Position Specification

Director
The Organization
Founded in 1985, the MIT Media Lab (“Media Lab” or “Lab”) is one of the world’s leading research and academic organizations. Unconstrained by traditional disciplines, Media Lab designers, engineers, artists, and scientists strive to benefit society by creating technologies and experiences that enable people to understand and transform their lives, communities, and environments.

History and Location
The Media Lab’s structure is unique. The Lab functions as a research laboratory within MIT and grants graduate degrees through its academic program in Media Arts and Sciences (“MAS”), which enrolls some 150 master’s and PhD candidates. In addition, each year more than 200 undergraduates engage in research projects at the Lab through MIT’s Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program. More than 25 faculty members and senior researchers share a multidisciplinary approach and work together in a collaborative spirit. Research areas are as diverse as social robotics, physical and cognitive prostheses, new models and tools for learning, biologically-inspired manufacturing and tangible-user interfaces, community bio-engineering, models for sustainable cities, emergent sensors, AI, and engineering applications.

The Media Lab and the MAS program have enjoyed many successes in their 35-year history, excelling with respect to many of the criteria that are used to evaluate a university research lab and educational program: impact of the research on the academic community; real-world impact through technology transfer, startups, deployment and outreach; success in attracting industry, government and foundation funding; award-winning faculty members who are leaders and trailblazers in their fields; graduates who go on to excel in academia, entrepreneurship, social outreach, and in the world of arts and design. The Media Lab has produced a Chief Technology Officer of the United States (U.S. CTO), leaders in corporate R&D labs, many successful entrepreneurs, and tenure-track faculty members at many of the world’s leading universities.

The Lab and MAS program originated in and report to the School of Architecture and Planning (“SA+P”), with which they share an emphasis on design, hands-on learning, collaborative research, and a research methodology of critique and reflection. The Lab’s multi-disciplinary platform is more relevant than ever, with emergent and pressing issues related to human dimensionality and technological applications. The Lab is looking forward to attracting a new Director who appreciates this distinctive role of the Media Lab and the MAS program in the world’s and MIT’s research landscape and who has a vision for what the next chapter could bring.

The Culture
Central to the Media Lab’s culture are its innovative and cross-disciplinary approaches to both academics and research. The Lab’s research combines theory and practice with an emphasis on designing, building, and evaluating working prototypes that have the potential for large-scale, real-world impact. The academic program emphasizes the practice of learning-by-creating, often in a collaborative, atelier-style context.

Diverse, multidisciplinary research and talent is a core tenet of the Lab. Software, electrical, and mechanical engineering live under the same roof as biology and neuroscience, visual and performing arts, space and oceans research, interaction and experience design. Our researchers come together in ways that meld disparate disciplines and backgrounds to invent original solutions to human problems.

Creative freedom is key to Lab culture. The Lab’s distinctive and diversified consortium model for corporate
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Sponsorship provides members with unrestricted access to all of the Lab’s intellectual property during the company’s term of sponsorship, allowing the Lab to maintain a significant level of undirected research that often involves exploring uncharted new territory. Faculty and students pursue areas of interest that may or may not lead to a near-term commercial outcome. This relative lack of commercial or other funding model constraints often results in radical and truly unexpected breakthroughs, a strong rate of technology transfer, and a healthy list of spinoffs.

The Role
The Director is expected to lead the Media Lab through its next chapter within a highly interdisciplinary, exceptionally talented, and creative community of faculty, staff, and students. As it is also a poignant moment, globally, with broader existential questions surfacing, the Director also will be advancing the Lab’s unique structure and agenda in an uncharted era.

The Director will serve as an effective manager of people and steward of its culture, while actively fundraising in support of current and future Media Lab programs. The new dimensionalities of a global pandemic and the unknown economic consequences have triggered fresh thinking regarding the Lab’s role within MIT and in the world’s research and innovation landscape.

Working closely with the head and faculty of the MAS academic program, the Director will also further develop the program’s contributions to both undergraduate and graduate education at MIT.

Ideal Experience
The Media Lab is seeking a dynamic thought leader and confident manager with a strong background in research and innovation at the intersection of technology and society. The Lab is entering a pivotal moment in its 35-year history; it is significantly larger in scale that its formative years and of greater global standing and working more across MIT. The ideal candidate:

- Possesses a background as a researcher and practitioner, with a body of work that has significantly changed the way people think about and operate in their area of expertise;
- Is a visionary who thinks big and sees important trends and the potential role the Lab can play at MIT and the world at large;
- Is able to work closely with the faculty to articulate the Lab’s vision and implement its research and funding strategy;
- Is comfortable in academic and industry environments, with a successful track record in fundraising;
- Has exceptional communication skills and a talent for telling the Media Lab story, imparting its vision both internally and externally;
- Has demonstrated strong, effective, equitable, inclusive, and transparent management practices in a large or complex organization; and
- Has prior experience in academia and would be considered for tenure at MIT.

Qualifications
Candidates should have a strong record of leading a research organization and significant experience of financial management and fundraising. A combination of bold thinking, leveraging an unusual platform, and marshalling resources through extraordinary storytelling is essential. Additionally, candidates should appreciate cultivating independent thought, advancing the boundaries of academic thought, and coalescing a faculty body.
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Critical Competencies for Success

**Resource Leadership:** The Director will build support for the Media Lab and ensure that it maintains its status as a premier global research and educational institution. To do this, they will:

- Actively engage and build relationships with corporations, foundations, and individuals, leveraging those relationships to support the Lab;
- Be highly strategic in developing and implementing new funding models for the Lab that are mindful of and maintain the organization’s fundamental independence and grounding in highly creative, undirected and directed research; and
- Focus on attracting, developing, and supporting top-tier faculty members, students, administrators, and staff.

**Institutional Leadership:** The Director will lead an organization whose culture is independent and thrives on autonomy, freedom, and, in some ways, a lack of traditional structure. At the same time, the Lab has more recently focused significantly on issues regarding equity, inclusion, and greater collaboration across the Lab as a whole. The Director will be expected to sustain and further develop these efforts.

While respecting and preserving this culture, the Director will be responsible for effective strategic, transparent, operational, and financial leadership for an organization comprising faculty members, graduate students, undergraduate researchers, staff, and industry and other sponsors. To do this, they will:

- Establish a culture of trust and accountability in which transparent decision-making and open communication are both expected and well governed;
- Develop and maintain strong and healthy relationships across MIT, both with academic units and the senior administration;
- Work closely in partnership with faculty, students, staff, and sponsors to continuously challenge the community to chart a bold path for the Lab’s research, academic agenda and themes; and
- With the faculty, recruit world-class researchers and provide the guidance and resources necessary to support them in a successful path towards tenure.

**Intellectual Leadership:** The Director will act as the leading internal and external voice for the Media Lab. In that capacity the Director will:

- Inspire the Lab internally and cultivate greater community engagement;
- Work closely with the faculty to develop areas of research synergy;
- Translate the Lab to key external parties;
- Capitalize on powerful online and offline communications platforms on which to share the Lab’s vision, work, and expertise; and
- Represent the Lab within the School of Architecture and Planning and MIT and grow connections and collaborations with other MIT labs, departments, and schools.
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**Other Personal Characteristics:** In addition to the aforementioned professional skills, the Director should demonstrate the following:

- Exceptional commitment to fostering a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusive excellence for faculty, staff, and students;
- Genuine interest in improving the student experience;
- Generosity and selflessness of spirit, including the ability to stand back when appropriate and allow others to shine;
- Thinker and a doer;
- Collaborative and creative;
- Intellectually rigorous and curious; and
- Resonate with the Lab’s mission to empower people to improve their lives.

**Job Responsibilities and Direct Reports:**

The director has the following direct reports:

- Director of Communications
- Director of Facilities
- Director of Finance
- Director of Member Relations and Development
- Director of Human Resources
- Director of Computing
- Senior and Principal Research scientists (3)

While the Director of the Lab is responsible for the Lab’s centrally-funded research efforts and submission, the Head of MAS is responsible for all academic matters, including student admissions, assessing student progress in the program, undergrad and graduate educational offerings, and faculty hiring, mentoring, and promotions. The roles and responsibilities of the Lab director and the head of the MAS program intersect when it comes to support for students and faculty.

The Lab intends to maintain the current structure of an “Executive Committee” that meets with the Director on a biweekly basis and serves as an advisory group to discuss important decisions. Apart from the Director, the committee consists of the Head of the MAS program and three senior MAS faculty or staff members.

**Contact**

Nominations, inquiries, and expressions of interest should be sent to MITMediaLab@russellreynolds.com.

*MIT is an equal employment opportunity employer. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment and will not be discriminated against on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, ancestry, or national or ethnic origin.*