



# **JAMES S. McDONNELL FOUNDATION**

## **LEADERSHIP PROFILE**

**President**  
**The James S. McDonnell Foundation**  
**St. Louis, MO**

# The Opportunity

The James S. McDonnell Foundation (JSMF) has been a humble, influential philanthropic force behind innovation for over 70 years. As it enters the third generation of family leadership, the Board is shifting its focus to the prosperity and quality of life in the St. Louis region. This shift will represent a significant contribution to place-based economic development and mobility, life sciences, PK-12 STEM education, and workforce development. The Foundation currently has assets of approximately \$700 million and, in 2021 awarded roughly \$16 million in programmatic grants with a budget projected to approach \$30 million by 2026.

The Foundation was established in 1950 by James S. McDonnell, an aerospace pioneer and leader of McDonnell Aircraft Corporation and its successor McDonnell Douglas Corporation. For the first 30 years, the Foundation was the vehicle for Mr. McDonnell's philanthropic interests, primarily in matters of the mind and consciousness and in St. Louis institutions. For the past 35 years since his death, the foundation has been led and staffed by professionals to promote quality of life by programmatically supporting research in the behavioral and biomedical sciences worldwide. The JSMF board consists of Mr. McDonnell's two sons and seven grandchildren. The dynamics of the foundation are moving from "sibling partnership to cousin collaboration". According to one observer, the family has a reputation for being "wonderful, generous, thoughtful, affectionate and respectful of each other."

In 2019, the current foundation president Susan Fitzpatrick shared her retirement plans to be effective in the fall of 2022. The board spent two years in a thoughtful process to determine its focus moving forward. St. Louis is the home to most of the nine-member board. The decision has been made with significant input from third generation family members, to turn the attention of the

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foundation to help increase the quality of life and prosperity of those in the St. Louis metro area.

St. Louis, the 10th largest region by population in 1970, is currently the 21st largest. It was once the home to other large corporate headquarters such as Southwestern Bell, General Dynamics and Ralston Purina. An extended period of manufacturing decline has impacted the city's growth and the region's prosperity. While the area benefits from world-class research institutions and universities, an emerging plant science sector, and strong financial and tech sector, progress in the region has been uneven. Opportunities exist to bolster the economy and its current and future workforce.

The foundation has a legacy of driving innovation through rigorous inquiry, data research, collaborative investment and thoughtful risk-taking. While the foundation's focus areas will change, the innovative, collaborative, evidence-based, humble approach will not. The board envisions bringing together funders, practitioners, and philanthropists to solve entrenched issues. One board member quoted Missourian president Harry Truman, "it is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit".

The new president will work closely with the board to build out the programmatic investment strategy in the St. Louis area and inherit a well-run organization with committed staff and an engaged and thoughtful family board.

## The Organization

The legacy of James S. McDonnell lives on in the numerous contributions he and his family have made to the St. Louis area. The McDonnell Aircraft Corporation, founded by James S. McDonnell in 1939, was the largest employer in Missouri by the mid-1960's. In 1967 it merged with Douglas



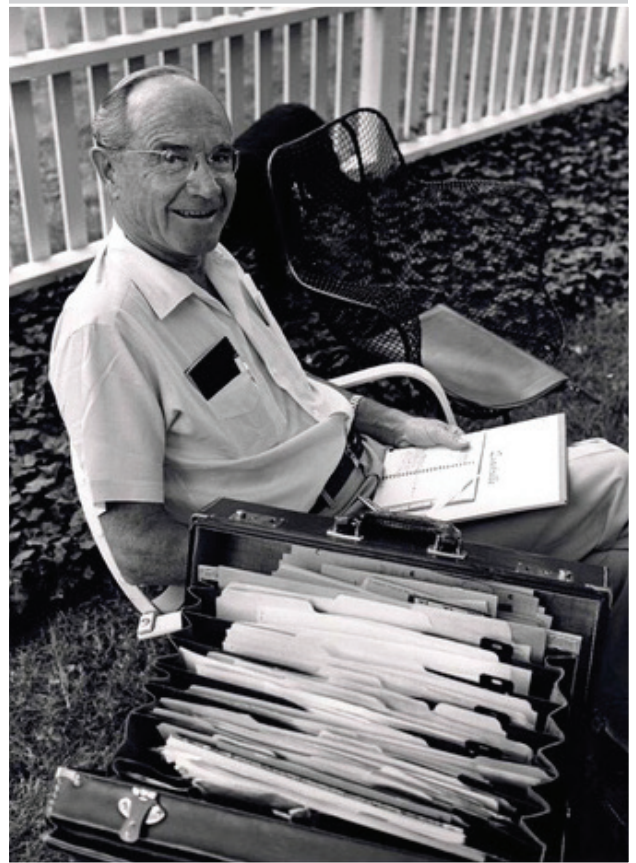
Aircraft and became McDonnell Douglas. It was a major producer of jet fighters, commercial aircraft, and space vehicles. McDonnell Douglas was the region's largest private employer and a source of great civic pride. In 1997 McDonnell Douglas merged with then Seattle-based Boeing, which is now headquartered in Chicago. St. Louis remains the primary site of the defense business.

The founder and CEO, "Mr. Mac" as he was affectionately known, is described as a quiet, thrifty man with wide-ranging curiosity, relentless attention to detail and a reputation for delivering excellence. The foundation, which bears his name, operates similarly. The offices are simple and functional; the work is thoughtful, scholarly, and innovative. The staff is committed to excellence and collaboration, and according to the current president, Susan Fitzpatrick, "we do with three people, what others cannot do with 20."

The foundation has made significant donations to Washington University Medical School, including creating the McDonnell Center for Systems Neuroscience and the complementary Center for Cellular and Molecular Neurobiology. The Centers have helped launch new careers, promote new technical initiatives, and helped define questions to improve quality of life.

For the last 35 years, the foundation has supported research in behavioral and biomedical sciences around the world. It has developed a reputation for strategic philanthropy, investing in new knowledge and application, finding niche areas where investment and collaboration would further the field. For example, the foundation was one of the first funders for brain cancer research over 20 years ago and a sponsor of the Brain Tumors Funders' Collaborative comprised of advocacy and philanthropic organizations.

In 2017, JSMF inaugurated the Understanding Teacher Change and Teachers as Learners in K-12 Classrooms program to fund education research



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on the science of teaching and expand the understanding of teachers as learners and key agents of change in education. As the foundation shifts its focus to the St. Louis metro areas the Teachers as Learners program is expected to continue with emphasis on sharing findings with local professional development efforts.

As JSMF shifts its focus to place-based economic development, education, and workforce development, it can build upon contributions made by individual family members and through other family charitable entities in relevant areas. For example, to promote St. Louis as a hub for life sciences research and economic development, family members have supported the founding and growth of the Danforth Plant Science Center, The McDonnell Genome Institute at Washington University Medical School, and BioSTL, a backbone organization supporting bioscience innovation. To ensure that economic opportunities are accessible to all students, particularly those underrepresented in STEM fields, they have been lead donors and involved with STEMSTL, a cross-sector collaboration focused on STEM learning, as well as Washington University's Institute of School Partnership's efforts to support quality math and science instruction in local K-8 classrooms.

## The Mandate

The next president of the James S. McDonnell Foundation will work closely with the board and staff to bring to fruition the board's vision of improving the prosperity and quality of life in St. Louis. The new leader will:

### **Understand the Family and the Community.**

The president will engage deeply with the family to coalesce and prioritize interest areas. The family is enthusiastic about the pivot to focus on the metro area and bring a range of political and social perspectives, which will help galvanize

the work. The president will invest time with community leaders, funders, and practitioners and bring an informed perspective on areas for potential investment. She or he will also help provide synergy and distinction between JSMF and individual family members' charitable endeavors.

**Collaborate.** The family is clear that a \$20-\$30mm investment annually will not solve the challenges the area faces. Success will only come through thoughtful collaboration and a shared voice with other funders, foundations, and partners. The president will continue the foundation's patterns of identifying a niche where funding can make a difference and creating a network of partners to address the opportunity.

**Lead.** The president will provide thought leadership, understanding how to drive systems change in partnership. Internally, the president will work with staff to pivot toward St. Louis, leveraging their substantial skill and commitment to the foundation and the area.

**Evaluate and Refine.** As program areas are defined, the president will develop processes to evaluate the outcome of investments and refine strategies as needed. JSMF will continue to issue RFPs and/or collaborate with others to develop investment opportunities. The president will take calculated risks, ensuring the foundation does not experience "paralysis by analysis".

## The Candidate

The next president of the James S. McDonnell Foundation must be a leader who embodies the collective passion for impact and progress in the St. Louis metro area and shares the vision of increasing the quality of life and prosperity for all its citizens.

The foundation's search committee and board are open to a variety of careers paths. A record



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of excellence in a place-based, collaborative environment and an understanding of the St. Louis metro area would be ideal. The board is open to candidates from other locations who have a track record of impactful success and an understanding of the dynamics involved in changing the growth trajectory of a region.

The ideal candidate will bring a process of inquiry and discovery to help set the vision for the foundation's new focus.

**Competence:** Among the other traits being sought the foundation expects to hire.....

- A skilled, strategic, evidence-based, and humble president, comfortable leading the board and a team of smart colleagues who are ambitious for their foundation, invested in their community, and accustomed to an environment of excellence and partnership;
- A critical thinker and continuous learner who can see issues from a variety of perspectives and is adept at drilling into a matter and finding multiple methods to address it;
- A strong communicator and genuine partner, both externally and internally;
- A collaborative change-maker experienced in cross-sector leadership; serve at the helm of a place-based enterprise or foundation respected for sustained impact would be of special interest;
- A systems-level thinker with experience driving changes at scale;
- A financially literate manager with the experience to oversee a \$2mm operating budget and a \$20mm grant budget;
- A culturally astute leader who is fully at home with people of diverse backgrounds, socioeconomic circumstances, and perspectives;

- A president who respects the power of data while also recognizing that the work of the foundation impacts real people;
- A board-savvy manager energized by the opportunity for real impact and realistic about the hurdles ahead;
- A leader with the education, experience, and people skills to lead a family foundation proud of its roots, ambitious in its goals, and deliberate in its execution.

**Culture:** we expect to attract...

- A credible, intelligent leader who will represent the family and foundation with humility and clarity with both a heart and a head for this important work;
- A leader who exudes authenticity, whether in the boardroom, the classroom or the community;
- A roll-up the sleeves president with a penchant for action
- An executive with cultural skills and emotional intelligence at least as well developed as their management skills; someone who can meet others where they are, not where they think they ought to be.

**Character:** we seek a president who is...

- Tolerant of risk taking and smart mistakes;
- Tenacious, decisive, and respectful in pursuit of agreed-upon objectives;
- Someone the community enjoys engaging with, even in the face of potential conflict or disappointment;
- Alert to the special joys (and potential challenges) of a family enterprise, especially one involving multiple generations;
- A joyful leader who derives genuine pleasure from supporting the successes of others.



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# The Relationships

<b>The President reports to</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Board of Directors, James S. McDonnell Foundation</li></ul>
<b>And manages a staff of three</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• VP of Operations</li><li>• Program Officer</li><li>• Grants Manager</li></ul>
<b>While stewarding other important relationships such as</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Grantees and program partners</li><li>• Local and statewide leaders and their organizations</li><li>• Peers in philanthropy, regionally and nationally</li><li>• Associates and the emerging generation(s) of future McDonnell family board members</li></ul>

## The Location

St. Louis is a family-friendly, primarily suburban-based community with approximately 6% lower cost of living than the national average (Payscale.com). The St. Louis metropolitan area population is 2.8 million. It is home to the Gateway Arch and Forest Park, considered one of the nation's greatest urban public parks. The park's 1,300 acres hosts five major cultural institutions including the St. Louis Art Museum, Science Center, and Zoo as well as the Missouri History Museum and the Muny Opera. For over 100 years, The Muny has captured hearts and sparked imaginations through music and movement. Each summer, it fills Forest Park with the sounds of Broadway. The park also has a beautiful landscape filled with forests, nature reserves, lakes and streams. It is a wonderful oasis in the middle of the city.

St. Louis hosts four professional sports teams, including the St. Louis Cardinals of Major League Baseball, The St. Louis Blues of the National Hockey League, the St. Louis BattleHawks of the XFL, and the new St. Louis City SC of Major League Soccer, anticipated to begin play in 2023.

St. Louis is also known for its blues and its barbeque. The area is ripe with walkable neighborhoods offering a variety of restaurants with unique charm and local personality.

The James S. McDonnell Foundation is located in the Richmond Heights community of St. Louis.

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For potential consideration or to recommend a prospect,  
please email appropriate materials to

**[JSMF@BoardWalkConsulting.com](mailto:JSMF@BoardWalkConsulting.com)**

or call **Crystal Stephens, Sam Pettway** or **Michelle Hall** at 404-262-7392.

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