



President Position Specification 2025



Chautauqua Institution



Internationally renowned for its nine-week Summer Assembly Season from June through August, [Chautauqua Institution](#) curates a stunning variety of programs in arts, religion, education, and recreation. More than 100,000 visitors engage each summer in daily lectures, performances, worship services, classes, workshops, and recreational offerings—drawn by a shared desire for intellectual growth, meaningful dialogue, an unparalleled sense of community, and personal relaxation and renewal.

Chautauqua’s grounds comprise 750 acres located on the shores of Chautauqua Lake in southwestern New York State and within a 3-hour drive of Buffalo, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh. Between 7,500 and 10,000 people reside on the grounds during the 9-week summer season.

Mission: Chautauqua Institution is dedicated to the exploration of the best in human values and the enrichment of life through a program that explores the important religious, social, and political issues of our times; stimulates provocative, thoughtful involvement of individuals and families in creative response to such issues; and promotes excellence and creativity in the appreciation, performance, and teaching of the arts.



Additional Information:

[Board of Trustees](#)

[2024 Annual Review](#)

[Executive Team](#)

[2023-2024 Audited](#)

[All Chautauqua Staff](#)

[Financials](#)

Chautauqua’s operating budget is about \$56M with 140 full-time and 40 part-time year-round staff.

History

Founded in 1874 as the Chautauqua Lake Sunday School Assembly, Chautauqua began as a one-week experiment in out-of-school vacation learning focused on Sunday School instructors. However, it rapidly expanded beyond its original remit to encompass academic achievement, music, art, literature, and physical education. In 1878, Chautauqua launched the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle (CLSC) to give those unable to attend college access to the knowledge and skills of higher education. Local CLSC circles spread across the country, and eventually, around the world. The CLSC's success sparked the Chautauqua Movement, which disseminated the ideas of continuing education and community engagement across the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Over the next 150 years, Chautauqua evolved into what can only be described as a unique and exciting place for which words fail in capturing its magic.

Chautauqua's lecture platform has hosted many famous speakers. Perhaps most notable among them was Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who gave his "I Hate War" speech from the Chautauqua Amphitheater stage on August 14, 1936. Three other Presidents, six Supreme Court justices, and many other notables, including Mark Twain, Booker T. Washington, Susan B. Anthony, Amelia Earhart, and William James, have spoken at Chautauqua.



Chautauqua Today



Today, Chautauqua continues to host a diverse and compelling lineup of artists, lecturers, and performers. On any given day, Chautauquans may enjoy religious leaders like Rev. Raphael Warnock, Rabbi Peter Berg, Rev. Winnie Varghese, or Rev. Otis Moss III. They may attend lectures and master classes from the likes of Ken Burns, Morgan Freeman, Doris Kearns-Goodwin, and Thomas Friedman. They may experience authors such as George Saunders, Kwame Alexander, Amor Towles, or Amy Tan. They may attend performances by the Alvin Ailey Dance Company, Diana Krall, Wynton Marsalis, Mary Chapin-Carpenter, Denyce Graves, Laufey, Sheryl Crow, or The Roots.

Chautauquans may also immerse themselves in classic works and world premieres performed by Chautauqua's [Theater Company](#), [Opera Company](#), and [Symphony Orchestra](#), or they can choose to support and nurture the future artistic leaders developed by the [schools of visual and performing arts](#). However they choose to spend their time, Chautauquans have the opportunity to experience creativity of all forms in a distinctive environment that is uniquely conducive to interaction, collaboration, and the formation of relationships. In fact, many speakers and performers stay for multiple days, bring their families, expand the scope of their involvement, and return to Chautauqua again and again. That is the power of the one-of-a-kind experience Chautauqua provides.



2026 Summer Season Lecture Themes

Week 1 - Icons and Instigators: Women Who Change the World

Week 2 - Breaking the News: Charting a New Media Landscape

Week 3 - The 2026 Election: What's at Stake?

Week 4 - Wasted: Our Era of Disposability

Week 5 - Art and Artists Against the Odds

Week 6 - America at 250: In Partnership with the National Constitution Center and The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

Week 7 - Global Power and Our Evolving International Order

Week 8 - The Future of Food: Climate, Technology and the Next Agricultural Revolution

Week 9 - The Importance of Gathering: A Collaboration with the Smithsonian Folklife Festival



Chautauqua's Four Pillars



Chautauqua's Four Pillars guide the Institution's mission, vision, and all its activities.

The Arts

Much of Chautauqua's Performing and Visual Arts pillar is presented in an Amphitheater, capable of seating approximately 4,300 patrons. Chautauqua boasts a resident symphonic orchestra with 74 professional musicians recruited internationally. The symphony has a vast repertoire, which is showcased two to three times weekly. Chautauqua also supports a resident theater troupe, which performs mainstage productions within the Bratton Theater, with an additional theater complex now under construction. The Institution supports a vibrant School of Dance and brings to the stage visiting Dance Companies, including ballet and modern dance forms. Chautauqua maintains a School of Art and a School of Music where resident artists develop their talents.

The Arts programs include lecture series, community classes, and two art galleries and centers with 10,000 square feet of gallery space. Opera has been a longtime part of Chautauqua's Arts program. The Norton Opera House is an important architectural part of the Institution's heritage.



Religion

The Department of Religion at Chautauqua spearheads a robust spiritual pillar. An ecumenical service each morning features a noted member of the clergy. Afternoons feature the Interfaith Lecture Series, typically held at the Hall of Philosophy, which is a scale model of the Greek Parthenon. The term "denomination" in Chautauquan usage is a very inclusive term meaning an institutional faith organization. The **15 Denominational Houses** at Chautauqua are open to all for worship, fellowship, and accommodations on the grounds.

Chautauqua's Four Pillars



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Education

Education is Chautauqua's founding principle, and the common thread uniting its patrons is that they are "lifelong learners." Each weekday, beginning at 10:45 a.m., the Amphitheater is filled with Chautauquans eager to hear a different speaker on a different topic. Each week has a **central theme**. Chautauqua supports a Special Studies and Master Classes program by which hundreds of community classes are taught, ranging from understanding classical music to fly tying to photography to virtually anything you can imagine. The Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle is among the nation's oldest book clubs and brings in prize-winning authors to discuss their work. Chautauquans know of the selections well in advance, and they come prepared to ask questions of the authors on the whys and wherefores of the books.



Recreation

Since its inception, Chautauqua has recognized the value of recreation in self-development. To that end, a veritable buffet of established and not-so-established activities is available to patrons. Golfers enjoy two eighteen-hole courses owned by Chautauqua, including one designed by Donald Ross. Chautauqua operates its own marina, including a sailing center, from which boaters fish, ski, sail, wakeboard, paddleboard, and kayak. Chautauqua operates a tennis center, where the pro shop oversees eight fast-dry Har-Tru courts and two pickleball courts.

Those looking for "quirkier" forms of recreation will find them at Chautauqua's Sports Club, where lawn bowling is taught on a formal English court, and shuffleboard, cornhole, and other recreational activities await. Chautauqua also operates a fitness center, which includes workout and swimming facilities.

Beyond the Pillars

Not everything at Chautauqua fits neatly into one of the historic four pillars. Chautauqua operates a [Boys and Girls Club](#), a summer day camp for kids starting at age five. Here, kids learn to sail, paint, canoe, play tennis, and much more. Kids under age five can go to [Children's School](#), where, for many of them, riding the big yellow bus to and from is part of the fun. Teens and pre-teens have their own space at the **Youth Activities Center** that Chautauqua operates, where youngsters have dances, play games, and make lifelong friends.

Chautauqua is enriched significantly by dozens of **community-based organizations**, each of which complements the historic pillars. These groups include the Bird, Tree, & Garden Club, Women's Club, African American Heritage House, Chautauqua Dance Circle, Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra League, Friends of Chautauqua Theater, Chautauqua Opera Guild, Friends of Chautauqua Writers' Center, LGBTQ+ and Friends, Friends of Chautauqua Visual Arts, and Chautauqua Yacht Club. These groups sponsor lectures and film series, host group discussions, and take part in a variety of other activities.

Chautauqua has also undertaken initiatives of significant import to the wider community. It has led the way in fact-based research into the challenges Chautauqua Lake faces with respect to climate change and problematic watershed runoff. Chautauqua has been a voice for climate change with a specifically endowed position tasked with deepening the reservoir of responsible community action. The same is true of Chautauqua's commitment to Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility, which is viewed as both a moral and business imperative.



The Grounds and Community

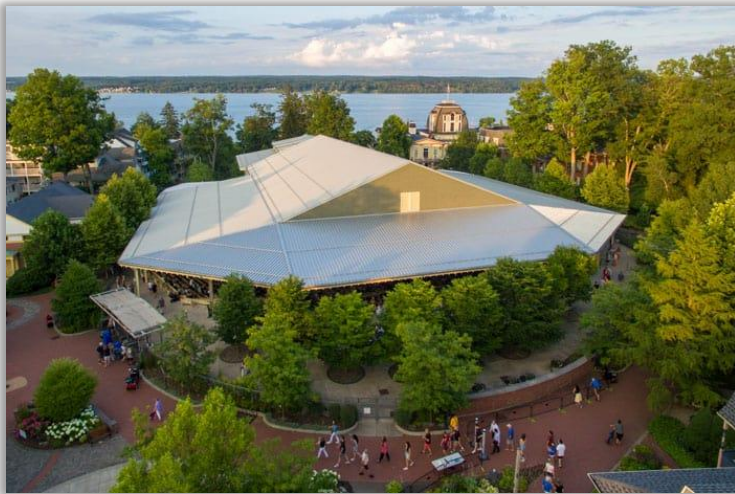


The Chautauqua grounds are designated as a National Historic District, and Chautauqua Institution was named a National Historic Landmark because of its contribution to American culture. Chautauqua joined seven other iconic American places as the recipient of the Heritage Award from the Urban Land Institute. Most of Chautauqua's activities occur within 750 acres on the lakefront, which has been recognized as a National Historic District landmark since 1989. Automobile traffic is extremely limited because Chautauqua is a walking and bicycling community. Over 900 families own homes which are typically Victorian in design, much like the famous Painted Ladies of San Francisco. Chautauquans own or rent private residences, including homes, townhouses, and units in multifamily buildings, or stay in guest houses or hotels, most notably Chautauqua's famous [Athenaeum Hotel](#), built in 1881. Throughout the summer season, guests at the Athenaeum are inspired by a variety of learning, recreational, and entertainment programs that are all part of the unique Chautauqua experience. During the spring and fall months, the Athenaeum Hotel acts as a host to well-organized conferences, beautiful weddings, and other special events.

The Institution boasts significant performance and gathering spaces, including the **Amphitheater**, the central venue for lectures, concerts, and worship, and the **Hall of Philosophy**, an open-air, Greek-style structure, in addition to smaller performance halls, recital venues, and classrooms.

The Chautauqua Property Owners Association (CPOA) serves as the vital link between residents and the Institution's leadership, representing owner interests through open meetings and area representatives, who provide direct connection to their neighborhoods.

Chautauqua does not shut down at Summer's end. A community of about 750 people lives here year-round. The vast majority of senior executive staff also reside either in Chautauqua or in nearby communities.



The Feeling

Beyond the intentional, curated programming and the pull of its enduring community, there is a “magic” at Chautauqua that manifests in varied ways for everyone who visits. For some, it is the opportunity to let their children run free on bikes all day, showing up only for food or for money to buy a balsa wood/rubber band airplane at Chautauqua’s Bookstore. For others, it is about the optionality to dip in and out of world-class performances and exhibits as you are “just walking by.” Or, it is stumbling upon a cellist playing in a soft rain with a graphite cello, or the serendipity of waiting in line for ice cream behind a Supreme Court Justice who spoke at the Amphitheater earlier that day. Chautauqua means something different to everyone, and it is the mix of what Chautauqua offers that makes it possible to leave each person satisfied.



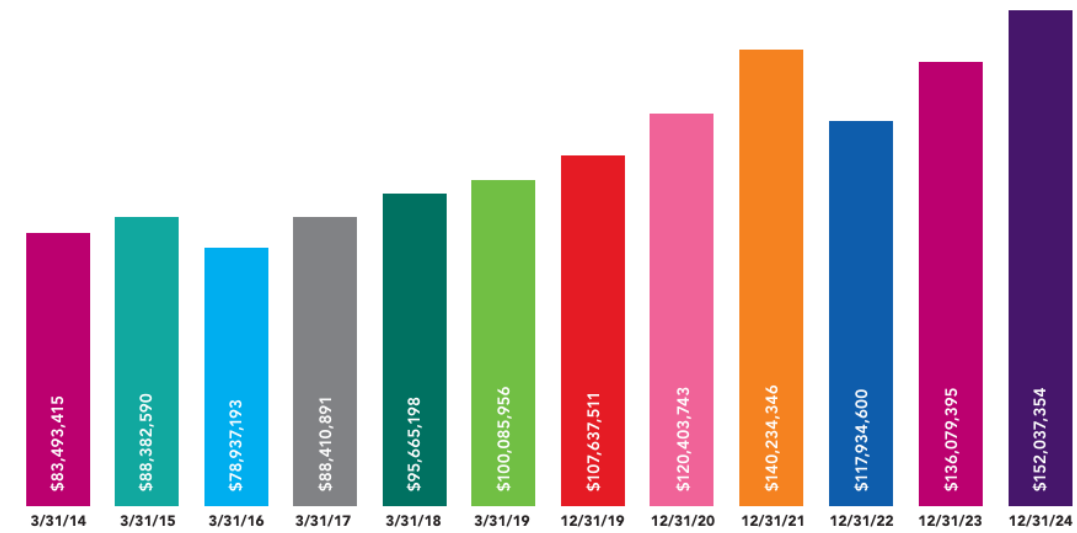
Chautauqua Foundation



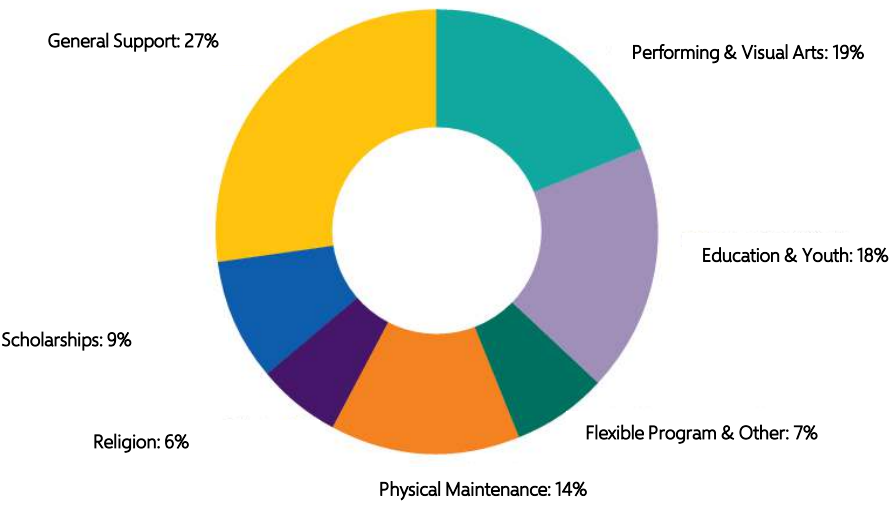
The Chautauqua Foundation is an independent organization that works closely with Chautauqua Institution to support its long-term sustainability, with a particular focus on the preservation, the appropriate use, and the growth of endowment funds. It stewards over \$150 million in total assets across more than 800 endowment funds with a focus on strong, consistent returns and prudent risk management. The Foundation safeguards donor intent, ensuring funds are used as intended and remain a lasting resource. Through careful stewardship, the Foundation sustains and strengthens Chautauqua’s mission for generations to come. More information about the Foundation and its recent performance is available in the [2024 Chautauqua Foundation Annual Report](#).

Chautauqua’s recent \$150 million [Boundless](#) campaign resulted in an additional \$60 million in commitments to the endowment.

The net assets of the Foundation have increased by \$69 million over the last decade, from \$83 million in 2014 to \$152 million at the end of 2024.



The chart below represents the allocation of total net asset balances of 816 active endowment funds by area of support.



150 Forward: A Renewed Vision for Chautauqua Institution 2024-2028



In 2019, Chautauqua Institution launched its ten-year strategic plan, *150 Forward*. After the COVID pandemic disrupted operations, a mid-point review in 2024 led to [an updated vision for 2024-2028](#).



The Position



Title	President
Reports To	Board of Trustees
Location	Chautauqua, New York
Summary	<p>The next President of Chautauqua Institution will lead one of America’s most unique and enduring cultural communities. They will steward a campus of ideas, arts, and human connection—where values are lived and curiosity thrives.</p> <p>The Institution’s operating model is steeped in tradition and charm but also attuned to the importance of variety and flexibility. Chautauqua’s format allows families, groups, and individuals alike to enjoy Chautauqua for a day or year-round.</p> <p>As magical as Chautauqua is, it requires thoughtful and strategic leadership to thrive. It is a capital- and labor-intensive enterprise that operates with intentional, yet material, constraints, including a nine-week season, a focus on affordability and accessibility, and a pull to tradition. It is a community that values mutual respect, in which decision-making requires careful input gathering, communication, and consensus.</p> <p>The next President will lead with intellectual curiosity and emotional intelligence, balancing respect for tradition with an entrepreneurial approach to growth. The President will be a visible, year-round ambassador to the community and will be responsible for the stewardship of Chautauqua’s historic grounds, multifaceted programming, talented executive team, and seasonal workforce.</p> <p>The President will be an able fundraiser who can cultivate and inspire philanthropy and grow the Institution's revenue streams. They will leverage Chautauqua’s unique interdisciplinary model to attract new audiences.</p> <p>Chautauqua’s President will be a strong leader, galvanizing support across a network of stakeholders. With strong management skills and a deep commitment to Chautauqua’s mission, the next President will shape a sustainable future while protecting the enduring character of Chautauqua.</p> <p>The President has historically resided for much of the year on the grounds at The President’s Cottage and Gardens, which looks out onto Lake Chautauqua. The President serves as a fixture in the community, particularly during the nine-week season and the surrounding weeks.</p>

Roles & Responsibilities



- **Champion the Mission:** Lead Chautauqua Institution in advancing its mission to explore the best in human values, enrich life through the arts, religion, education, and recreation, and convene numerous diverse communities for thoughtful dialogue on the pressing issues of our time.
- **Serve as Chief Ambassador:** Represent Chautauqua, articulating its vision and unique value to inspire engagement and investment from high-profile donors, philanthropic partners, and thought leaders. Work closely with external partners, including civic and political leadership in Chautauqua County, Western New York, and Albany.
- **Ensure Financial Sustainability:** In partnership with the CFO, leadership team, Board of Trustees, and Chautauqua Foundation, oversee the Institution's fiscal health, practice disciplined budgeting, diversify revenue streams, and grow endowment resources.
- **Drive Fundraising:** Partner closely with the development team to cultivate gifts from individuals, foundations, and other philanthropic sources, ensuring the Institution's long-term sustainability.
- **Expand Strategic Relationships:** Build and strengthen relationships with civic leaders, policymakers, cultural influencers, and national organizations to elevate Chautauqua's profile and broaden its audience.
- **Advance Operational Excellence:** Identify and oversee the implementation and/or improvements and innovations in systems, infrastructure, guest services, and technology to elevate the Chautauqua experience.
- **Engage and Partner with the Board:** Collaborate with the Board of Trustees to build strategic consensus, strengthen governance, and engage Trustees as an active resource in advancing organizational progress. Consult with the Board regarding critical developments and progress.
- **Lead with Unity and Vision:** Provide inclusive, visible, and unifying leadership across strategic, operational, and programmatic areas, fostering a culture of collaboration, professional growth, and innovation.
- **Strengthen the Leadership Team:** Retain, recruit, and develop top talent, empowering the Executive Team and staff to excel and align with the Institution's mission and values.
- **Enhance Programs and Experiences:** Support and improve Chautauqua's rich programming portfolio, ensuring exceptional experiences for residents, guests, artists, lecturers, and learners of all ages.

The Person



Pivotal Experience & Expertise

Organizational Leadership

Proven success leading an organization of relevant size and stature, driving operational excellence, setting and measuring goals, and possessing the ability to manage through change. Experience managing and developing a senior leadership team.

Financial Acumen & Revenue Enhancement

Emphasis on financial acumen, management of people and facilities, careful resource management, and creative enhancement of mission-aligned revenue streams from a variety of sources.

Stakeholder Management

Ability to unite Chautauqua's numerous and diverse constituencies to build a trusting, collaborative environment. Can navigate complex challenges with discernment; ability to balance various, sometimes competing, priorities. Strong communication skills, with the ability to build consensus, are critical.

Intellectual Authority

A proven leader with the intellectual credibility and passion worthy of Chautauqua's mission. Some breadth of experience and curiosity across a range of disciplines is ideal; academic or experiential expertise in any one area is not required. Clear commitment to Chautauqua's mission is essential.

The Person



Culture Impact

Clarity of Direction

Can define and communicate a clear, compelling vision for Chautauqua's mission and future and galvanize the Board, staff, and community around shared priorities.

Performance Orientation

Focus on talent with an emphasis on excellent performance and delivery.

Community-Facing Leadership

Motivated to be an accessible and community-facing leader, building relationships and collaborating across the Chautauqua community. Displays a clear understanding of and commitment to Chautauqua's mission in all activities.

Confident Humility

Brings a clear understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses and the ability to cultivate a team that supports them.

Engagement Team



Jackie Zavitz
jzavitz@heidrick.com

J.J. Cutler
jcutler@heidrick.com

Bonnie Gwin
bgwin@heidrick.com

Erin Kneeley
ekneeley@heidrick.com

Applications and nominations can be directed to: ChautauquaPresident@heidrick.com.

The Institution is an equal opportunity employer committed to equitable and inclusive hiring practices. Applicants will not be discriminated against based on any status protected under federal, state, or local law.

Compensation for the role will be determined based on experience and skill set, with an anticipated base salary range of \$400,000-\$550,000, plus at-will housing and other benefits.

