



**THE ESPLANADE ASSOCIATION
BOSTON, MA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

THE SEARCH

The Esplanade Association, the nonprofit organization dedicated to restoring and enhancing the Charles River Esplanade, seeks a visionary executive director to drive the rejuvenation of this vital urban park. The association has worked tirelessly over the past 12 years to address decades of neglect to the Esplanade, improving its landscape and the experience of its visitors. The next executive director will build on this momentum to spearhead major restoration projects and convince state and community leaders to support the park and return it to its former glory. This is a pivotal moment in the history of the Esplanade, centrally located in Boston – a city that has succeeded brilliantly to become a vigorous international metropolis. With hundreds of millions in transportation and health care infrastructure investments scheduled for the next few years around the park and a bold vision for its development published by The Esplanade Association last year, the park is poised for a spectacular rebirth of its own. As the park's primary champion, the association is uniquely situated to realize this dream. The executive director will marshal the money, expertise, and influence to make this happen.

Founded in 2001, The Esplanade Association has taken a central role in efforts to improve the park, working with the state and community organizations to restore this beautiful three-mile stretch of land situated between the historic core of Boston and the lower Charles River. The organization advocates for additional focused public and private resources to maintain and improve the park, improved park access and connections, restoration of parkland, and improved park amenities. It raises funds for projects and works closely with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to provide for the general upkeep of the state-owned park, employing a full-time horticulturist and organizing regular visits from thousands of volunteers. The organization's free programs – from fitness classes to camps for inner-city youth – attract many of the 3 million visitors who enjoy the park each year.

Reporting to a Board of Directors and overseeing a staff of five, the next executive director will bring elements of creativity, fearlessness, thoughtfulness, energy, and political savvy to make this vision a reality. Candidates should bring strengths in management, fundraising, and communications. They should have a history of working for causes motivated by a public purpose, building consensus, and bringing projects to fruition.

The Esplanade Association has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in this search. All applications, inquiries, and nominations, which will remain confidential, should be directed to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

BACKGROUND

The Esplanade

The Esplanade was made possible by the early 20th century construction of the Charles River Dam Bridge at the modern-day site of the Museum of Science. The dam transformed the Charles River Basin from a tidal estuary that transformed into stinking mud flats at low tide to a stable and wide freshwater river basin – the perfect setting for a waterfront park. Dedicated as the Boston Embankment in 1910, the park was the realization of a vision brought forth some 20 years earlier by landscape architect Charles Eliot. He proposed a parks system emanating from the Charles River and running throughout Boston. This vision was realized when the narrow green space of the Boston Embankment was extended upstream to the Harvard Bridge and connected with Frederick Law Olmsted’s Emerald Necklace. Trees, a refreshment pavilion, and concerts were added to the park in its early years.

Aided by a \$1 million donation from Helen Osborne Storrow in memory of her husband James, the Esplanade went through a major expansion. From 1928 to 1936, the Esplanade’s first lagoon, boat landings, plazas, and playgrounds were built. The period also saw the construction of the Music Oval, where a temporary band shell was placed. In 1929, Arthur Fiedler and the Boston Pops performed there for the first time. The Storrow Memorial Embankment – universally known as the Esplanade – was dedicated in 1936. The next decade saw the creation of Community Boating’s boathouse and the country’s first public boating program. The construction of the Hatch Memorial Shell in 1941 gave the Pops and many other performers a first-class stage for popular summer events and is today host to the nation’s premier Fourth of July concert.

The park now encompasses a 65-acre area along the river from the Museum of Science to the BU Bridge fronting Boston’s West End, Beacon Hill, Back Bay, and Kenmore neighborhoods. It remains a popular destination for locals and tourists and offers a myriad of recreational opportunities – from fishing and boating to jogging and team sports. But while the thoughtful planning and development of the park’s first 40 years built a solid foundation for this historic cornerstone of Boston, the following 50 years of private and public development around the park – most notably the development of Storrow Drive into a heavily-congested artery – undermined the Esplanade and its connection to the city. Despite its inspired design, perfect location, and influential neighbors, the Esplanade eroded under the pressures of inattention and myopic development decisions.

The Esplanade Association

By the time the association’s co-founder Jeryl Oristaglio first visited the park in 2000, it was marred by graffiti, broken fences, collapsing docks, and degraded play spaces. Believing public parks to be a reflection of the community and a resource that offered equal opportunity for everyone to pursue healthy lifestyles, she reached out to other community leaders, including fellow co-founder Linda Cox. They led an effort that raised more than \$300,000 to build the Stoneman Playground on the Esplanade. This campaign drew attention to other projects to

improve the Esplanade and The Esplanade Association was born. More than 400 people joined the group over the next two years in a grassroots effort to rejuvenate the park.

Over the next few years, the association led successful efforts to clean up the park, plant trees, replace park benches, and fund other small but important beautification projects. They also worked to attract more people to the Esplanade, providing free youth programs for children to visit the park and launching a volunteer program to help beautify the Esplanade. Now an essential park resource, the award-winning volunteer program brings thousands of volunteers to the park annually and serves a second purpose as a key means for outreach to companies and individuals. The association funds programs such as Children in the Park to provide opportunities for children from urban camps to visit the Esplanade throughout the summer.

In 2003, the organization launched its first Esplanade dock rehabilitation project, renovating the Gloucester Street Dock. The Esplanade Association has since led other projects to enhance and replace nearly all of the Esplanade's docks. The work to improve and restore these vital gathering areas for boaters and pedestrians continues. The association has supported these projects and programs through regular fundraising events. In 2004, it held its first clambake fundraiser in the park. Four years later, it held its first gala celebration. Now an annual fall event, the gala generates approximately \$500,000 each year.

These early efforts led to increased awareness of and appreciation for the Esplanade. Within a few years of its founding, The Esplanade Association hired a small professional staff and executive director reporting to a board and its advocacy role also took shape. To foster better understanding of the park, the association and DCR conducted a user survey in 2007 that counted visitors and solicited user feedback.

Pivoting from the role as a fundraiser, advocate, and educator to an organization that can drive long-term planning for the park is a challenge. In addition to the DCR, the Esplanade's official steward, a variety of other state, community, and private interests influence decisions that have a direct impact on the park. But planning and foresight has helped The Esplanade Association seize opportunities when they become available. Perhaps the best early example of this strategy was the rehabilitation of the park's soccer and baseball fields at Lederman Park in 2005. The fields were uneven and frequently unplayable due to flooding. The Esplanade Association already had a major renovation plan on its drawing boards when a proposal to simply re-sod the fields was made. The association advocated for and helped to implement a plan to completely renovate the space. The costs for the \$2 million project were shared by a major donor, the Ebersol family, the Boston Red Sox, and various community groups and the state. While differences of opinion threatened to undermine the project, the cooperative effort ultimately resulted in the dedication of Teddy Ebersol's Red Sox Fields in 2006 – a cluster of well-maintained and durable fields enjoyed day and night by teams throughout the year. Planning met opportunity again in 2010 when The Esplanade Association successfully advocated for a universally-accessible pedestrian bridge to the park as part of the state's Longfellow Bridge Rehabilitation Project.

In 2009, the association embarked on its most ambitious planning project, coinciding with the Esplanade's 100th anniversary. [*Esplanade 2020: A Vision for the Future*](#) charts a course for what the Esplanade could become given proper planning, sufficient resources, and political will. Developed from a series of public meetings, the 100-page document is the result of work from designers, landscape architects, horticulturists, traffic experts, environmentalists, park users, and community leaders who donated their time and expertise. It includes many potential

projects – big and small – but more importantly serves as a collection of guiding principles and objectives for the park’s future. As the plan’s overview states, “It provides a holistic framework for evaluating the park’s needs, and it lays out imaginative yet pragmatic solutions that can make the Esplanade again an inspiring and world-leading urban park.”

THE ESPLANADE ASSOCIATION TODAY

When *Esplanade 2020* was unveiled in 2012, it generated significant attention for the organization and the park. The project was covered in detail in traditional media such as The Boston Globe, National Public Radio, and local television; in university publications and web sites; and in local magazines. It created a buzz and led people to think about the Esplanade and its potential in ways they never had before. With a mayoral election this fall, a gubernatorial election a year away, and a major construction project on the Longfellow Bridge just underway, this attention has come at an advantageous time. Work on a \$380,000 project to revitalize the Esplanade’s Eliot Memorial plaza began in September – thanks to The Esplanade Association’s successful fundraising and proposal for funds from DCR. Other projects on neighboring parking areas and roadways could have a major impact on the park’s footprint over the next several years. The Longfellow Bridge renovation and proposals to expand the Mass Eye and Ear Hospital will mean that 100’s of millions in development will be invested in infrastructure bordering the park. Done well, with improvements and mitigation built in, these efforts could have historic effects. Done badly, they will degrade. Now with the benefit of a document to focus its long-term aspirations for the Esplanade, the organization has the opportunity to factor in major decisions that could impact the park for decades.

While still small, the association’s staff has expanded over the past two years and it now includes a full-time horticulturist and its first director of development. The recent construction of a new play space on the Esplanade led to the merging of Friends of the Esplanade Playspace with The Esplanade Association this year – a development that will help to strengthen the volunteer base, the Board, and the staff.

The next executive director will lead an organization advocating and generating support for a beloved park centrally located in a city that has been on a spectacular run over the past 30 years. Neighborhoods throughout Boston have been revitalized by new development as it has transformed itself from a provincial backwater to an international destination and world leader in technology, academics, healthcare, finance, and publishing. Its waterways – including the Charles River – are cleaner than at any time during the past century. Now is the time for its beautiful waterfront park to be reborn and for The Esplanade Association to lead the way as it matures as an organization.

THE ROLE

The executive director will oversee a staff of five: a director of development, a director of park operations, a marketing and events manager, a horticulturist, and a gifts administrator. In addition, during the summer, a part-time horticulturist and 2-3 interns join the staff. The executive director will report to a board of directors that currently consists of 13 members but is typically a 15-person board. The board meets 6 times a year and an executive committee – consisting of a chair, vice chair, treasurer, clerk, and 2-3 at large board members – meets monthly. The executive director’s role includes managing the day-to-day activities of the organization, raising awareness for the Esplanade in the community, and working with the DCR

to advocate for and advance projects that the association supports. He or she will work closely with the board on long-range strategy and help enable board members to use their expertise and influence to plan and advance the organization's goals. The executive director manages an annual budget of approximately \$1 million generated exclusively through private giving and grants. These funds support personnel costs, park upkeep, and a variety of projects and programming.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Primary opportunities and challenges for the executive director will include the following:

Be the public face of The Esplanade Association

As this organization advances through its second decade of existence, the executive director will aggressively communicate its mission and its importance to the community through a variety of media, public appearances, and personal relationship building. These efforts will include advancing the overarching vision of *Esplanade 2020* and the association's recent rebranding efforts to underscore how the park enriches the quality of life of all members of the Boston community. The Esplanade abuts some of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the state and has connections to revered civic institutions such as the Boston Pops, the Museum of Science, and the Red Sox. The executive director will leverage the park's location, build on existing connections, and explore potential ones while underscoring the role of the Esplanade as a resource for all. He or she will be a tireless communicator and advocate for the organization as it becomes larger, more active, and more ambitious. He or she must have a personality and energy level that will enable the organization to connect with the city's various political, social, and philanthropic circles to garner support and funding to bring big ideas to fruition.

Develop a consensus around a unified vision and implement it

With the unveiling of *Esplanade 2020* the Esplanade Association has, for the first time, an overarching vision of what the park could be. But *Esplanade 2020* is a vision, not a step-by-step directive. The executive director must celebrate the vision and advance all efforts, great or small, within this context. He or she will work with the board and staff to ensure the organization is speaking with one voice about its ambitions for the Esplanade and be prepared to seize opportunities that will move it toward that vision. This will require the executive director to be a strong leader and thoughtful persuader who will listen to opinions and think creatively about ways to build consensus both within the organization and among allies in the community.

Attract influential community leaders to serve on a dynamic and unified board

The Esplanade Association enjoys the support of a board of influential community members. The executive director will build upon this group and broaden its reach to represent the wide range of interests of friends of the Esplanade throughout the city by recruiting influential, knowledgeable, and energetic leaders with a passion for the park and Boston. This board will actively engage in fundraising and relationship building and work in concert with the executive director to help chart the course for the organization's development. While the board will represent a variety of interests and opinions, it will be unified behind an overarching mission and vision.

Lead the transition to a larger organization

As The Esplanade Association expands in size and mission, the executive director will lead the discussion with the board about what it wants to become and how to best focus the time and efforts of board and staff members. The organization's roles as a fundraiser, advocate, educator, and planner all complement one another and contribute to the achievement of its goal to improve the park. Determining what model it should follow in pursuit of this goal will impact its structure and organization as well as its relationship with the state. The next executive director will be a thoughtful leader with a keen understanding of how nonprofit organizations can best achieve their goals.

Build a strong relationship with the state to move initiatives ahead in a timely manner

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation is the largest landowner in Massachusetts. Its responsibilities span 450,000 acres of public lands throughout the Commonwealth, including the 65-acre Esplanade. The executive director will vie for DCR's attention with hundreds of groups in the state while advocating with them to expand funding for state parks. The association's relationship with DCR is multifaceted: its horticulturists and volunteers share park upkeep duties with DCR staff, the DCR matching grant program provides funds for projects in the park, DCR must approve projects, and the timely planning and implementation of projects is often dependent on DCR responsiveness. The executive director must ensure a steady flow of communication between the two organizations as it concerns projects and upkeep of the park. He or she must be a convincing proponent of specific projects and broader plans and promote The Esplanade Association as a true partner with DCR in the development of the park.

The relationship between The Esplanade Association and the state expands beyond the boundaries of the Esplanade to include projects such as the \$255 million Longfellow Bridge rehabilitation project. Effective advocacy for the Esplanade on such large projects can lead to major wins such as the recent commitment from the state to build a \$10 million pedestrian bridge to the Esplanade as part of the Longfellow rehabilitation. With plans for hundreds of millions of dollars in other state projects around the Esplanade, the executive director will be expected to think creatively and advocate effectively for ways to logically tie in park improvements around the periphery of large projects.

Develop ongoing relationships with other community organizations

Boston is home to dozens of nonprofit organizations that advocate for public parks and institutions, many with missions that complement the association's goals. The next executive director will seize opportunities to continue to work with other groups such as the Charles River Conservancy, Charles River Watershed Association, and Emerald Necklace Conservancy. The Esplanade Association is a member of Boston Park Advocates, a network of park-connected groups working to elevate the status of open space among political candidates and policy makers. Now in its 12th year of existence, The Esplanade Association could be poised to take on a greater leadership role and harness the city's support for its public spaces just as a new administration is about to inhabit the mayor's office.

Secure resources to advance the organization's mission

The Esplanade Association has been the catalyst for raising more than \$12 million dollars for the park in the past 12 years. The executive director will work closely with the director of development and the board to build on these efforts and establish a sustainable, dependable infrastructure that will generate sufficient resources to pursue larger projects. This will include developing relationships with corporations in the region as well as private donors and connecting their desires with the vision for the park. He or she will seek out opportunities and work with the board to make connections with people and organizations with the resources to make the association's aspirations for the park a reality.

THE SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE

The successful candidate will possess most, if not all, of the following qualities or experience:

- The ability to influence decision makers and advocate effectively for a cause.
- Strong communication skills and public presence that will generate support for a grand vision and enthusiasm for specific plans among a variety of groups.
- A track record of seeing long-range plans through to fruition.
- The ability to build consensus, lead difficult discussions, and make tough decisions.
- The ability to manage and develop staff; experience promoting and maintaining a supportive work environment that gives staff the guidance and clarity to achieve their goals and the space to develop their skills and seek new challenges.
- Strong management, organizational and financial skills; experience working with a budget.
- Experience raising funds from private donors, foundations, and corporations.
- The energy and organizational aptitude to orchestrate complicated projects; an ability to dream big and bounce back from small defeats undaunted.
- A proven commitment to improving communities; a track record of pursuing causes motivated by a public purpose.
- Experience navigating difficult political situations and the savvy to think in terms of long-term as well as short term goals; a strategic thinker.
- An understanding of and appreciation for the importance of public parks to their surrounding communities.
- Familiarity with Boston and its connection to the Esplanade.

- An understanding or ability to be a quick study of the political apparatus on the state and local level; a comfort with feeling and applying political pressure when necessary.
- The ability to work within a team; a measure of self confidence without self importance.
- An outgoing and friendly personality.

TO APPLY

The Esplanade Association has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm. Review of candidates will begin immediately and continue until the position is filled. Nominations, inquiries, and applications, including a letter of interest describing the individual's qualifications for the position and resume, should be sent in confidence to:



John Isaacson, President and Managing Director
Greg Esposito, Senior Associate
263 Summer Street
Boston, MA 02210
E-mail: 4859@imsearch.com

Electronic submission of materials is strongly encouraged.