose for staff. The Director will also continue the crucial work underway with the Diversity Equity Inclusion and Access Strategic Plan to ensure the Folger embodies the inclusive and accessible organization it is committed to be for its visitors, neighbors, and stakeholders.

The Director must remove barriers to cross-unit collaboration and communication, increase empowerment, support experimentation, and rationalize decision-making paths. As the Folger launches into its next chapter, the Director will need to align capacity and expand staff as needed to support the organization's priorities and expand professional development and opportunities to stretch and grow for all roles at the Folger.

***Ensure the Folger has best in class structure and systems to support its operational and strategic aims.***

The Director will evaluate the current organizational structure of the enterprise and ensure that it advances the Folger's high ambitions and more public-facing aspirations. They will analyze existing systems and invest in enterprise applications that support the collection and analysis of meaningful data across the organization's pillars--all to inform the Folger's initiatives and measure their success. In so doing, the Director will consult broadly across the organization to identify and address deficiencies in systems and gaps in staffing.

***Expand the financial base of the Folger.***

In order to fully realize the ambitions and vision for the future of the Folger, the Director will analyze the market, identify opportunities to raise earned income, and develop new and diversified revenue streams. The Director will actively cultivate donors and broaden the base of donors beyond the generous and devoted corps who have sustained and grown the Folger to date. This will include securing financial support from corporations and continuing to expand relationships with foundations and other granting organizations. Additionally, the Director will deepen a shared sense of responsibility and enthusiasm for philanthropy across staff, stakeholders, and the Board of Governors.

**KEY QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS**

The ideal candidate will bring many of the following qualifications, professional experiences, and personal attributes:

- A record of successful executive leadership in public-facing cultural institutions and/or higher education. Understanding of and experience in change management, strategic planning and

execution, programmatic innovation, financial stewardship, and board relations, including the capacity to navigate and collaborate within a complex governance structure. Experience with major physical plant investments and improvements is a plus.

- A passion for Shakespeare or the early modern period, an intensely engaged and broadly curious intellect, and a commitment to supporting distinguished and innovative scholarly research. An advanced degree is preferred. Scholarship grounded in the early modern period is desirable.
- A gift for facilitating both transformation and unity – internally and externally – in a time of significant change and uncertainty. A transparent disposition and habit of consultation, coupled with decisiveness when consensus is elusive.
- Fundamental commitment to equity and inclusion at the personal core. A record of advancing diversity and belonging, with cultural fluency, compassion, and emotional intelligence.
- A proven and nimble organizational strategist with creative vision, consistently excellent judgment rooted in rigorous analysis, and a leadership style that builds excitement and inspires trust and collaboration.
- Demonstrated ability to empower, support, and advance a world-class team, and to ensure that state of the art systems advance the achievement of strategic goals.
- Aptitude, enthusiasm, and determination to prioritize fundraising. Ability to make the philanthropic case for the Folger, and the magnetism to captivate new audiences.
- Superb communication skills. The commitment and aptitude to listen, discern, illuminate, and to maintain open lines of communication across a complex organization, as well as to convey the Folger’s mission to the community and the wider public.
- Unquestioned integrity as well as a spirit of adventure and experimentation. Confidence without self-importance.

## TO APPLY

All inquiries, nominations, and applications should be sent electronically to [Isaacson, Miller](#).

*The Folger Shakespeare Library is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer and actively works to enhance its diversity.*

*Please see the [Folger Shakespeare Library’s values](#) for more information.*