SEATTLE BOTANIC GARDENS

PRESIDENT & CEO

Reports to: Board of Directors

Salary Range: $250,000 – $290,000 (TBD)

Total Staff: ~ 50 employees

Annual Operating Budget:
Projected $9 - $10M FY 2026

Apply now



www.valtasgroup.com

Seattle Botanic Gardens (SBG)* is conducting a nationwide search for its inaugural President & CEO to guide the integration of two closely aligned organizations, the University of Washington Botanic Garden (UWBG) and The Arboretum Foundation, into a single entity positioned to take full advantage of their extraordinary, shared resources. For the past 90 years, the Arboretum Foundation has stewarded the Washington Park Arboretum, both as a freely accessible public park and as one of the finest collections of woody plants in the world.

For the past 50 years, the UWBG has managed that collection, conducted extensive botanical and environmental research, and provided myriad educational opportunities for toddlers, schoolchildren, and adults. Together, we will be a single institution of national significance; capable of nimbly furthering our mission and efficiently executing ambitious capital projects. Our new leader will need to be an inspirational builder, though the foundations are already firmly in place.



FAST FACTS

Impact

Seattle Botanic Gardens welcomes more than 600,000 visitors each year from across the region and around the world. Our sites include:

- The 230-acre Washington Park Arboretum whose collections include more than 40,000 plants from 107 countries
- The Center for Urban Horticulture with gardens, research facilities, and the Rare Care plant conservation program and seed vault
- The 74-acre Union Bay Natural Area - the second largest natural system left on Lake Washington and considered one of the best bird-watching sites in the city of Seattle
- The Seattle Japanese Garden, a 3.5-acre traditional stroll garden
- A future 28-acre Montlake Peninsula site (coming in ~2031)

History/Location

- In 2026, the Arboretum Foundation and UWBG are combining into one organization
- The Washington Park Arboretum was founded in 1934 to house plant collections from the University of Washington
- The Center for Urban Horticulture opened in 1984 on the UW Campus as a hub for plant science and research
- Seattle is known for its natural beauty, innovation, abundant outdoor recreation, and commitment to environmental leadership

* The name Seattle Botanic Gardens has not been formally adopted as of yet.

Mission (in development)

To bring plants and people together to cultivate a more sustainable, inspired, and just community.



Our Values (in development)

- Respectful Stewardship
- Inclusivity
- Authenticity
- Collaboration
- Curiosity, Learning, Wonder

The Organization

The Arboretum Foundation and UWBG are joining forces to create one unified organization. This combination brings together:

- Public park spaces loved by local, regional, national, and international visitors
- World-class plant collections used for research and conservation
- Educational programs that connect thousands of people with nature each year
- Gardens that serve as outdoor classrooms and peaceful gathering places

The new organization will manage public use and access, plant care, science education, and community programs across multiple sites. Once brought together as SBG, the new organization will have more resources, stronger programs, and greater impact than either organization could achieve alone.

A major opportunity ahead is developing the Montlake Peninsula comprised of 28 acres that will return to the Arboretum in 2031. This once-in-a-generation project will require raising $100-$150 million and creating a new vision for how we welcome visitors and serve our community.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPACT

Organizational Integration

The President & CEO will bring together two organizations with different histories and cultures into one strong, unified team by making necessary hires and building systems to support more than 50 staff members. To be successful during this time of significant change, the President & CEO must create a workplace culture based on learning, collaboration, inclusion, and respect where everyone feels valued, heard, and excited about the future.



Vision & Strategic Leadership



The President & CEO will develop a clear, inspiring vision that communicates to the public at-large – both locally and beyond - why this organization matters to the city's future. The President & CEO will guide strategic planning that actively involves staff, board members, and community partners. The President & CEO will build our reputation as a world-class, high-quality, must-see botanic garden while continuing conservation work, scientific research, educational programs, and public access.

Community Engagement & Partnerships

The President & CEO will strengthen relationships with key partners including Seattle Parks and Recreation, elected officials, tribal leadership, and the Japanese American community among others. The President & CEO will actively engage diverse communities, listen carefully to what neighbors and visitors want, and position the organization as essential to Seattle's identity and future.

Fundraising & Development

The President & CEO will lead efforts to raise between $100 million and $150 million for the Montlake Peninsula project while growing annual fundraising to support operations and new programs. Working closely with the board, the President & CEO will build relationships with major donors, foundations, and corporate partners, support a strong development team and put the systems in place for long-term fundraising success.

Programs & Operations

The President & CEO will support excellent plant care, conservation work, and research and academic partnerships with the University of Washington and expanding educational programs that connect more people with plants and nature. As climate change creates new challenges and opportunities within the gardens and in the botanical and horticultural communities served by SBG, the President & CEO will help the organization prepare for these impacts while ensuring financial sustainability and operational excellence through strong systems and processes.



LEADERSHIP PROFILE

If you're excited about this opportunity but don't check every qualification listed or your experience isn't a perfect match, we still want to hear from you and we encourage you to apply anyway.

Are you a leader who inspires others and brings people together? Seattle Botanic Gardens is looking for a President & CEO who combines vision with empathy, strategic thinking with relationship building, and fundraising skills with genuine care for staff.

Candidates will be evaluated on their full range of experience—professional background, volunteer work, lived experience, and both direct and transferable skills. We're seeking candidates with successes in some or all of these areas:

Qualifications

Leadership

- Experience managing organizational change during mergers, major transitions, or significant growth or change
- Collaborative leadership style that empowers teams, values expertise, and builds trust within high performing organizations
- Proven leadership experience as President, CEO, COO, or similar senior role at a nonprofit, cultural institution, or comparable organization
- Ability to foster inclusion and create a workplace where everyone feels valued and respected
- Commitment to listen carefully to staff, board members, partners, and community voices before making decisions
- Skilled in managing finances including budgets, fundraising, and ensuring long-term sustainability
- Able to think strategically while also overseeing day-to-day operations
- Proven acumen in partnering effectively with the board of directors

Partnerships/External Relations

- Partnership experience working with government agencies, universities, or other complex institutions
- Consultation with tribal governments and leaders; experience fostering partnerships with indigenous populations, and managing Native American land rights, sovereignty, and place names
- Work with diverse communities and equity-focused practices



Fundraising/Donor Relations

- Fundraising success including major gifts, capital campaigns, and building donor relationships
- Capital campaign leadership ($25 million or more)
- Knowledge of the region's philanthropic community

Mission Alignment

- Deep commitment to public gardens, plant conservation, and connecting people with nature
- Background in botanic gardens, zoos, aquariums, science centers, museums, nature centers, or similar organizations
- Understanding of university culture and academic research institutions
- Horticultural, botanical, or landscape design knowledge

Personal Qualities

- Emotional intelligence with genuine care for people and ability to navigate sensitive situations
- Strong communication skills with ability to speak knowledgably and inspire diverse audiences from staff to donors to government officials among others
- Understanding of nonprofits including board relations, strategic planning, financial management, and operations
- Ability to make decisions that balance many interests and move the organization forward
- Skilled in uniting people from different backgrounds and organizations around a shared vision
- Communicate clearly in writing, in speeches, and in one-on-one conversations
- Stay resilient and maintain positivity during challenges and change
- Represent the organization at public events, in the media, and with community leaders

Total Compensation & Benefits

The annual salary range for this position is $250,000 - $290,000, depending on experience.

Seattle Botanic Gardens is committed to supporting all employees through competitive salaries and benefits, professional development opportunities, and a commitment to equity and inclusion.

The benefits package includes:

- Health, dental, and vision insurance
- Retirement plan with employer contribution
- Generous paid time off
- Professional development support

To Be Considered

The position is open until filled, with a priority deadline of January 9, 2026. We encourage you to apply as soon as possible.

Please submit:

1. A cover letter (two pages or less) addressed to the President & CEO Search Committee
2. Your resume

Focus your cover letter on these questions:

- Why are you interested in this role?
- How does your experience align with our mission and values?
- What would you bring to this moment in our organization's history?

Submit your application at: SBG President & CEO

You may direct questions to Ed Rogan (ed@valtasgroup.com) or Chris Cannon (chris@valtasgroup.com)

OUR COMMITMENT TO EQUITY

Human communities and ecosystems both thrive through diversity. Seattle Botanic Gardens welcomes candidates of all races, ethnicities, genders, abilities, identities, religions, and ages with diverse viewpoints and lived experience.

It is our policy to consider all applications equally without regard to race, color, religion, disability, pregnancy, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, age, ethnicity, income, veteran status, marital status, or any other basis prohibited by law.

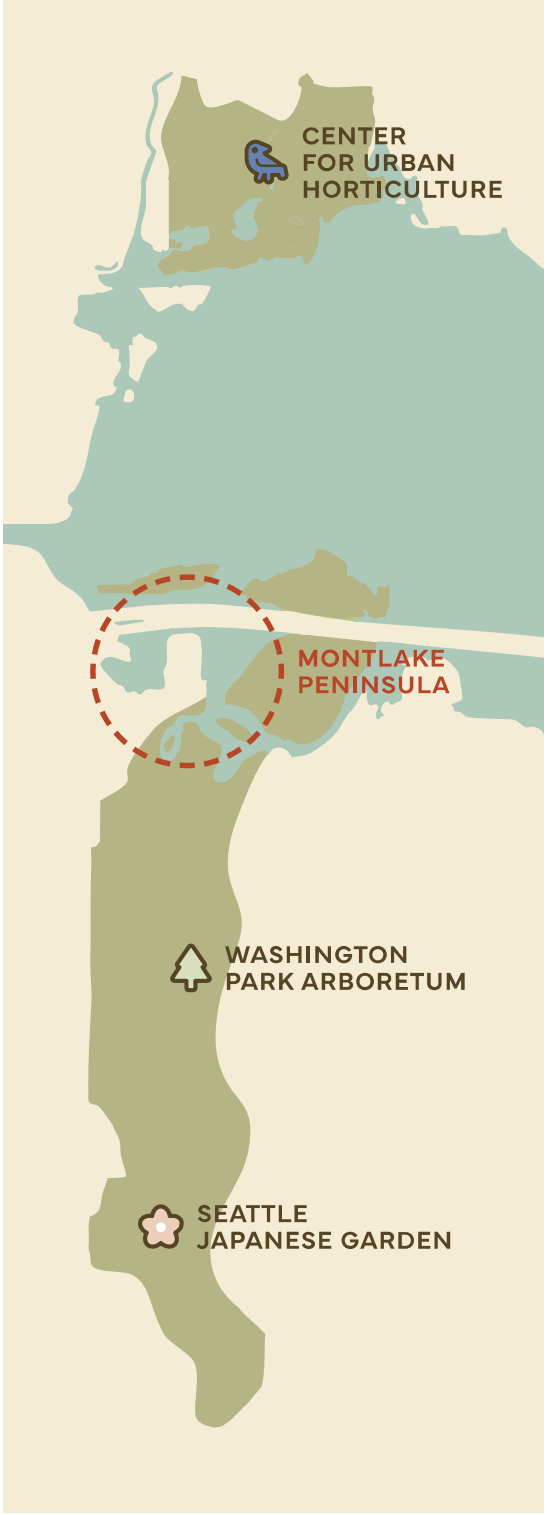
Seattle Botanic Gardens will be an inspiring place to work. This is a once-in-a-century opportunity to bring some of Seattle's most beloved places together, supported by one dynamic, diverse and engaged organization. Join us in creating something extraordinary.

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Addendum

One Vision, Three Locations

Bringing people & plants together for greater connection, knowledge, and inspiration



Why a Newly Imagined Partnership?

Through reimagining our work together to better organize our expertise and talents, we would be able to:

- **create a better experience for our visitors**
- **provide more opportunities for learning and engagement**
- **unlock a new level of fundraising resources**

By sharing our strengths, we would be capable of greater connection, knowledge, and inspiration.

The Center for Urban Horticulture is a vibrant hub for plant science, education, and community engagement. Spanning 16 acres of landscaped grounds and adjacent to the 74-acre Union Bay Natural Area, it offers diverse environments for exploration and research, and is a haven for birdwatchers, with over 200 bird species.

The Washington Park Arboretum is our state's home for hundreds of world-class plant collections. With cherished local species and rare plants from around the world, the Arboretum attracts thousands of visitors each year.

The Seattle Japanese Garden is an urban oasis of mindfully tended peace and beauty. Many visitors are especially drawn to the cultural celebrations, art displays, and tea ceremonies uniquely offered at the Japanese Garden.

Future: Reimagining the Montlake Peninsula

The Arboretum is on the traditional land of Coast Salish peoples. As we look to the future, our work offers a restorative opportunity to honor Indigenous connections in partnership with its original caretakers. The Montlake Peninsula is currently in use for the 520 bridge project and will be returned to the Arboretum in the coming years. In partnership, we would work to restore to restore and reimagine these 28-acres for generations to enjoy.

We want you to be part of an exciting new chapter.

For more information, visit **arboretumfoundation.org/a-new-united-organization**

Arboretum Foundation

University of Washington Botanic Gardens