

# **MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS FOR THE ARTS, INC.**

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## **Job Profile Artistic Director Portland Center Stage at The Armory Portland, Oregon**

### **The Opportunity**

A 30-year history with one of the most original launch stories in the American theater. A theatrical home that is a renovated, unique city landmark. A remarkable 10-year growth cycle (in audiences, budgets and programming) since moving to that home, while gaining national note for new work development, community engagement and diverse work on stage. Located in a city that consistently makes top 10 lists of the best places to live in the U.S., in one of the most beautiful corners of the country. A seasoned staff of artists, craftspeople and administrators, with a committed and engaged board of directors. Looking for the next artistic leader to inspire, connect and collaborate as Portland Center Stage at The Armory continues its trajectory as one of America's leading regional companies.

### **Background**

Portland Center Stage at The Armory (PCS) is the largest professional theater in Portland, Oregon, and among the top 20 regional theaters in the U.S., with an annual budget of over \$10 million. Established in 1988 as an offshoot of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, PCS became an independent theater in 1994. Since May 2000, PCS has been under the leadership of Artistic Director Chris Coleman, who is leaving to assume the position of Artistic Director of the Denver Center Theatre Company.

In August 2006, following a \$38 million campaign, PCS moved to its permanent home in the green-renovated Gerding Theater at The Armory, located in Portland's vibrant Pearl District. Housing two theater spaces — the 580-seat U.S. Bank Main Stage and the 190-seat Ellyn Bye Studio — The Armory is the first building on the National Register of Historic Places to achieve a LEED Platinum rating. The building has become much more than a theater space; it has become a gathering place for the community. PCS is today one of the major cultural organizations in Portland and clearly embraces the responsibility to be of service to the city and its surrounding communities.

Its Mission: Portland Center Stage inspires its community by bringing stories to life in unexpected ways.

With its move to The Armory, PCS incorporated within its vision for the organization the concept of four pillars. The first, of course, is theater and its commitment to storytelling at the highest levels. The others are history and sustainability, reflecting its new home, and community, reflecting its commitment as an organization to welcoming all to The Armory, to building an audience and a body of work that is reflective of its community, and to being active participants in the continuing advancement of that community.

From Its Manifesto: “Theater brings us together, to sit near one another, to hear stories, to lift our voices in song. Theater creates worlds like no others. Its immediacy cannot be duplicated. Its intensity cannot be matched. A playwright’s miraculous words, directed with insight and acted with passion, elicit laughter, sorrow, astonishment, enlightenment and inspiration. Suddenly, we are not alone.” *(The complete statement can be found on the theater’s website cited later in this profile.)*

EDI Vision Statement: PCS has made a sincere commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion, although its people understand that they have much more work to do to reach this vision. Quoting from PCS’ vision, which is attached in its entirety to this job profile: “Could Portland Center Stage become one of the primary places in this city where we celebrate our differences?”

Now serving 150,000 playgoers annually, PCS produces an annual season of a rich variety of 10-11 main season plays that present diverse voices and cultural perspectives, from enduring classics to major musicals to world premieres by emerging talents. As an expression of its commitment to the community, many of its plays tell stories from or about the region. Its audiences have become accustomed to very high production values.

PCS is deeply invested in nurturing the future of American theater by developing and producing new works. Currently, the organization pursues this goal via two main pipelines: a commissioning program ripe for expansion and the company’s nationally respected annual playwriting festival, JAW, now celebrating its 20th year. During JAW, four to six artist-driven workshops occur simultaneously over two weeks in July, culminating in a thrilling weekend of staged readings that are free and accessible to the public at large. The cross-pollination of local and visiting theater makers that JAW instigates is an essential part of Portland’s theatrical landscape and also a community-building laboratory where diverse artists from around the country can collaborate and push the envelope of new American playwriting while increasing the theater’s reputation as a welcoming home for emerging artists. In turn, PCS’ commissioning efforts have recently focused on the NW Stories series, which originates plays that focus on the history and culture unique to the Pacific Northwest region. The series has five commissions in progress, and PCS has premiered three new plays under the NW Stories

umbrella. The possibilities for future commissions, both related to the Northwest and not, are an important part of PCS' creative values and planning. To date, 65 plays commissioned or developed at PCS have gone on to be produced at more than 150 professional theaters throughout North America and the United Kingdom.

PCS also has remained active in its community and education programs, with an emphasis on building tomorrow's audiences by working mostly with middle school and high school students through its Stage Door program, Visions & Voices playwriting residencies and Summer Theater Academy. It serves about 10,000 young people each year. These programs include classroom work with teaching artists, programs at the theater and bringing young people on a regular basis to see age-appropriate productions. Community Programs at PCS serve audiences of all ages. On average, the theater partners annually with over 50 different community organizations for everything from public conversations on topics related to the shows to group ticket events to showcasing art and performances from other organizations and area communities that are invited to use The Armory and its resources to further their own missions.

<https://www.pcs.org/assets/EdCP-annual-report-16.17-final.pdf>

PCS operates on an annual budget of around \$10 million to \$11 million, depending upon the season choices, and is among the five largest arts organizations in the state. It employs 75 full-time staff, with seasonal and part-time employment bringing staffing levels to over 150. With the move to The Armory in 2006, PCS has experienced significant growth—in audiences, programming and staff. Today, there is a very strong senior leadership team of nine people, representing operations, finance, HR, marketing, development, production, community/education programs and artistic. The average tenure of service within this team is 10 years.

A committed and engaged board of up to 40 members governs the theater and is increasingly aware of its changing role as PCS' longtime professional leader departs. Nearly 45% of the theater's income comes from grants and contributions. PCS recognizes and negotiates with three professional unions—Actors' Equity Association, Stage Directors and Choreographers Society and United Scenic Artists.

There are multiple opportunities for PCS under its next Artistic Director. They include the following:

- Its growing new play development program can be further strengthened, including greater commissioning activity and even more movement of its productions elsewhere.
- Its success relative to many other theaters in the country in developing younger audiences led to PCS' being invited to join the cohort in the Wallace Foundation's Building Audiences for Sustainability initiative. In a region with a

relatively youthful net migration, PCS' audience can continue to cross generations.

- While Portland is known to be a mostly white city, demographics are changing, and the above 80 percent white population of its past is quite literally shifting before the community's eyes. Great opportunities exist to create a more diverse audience, building on the broad range of stories the theater has been telling on its stages and the increasingly diverse casts who are telling them—not to mention PCS' successes in engaging the youth from diverse communities through its education and community programming.

As with all organizations, there are also challenges to overcome:

- As this community evolves and changes, effort must continue to be applied to build new relationships so that present and future citizens will see this theater as relevant and important to their city's life.
- As with the entire professional not-for-profit theater industry, there are ongoing cost pressures. PCS has now had seven consecutive years with no annual operating deficits, but during most of those years, it carried an accumulated deficit from its previous years of operation, following the split from the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and the Great Recession. That accumulated deficit was eliminated in the 2015/16 season, but as is common in the field, there simply are not sufficient reserves, including working capital.
- While there are surely opportunities to grow ticket revenue — and PCS has demonstrated it can raise significant dollars, including through its past capital campaign — the competition from other worthy local nonprofits and the demands upon major donors in Portland require creative and sustained effort.

Much more information, including a list of PCS' past productions (labelled "Past Seasons") and more detail on the growing community programs, can be found at <https://www.pcs.org/inside-pcs>.

#### About Portland, Oregon

Portland is the largest city in Oregon and the seat of Multnomah County. It is a major port in the Willamette Valley at the confluence of the Willamette and Columbia rivers. The city has an estimated population of 639,863, the second-most populous in the Pacific Northwest after Seattle. Approximately 2,424,955 people live in the Portland metropolitan area. Roughly 60 percent of Oregon's population resides within the Portland metropolitan area.

From its beginnings as a rough-and-tumble timber town, Portland became noted in the 1960s for its growing liberal political values, and the city has earned a reputation as a bastion of counterculture and active public discourse.

The city is notable for its land-use planning and investment in public transportation. Portland is frequently recognized as one of the world's most environmentally conscious cities because of its high walkability, large community of bicyclists, farm-to-table dining, expansive network of public transportation options and over 10,000 acres of public parks. Its climate is marked by warm, dry summers and cool, rainy winters. This climate is ideal for growing roses, and Portland has been called the City of Roses for over a century. "Keep Portland Weird" is an unofficial slogan. Portland is equidistant from the ocean and the mountains, so that it's literally possible to ski and surf on the same day year-round — with the proper equipment, of course! Portlanders embrace the outdoors as fervently as they embrace books (the city is the home of Powell's Books, the nation's largest independent bookstore, which is next door to The Armory), and the city is home to several colleges and universities.

Resources: [www.travelportland.com](http://www.travelportland.com); [www.orartswatch.org](http://www.orartswatch.org); [www.portlandoregon.gov](http://www.portlandoregon.gov)

### **Position and Responsibilities:**

The Artistic Director and Managing Director Cynthia Fuhrman will form a co-equal working partnership in which each will report to the board through its chair. Although PCS had used this leadership structure in the past, Chris Coleman has been the singular leader for the last eight years.

The major roles of the Artistic Director, often performed in collaboration with others, will be as follows, recognizing that the new leader's own professional artistic practice can influence the roles the Artistic Director will take:

1. In tandem with the Managing Director, set overall organization objectives and facilitate an environment in which the professional team can do its best work, as well as inform and inspire the board of directors to experience their own sense of fulfillment through service to this theater. All of this requires that the Artistic Director be a clear and activist leader in fulfilling PCS' vision of an inclusive community.
2. To lead in the development of an artistic vision that will result in seasons of plays and musicals that are relevant to the community and that continue to express a wide variety of voices, subject matter and style in order to remain known to embrace its entire community.
3. To actively recruit theater artists both locally and from elsewhere in the country, to form creative teams, make choices of plays, and consistently use a lens that ensures that PCS continues to build an audience from throughout its region.
4. To build upon this theater's commitment to new plays.
5. As the major public face of the organization, become an important citizen in the city, seeking opportunities for the theater to use its voice to further the public good, including advocating for PCS' community programming and participating in resource development for the theater's financial health.

## **Qualifications:**

No one person will fully meet all these qualifications. However, the Search Committee will be assessing to what degree each candidate comes close to their expectations by evaluating the following factors, which are not necessarily articulated in priority order:

### Professional Experience

1. Essential are the leadership skills, capacity to articulate a vision going forward and the ability to motivate others to pursue that vision.
2. While prior organizational or major project leadership will be valued, it is not required.
3. The chosen candidate may well be a practicing artist but could have other theater experience that excites the people of this theater. What is necessary is a person who has a rigorous artistic practice.
4. The capacity to innovate and guide the organization in a rapidly changing landscape is important.

### Personal Qualities and Values

The following are all important to the success of the next Artistic Director:

- Ability to establish a meaningful working partnership with the Managing Director.
- A person who engenders trust and loyalty through their authenticity.
- A natural collaborator and team builder, a visionary, a thought leader.
- (As noted in the official hiring statement at the end of this profile) “The ability to help us achieve our vision of a diverse and inclusive community.”
- An encompassing aesthetic to align with this theater’s historical efforts to provide a great breadth and variety in its seasons.
- A leader who applies a social justice lens to strategic decision-making.
- The capacity to build strong relationships, which of course includes internally with the staff and the board, but importantly also includes cultivating donor relationships.
- A desire to personally and institutionally be an active and impactful resident of Portland, with a demonstrated track record of community involvement.

Successful candidates will demonstrate a deep commitment to, and vision for, advancing equity and inclusion at Portland Center Stage. This may be shown through lived experience as a member of a group that is underrepresented in the leadership of American regional theaters and/or through a demonstration of previous

successes in advancing racial equity, accessibility for individuals with disabilities and gender inclusivity.

### **Start Date**

The Search Committee hopes to make its final decision no later than summer 2018. The start date for full-time employment will be as soon as possible thereafter. The 2018–2019 season will be set prior to the new Artistic Director being on board. This will hopefully provide the time necessary for the new leader to engage with all of PCS’ constituencies and spend time with its audiences, board and staff before leading the construction of the 2019–2020 season.

### **Procedure to Apply**

Interested and qualified candidates are encouraged to submit in complete confidence a cover letter and resume to the consulting firm retained to conduct the search. A letter of no more than 1 ½ pages should describe why this post and theater are attractive to the applicant and what about them and their work makes them a potentially strong contributor as a leader of Portland Center Stage.

Management Consultants for the Arts, Inc.

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*“Portland Center Stage is committed to advancing equity and diversity in all that we do. PCS does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, marital or familial status, sexual orientation, gender identity, veteran status or any other basis prohibited by local, state or federal law. We encourage people of all backgrounds to apply, including people of color, women, LGBTQ individuals, people with disabilities, veterans and others who demonstrate the ability to help us achieve our vision of a diverse and inclusive community. Successful candidates will commit to an equitable and inclusive workplace, including but not limited to: racial equity, accessibility for individuals with disabilities, use of gender inclusive language and cultural sensitivity.”*

EDI Vision Statement:  
Could Portland Center Stage become one of the  
primary places in this city where we  
celebrate our differences?

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What kind of organization would we become if we answered yes? Why would it matter?  
How would it connect to our core purpose?

Our mission statement: *inspiring our community by bringing stories to life in unexpected ways.*

Sharing stories creates community. A group of strangers wander into a dark theater on a given night, and over the course of a few hours (with the help of live actors and a good story) find themselves sharing the dreams, joys and sorrows of the room. Portland Center Stage tells stories that resonate for our time. We create events with big imaginations — whether that means 20 actors dancing across a room or one actor conjuring a cosmos. We want to gather an audience as varied as the faces you see walking down the streets of Portland.

Why does inclusion matter here?

First: What we create and share with the community is an experience. That experience centers around sharing a story, but it is complemented, it is amplified by the experience of walking into the neighborhood, enjoying The Armory's atmosphere, discussing the story with friends and being infected by the energy of the other people in the room who share that experience through the lens of their day, their culture, their lifetime. At its best, the theatrical experience is like a party: The energy in the room is derived both from the event onstage AND the richness of the group that decided to show up that night. The more varied and diverse the group of people, the more fun and rewarding the experience.

It's one thing to listen to Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech with a group of white Portlanders, while it is another to hear it sitting next to an African-American couple. It's one thing to plan a season, devise a budget or imagine a gala when everyone in the room comes with similar cultural perspectives, socioeconomic backgrounds or physical abilities. That perspective changes when a new story, a new history, enters the room. It actually makes us smarter. It is one thing to watch *Othello* with a group of friends who have seen Shakespeare all their lives, and an entirely different experience to watch it surrounded by a group of visually impaired high school students hearing the story for the first time. Whether it's watching *Fiddler on the Roof* next to a young man from Saudi Arabia, *Anna Karenina* in front of Russian emigres (who are correcting Tolstoy's text) or *Chinglish* beside Mandarin speakers who are catching

the jokes before the subtitles: The emotional texture, the perspective, expands or contracts depending on who is sitting next to you.

In a cultural moment when we have many opportunities to exclusively experience stories and events similar to those most familiar to us (think Netflix: “If you liked *Homeland*, you’ll enjoy *The Honorable Woman*”) those of us in the business of providing experiences have some decisions to make. Is the strongest pathway forward to mimic the trend and narrow everyone’s focus (i.e., become the theater that does only classic plays and gets comfortable with its ability to attract a solid audience of mature citizens from similar backgrounds)? Or is it to provide an antidote to that trend?

Can creating more diversity within our organization become one of our core strengths? Can diversity become one of our primary differentiators in the marketplace?

As one patron expressed after opening night of *Clybourne Park*, “We are somewhat handicapped in Portland by how demographically lopsided we are. We have so few opportunities to learn how to talk across our differences.” While statistics show that the city and state are becoming increasingly less homogenous, it remains possible (easy perhaps) to walk through life and experience Portland as a “white” city. Depending on your neighborhood or your preferences or your sense of adventure, if you’re in the majority, it may be hard to find people that don’t look like you.

But if you wander the campus of Portland State University or Portland Community College, if you venture out to Last Thursday on Alberta Street, if you have lunch in Hillsboro, if you visit virtually any public middle school in the metro area, a very different Portland shows up.

And yet, socially, we tend to behave like Netflix and Amazon encourage us to: We self-select into groups that look, think and behave like us. Can PCS become known as one of the places where it’s possible, even likely, that we’ll cross bridges into each other’s worlds?

In a highly competitive cultural landscape, there will always be “more central work” for the organization to do. We have to keep the quality of work high; we have to secure funding, manage expenses, operate a building and cultivate a larger audience. But if our mission is really about “inspiring our community,” it is also critical that we stay relevant.

Trends suggest that the coming years will lead to an increasingly varied population across the city and region. Will this theater company be ready? Will we have the relationships in place, the cultural fluency and the mix of programming that can keep us relevant to who the community is becoming?

Could Portland Center Stage become one of the primary places in this city where we celebrate our differences?