



ALLEY THEATRE

Chief Development Officer

Sorrell is proud to partner with Alley Theatre, which is seeking a new Chief Development Officer.

Founded in 1947 by Nina Vance in Houston, Texas, Alley Theatre is a pioneer of regional theatre and one of the leading nonprofit theatre companies in the United States. It reaches more than 200,000 people each year through delivering world class theater performances on its two stages and through its robust education programs and community engagement work. The Alley has been awarded the prestigious Regional Theatre Tony Award® and the Texas Medal of Arts Award. The Alley has transferred productions to Broadway, Off-Broadway, major European Festivals, and to 40 American cities.

Unique among regional theatres, the Alley is committed to maintaining a Resident Acting Company and providing them with work year-round. Nationally recognized directors, actors, playwrights, and designers from across the country have regularly joined the Resident Acting Company to create productions. The Alley operates on a \$24 million annual budget and has \$138 million in net assets. The 2026/2027 season marks the Alley's 80th year.

Led by Artistic Director Rob Melrose and Managing Director Jennifer Bielstein, the Alley focuses on delivering excellent programming to inspire and enchant lives through theater and prioritizes creating a welcoming environment for all.

For more information, see <https://www.alleytheatre.org/>.

Position Summary

The Chief Development Officer (CDO) is a senior leader responsible for advancing the Alley's annual and long-range philanthropic goals through a comprehensive, strategic fundraising program. Reporting to the Managing Director, the CDO will serve as a close partner to the Managing Director, Artistic Director, Board of Directors, and senior leadership team and will lead all contributed revenue efforts across individual, foundation, corporate, government, and special event support.

The CDO will oversee three direct-report functions: Individual Giving, Institutional Giving, and Special Events, with a collective annual fundraising goal of approximately \$10 million plus periodic campaigns for capital or project needs.

This is an important leadership transition for the Alley. Its longtime Chief Development Officer plans to retire by the end of 2026 and will remain available as needed in a consulting capacity. The incoming CDO will inherit an established fundraising program and a talented development team, while also having a clear mandate to move the department from a heavily event-driven model toward a more strategic, relationship-based, multi-year approach to donor cultivation and stewardship.

The ideal candidate is a results-driven leader who reflects the Alley's cultural pillars of Inclusion, Respect, and Collaboration. The successful CDO will be strategic and execution-oriented while remaining positive, thoughtful, and composed, inspiring the team to perform as a cohesive unit. Moreover, the CDO should genuinely care about the Alley's mission and the people who support it.

Key Responsibilities

Strategic Leadership

- Serve as a member of the senior leadership team and a key strategic partner to the Managing Director in setting and implementing the Alley's overall fundraising strategy.
- Develop and lead a comprehensive, multi-year development plan that strengthens donor pipelines, expands contributed revenue, and establishes clear goals and accountability across fundraising channels.
- Assess current development practices and build a more strategic, coordinated program that balances events with sustained cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship.
- Partner across artistic, marketing, finance, education, community engagement, production, and other functions to align fundraising priorities with institutional goals and opportunities.
- Serve as an external ambassador for the Alley and help deepen its visibility and relationships throughout Houston's philanthropic community.

Fundraising & Donor Relations

- Lead strategies to achieve and grow support from individuals, foundations, corporations, government sources, and special events.
- Serve personally as a principal and transformational-gift fundraiser, managing a portfolio of major prospects and participating directly in identification, cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship.
- Build thoughtful, multi-year cultivation plans that deepen donor engagement and move relationships toward increased and sustained support.
- Work closely with the Managing Director, Artistic Director, Board leadership, and other volunteers on major donor strategy, introductions, solicitation, and stewardship.
- Guide the implementation of donor recognition from the recently completed Vision for the Future capital campaign and help shape future long-range funding priorities.
- Ensure donor relationships are sincere, mission-centered, and highly personalized rather than transactional.

Team & Board Leadership

- Provide leadership, direction, coaching, and accountability for the Development Department, including Individual Giving, Institutional Giving, and Special Events.
- Create a positive, encouraging, high-performance culture that supports collaboration, professional camaraderie, and strong execution.
- Recruit, develop, and retain strong fundraising professionals; establish clear expectations, goals, performance measures, and professional development opportunities.
- Build effective working relationships with the Board of Directors and its committees, and partner with the Managing Director and Board leadership to identify and engage Trustees who can open doors, give, and help secure significant gifts.
- Equip senior leaders, board members, and volunteers with the strategies and tools needed to support fundraising success.

Stewardship, Events & Institutional Presence

- Ensure a comprehensive stewardship program that recognizes donors, communicates impact, and creates meaningful opportunities for engagement with the Alley.
- Partner with the Special Events team on major fundraising events, including the Alley Ball and Deck the Trees, while ensuring events support broader relationship-building and fundraising goals.
- Maintain an active donor-facing presence at performances and special events, including strategic/rotational participation in the Green Room to steward donors and prospects.
- Work closely with Marketing and other colleagues to ensure consistent, compelling donor communications and recognition.

Operations, Budget & Performance

- Oversee the Development Department budget and evaluate fundraising programs for effectiveness, cost, and return on investment.
- Establish clear benchmarks for growth in dollars raised, donor retention, pipeline development, and other measures of fundraising performance.
- Ensure strong use of Tessitura and other systems for donor information, moves management, reporting, and analysis.
- Provide regular, concise progress reporting to the Managing Director and Board leadership.

Essential Skills, Knowledge and Experience

- Significant progressive fundraising leadership experience, ideally including responsibility for multi-million-dollar annual fundraising goals and a proven record of closing major and transformational gifts. Capital campaign experience is a plus.
- Demonstrated success leading and developing high-performing fundraising teams and holding people accountable in a positive, supportive manner.
- Strong strategic planning skills, with the ability to translate broad direction into practical multi-year cultivation and fundraising plans and execute them effectively.
- Strong financial acumen and experience working with budgets.
- Exceptional interpersonal and soft skills: relational and sincere, possessing high emotional intelligence; able to read a room and adapt communication style and approach accordingly.
- Confidence and courage as a fundraiser; willing to make the ask, pursue ambitious goals, and navigate complex donor and stakeholder relationships with sound judgment.
- Ability to think critically and strategically and anticipate potential challenges, with a proactive approach to problem-solving with strong decision-making skills.
- Deep knowledge of Houston and/or strong familiarity with Houston's philanthropic landscape, with the ability to help the Alley expand and strengthen its donor network.
- Experience working effectively with boards, volunteers, senior executives, and community leaders.
- A demonstrated record of ability to multi-task and meet deadlines under pressure; completing assignments on time and on budget.
- Excellent verbal and written communication, presentation, analytical, organizational, and problem-solving skills.
- Trustworthy; ability to maintain confidential information.
- Proficiency with Microsoft Office Suite, fundraising databases and other technology; experience with Tessitura is a plus.
- Strong and positive collaboration skills in order to work effectively across the organization and with external stakeholders.
- Detail oriented, able to prioritize efficiently and multi-task.
- Ability to be self-directed and take initiative.
- Bachelor's degree required.
- CFRE certification is a plus.
- Experience in the arts or performing arts is a plus but not required.

Physical Requirements / Working Conditions

- Full-time, exempt, in-office position based at the Meredith J. Long Theatre Center in Downtown Houston.
- Typical hours are during the day, but the position requires flexibility to be available for weekends, holidays and evening work hours as needed for performances, donor stewardship, and special events.
- Must be comfortable working in a fast-paced environment where directions and priorities can change rapidly.

- Prolonged periods of sitting at a desk and working on a computer.
- Ability to lift and move 25 lbs.

Compensation and Benefits

Compensation is competitive and commensurate with experience. Generous benefit package, including medical, dental and vision insurance; paid vacation, floating holiday and sick time; 401(k) with matching; Flexible Spending Account (FSA) and Health Reimbursement Account (HRA); free and discounted tickets to Alley Theatre performances; discounted parking and gym membership; and employee wellness and Employee Assistance Program benefits.

Application and Referral Process

Applicant review is currently underway and will continue until the candidate has been selected. To nominate or be considered for this position, please contact Priscilla Plumb at priscilla@sorrellco.com / 281.224.0881 or Stacie Gaff at stacie@sorrellco.com / 832.594.1925. All inquiries will be held in confidence.

Alley Theatre is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities and disabled veterans in its job application procedures. If you need assistance or an accommodation due to a disability, you may contact hrdept@alleytheatre.org.

Alley Theatre is an Equal Opportunity Employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, veteran status or any other characteristic protected by applicable local, state, or federal law. We encourage people of all backgrounds to apply.

About Sorrell

Sorrell is a highly relational provider of executive recruiting. Our mission is to serve as partners with our clients to accelerate their efforts to attract, hire and retain talent that impacts the future of the organization. For more information, call 713.840.1870.