



ADVISOR
SCIENCE PHILANTHROPY ALLIANCE
Palo Alto, California
[Science Philanthropy Alliance](#)



Advancing basic science—The foundation of our future

The Aspen Leadership Group is proud to partner with Science Philanthropy Alliance in the search for an Advisor.

Partnering closely with the President and Executive Director, the Advisor will establish, advise, and deepen relationships with high-net-worth individuals and their foundation staff on how to effectively support basic science research. The Advisor will complement the work of the President and Executive Director in the recruitment of new members and advisees to the Alliance, thus building the community of basic science research funders.

The mission of Science Philanthropy Alliance is to increase philanthropic support for basic scientific research. It accomplishes this by understanding the opportunities and complexities philanthropists face in funding basic science, and providing advice and learning opportunities for individual philanthropists and foundation staffs on how to support basic research most effectively. Science Philanthropy Alliance believes that philanthropy plays a critical role in advancing basic scientific knowledge—knowledge that is essential to the improvement of human health and welfare.

Science Philanthropy Alliance is a group of funders that have come together to increase philanthropic support for basic scientific research to accelerate scientific discovery. It provides advice and learning opportunities for individuals and foundations so they can help answer scientific questions, solve big problems, and further knowledge about the natural world. It empowers them to advance their own science interests and priorities. It does this by utilizing its deep connections in the worlds of science and philanthropy. By serving as impartial advisors to philanthropists, promoting collaboration among those who are interested in this vital stage of scientific discovery, and bringing together donors and top scientists, the Alliance aims to substantially increase philanthropic funding for fundamental research, and create a community of funders for discovery-driven scientific inquiry.

The journey to supporting basic research can be daunting for philanthropists. The range of potential topics is so vast—from cosmology to research on materials, from genomics to plant biology—that it is difficult to know where philanthropic support can make a difference. Additionally, the mechanisms for giving are complex—from supporting a single university, to supporting individuals at many institutions—that the possibilities can seem overwhelming. The Alliance provides advice and learning opportunities for individual philanthropists and foundation staffs on how to support basic research most effectively.

REPORTING RELATIONSHIPS

The Advisor will report to the Executive Director, Valerie Conn.

PRINCIPAL OPPORTUNITIES

The Science Philanthropy Alliance was founded by six foundations to increase private funding for basic science, in response to the steady decline in government funding since 2003. Today, the Science Philanthropy Alliance is in a critical and exciting growth phase. After over three years with full time staff, it is clear that the Alliance's business model and strategy are effective, so an additional Advisor is needed in order to manage and build advising relationships, and to help the Alliance's mission succeed.

The Alliance is seeking a senior, experienced relationship manager who has experience working with high level people such as billionaires, university Presidents, and Nobel Prize awardees. As a philanthropic advisor for basic science, the Advisor has the potential to make a significant impact on the future of science funding for decades to come by influencing new commitments, programs, and funding streams to basic science in a philanthropist's portfolio today.

The Advisor will be exposed to a world-class network of philanthropists and scientists and other stakeholders which will allow the Advisor unprecedented access to the basic science philanthropy sector. The Advisor will be learning about the current practices of Alliance members, 25 of the most significant private funders of basic science in the U.S. and the U.K. today. This exposure to the top private funders of basic science will enable the Advisor to become an expert in how private donors can most effectively fund basic science. The Alliance's operating model is uniquely aligned with its mission, with the result being impartial (and credible) advisory services. As such, all services are donor-centric, helping to ensure the highest degree of philanthropic satisfaction. Because the Alliance doesn't match specific funding opportunities with funders, the Advisor will be free to access the top scientists regardless of institution, and to provide objective advice on how best to fund basic science.

Witnessing this satisfaction and developing deep and trust-based relationships with advisees is highly gratifying work. Opportunities beyond this position include private advising in various settings or fundraising at the highest levels.

The right candidate will expand our advising reach throughout the growing universe of ultra-wealthy individuals and help target (and develop) those with potential interest in funding basic science. Strengths complementary to those of the current team will allow for a broader range of services offered. Having contrasting skill-sets and styles represented will enable the Alliance to engage successfully with all types of advisees, at all stages of their giving. The Advisor will be welcomed into a mission-driven non-competitive environment where teamwork is paramount to the effectiveness of the organization. As part of a small but very senior team, the Advisor will have the opportunity to influence the strategy and direction of the organization throughout her/his time at the Alliance.

In contrast, it often takes decades for an initial scientific discovery to develop into a world-changing advance, and for the full import of the investment to be recognized. Although it's difficult to predict exactly what future ground-breaking discoveries might occur, what is known is how necessary they will be to successfully address the challenges posed by a growing global population. Whether or not this candidate can directly trace her/his influence to a particular discovery, at the very least, they will know that their efforts led to a fundamental increase in our knowledge and understanding of the natural world.

—Valerie Conn, Executive Director

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES

The Advisor will

- advise high-net-worth individuals and their foundation staff on how to effectively support basic science research;
- partner closely with the President and Executive Director to establish and deepen relationships with high-net-worth individuals and their foundation staff;
- drive the interactions with advisees and other prospective funders to basic science;
- oversee a pool of members, advisees, prospective Alliance members, and prospective advisees to ensure consistent contact commensurate with their needs;
- listen carefully to funding questions, articulate the case for basic science research, and provide customized counsel on funding models and mechanisms as needed;
- be knowledgeable about Alliance members and their funding models, and have a strong working relationship with the senior staff at the Alliance member organizations;
- bring or build relationships with other basic science thought leaders in order to have broad knowledge of the basic science funding landscape including planning workshops or other collaborative learning events;
- play an active role in planning strategies for advisees, and be encouraged to help enhance the operations for portfolio management;
- work closely with the entire advising team that includes advisors, consultants, fellows, and the research assistant; and
- complement the work of the President and Executive Director to recruit new members and advisees to the Alliance, thus building the community of basic science research funders.

KEY COLLEAGUES



Marc Kastner
President

Marc Kastner is the President of the Science Philanthropy Alliance, a coalition of leading nonprofit institutions and foundations dedicated to increasing financial support for basic science research. Prior to leading the Alliance, Kastner had a long career in a variety of senior positions at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Kastner joined MIT in 1973 and was named the Donner Professor of Physics in 1989. He became director of the Center for Materials Science and Engineering in 1993, head of the Department of Physics in 1998 and Dean of the School of Science in 2007.

Kastner has served as chair of the Solid State Sciences Committee and as chair of the Board on Physics and Astronomy of the National Research Council. He has also served on the Science Advisory Boards of the National Cancer Institute and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. Kastner is a member of the National Academy of Sciences, a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Physical Society, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. In 1995, he received the David Adler Lectureship Award of the American Physical Society, and in 2000 he won the Oliver E. Buckley Prize of the American Physical Society. Kastner received a B.S. in chemistry, an M.S. in physics, and a Ph.D. in physics from the University of Chicago and was a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard University.



Valerie Conn
Executive Director

As Executive Director of the Science Philanthropy Alliance, Valerie brings over 25 years of experience working with philanthropists, foundations, and corporations to fund science, medicine, engineering, and education initiatives. In 2015 Valerie joined Science Philanthropy Alliance as its second employee in the role of Vice President, helping to create the strategy to advise philanthropists on how to effectively support basic science research.

In addition to building and managing the operational capacity of the organization, Valerie is a key advisor to a growing number of Alliance members and other philanthropists. Valerie creates customized science philanthropy strategies and serves as a connector for the science and philanthropic worlds. She is a recognized expert on science philanthropy and a frequent speaker to a variety of stakeholders, including billionaire philanthropists, university science leaders, and fundraising professionals.

During her decade as a development officer at the University of Chicago (2004-2013), Valerie led teams in the Physical Sciences Division, as well as university strategic initiatives, including developing and implementing the strategy for partnership development, resource development, and marketing for the Giant Magellan Telescope and the Computation Institute fundraising initiatives.

Prior to joining the Alliance, Valerie was vice President of Strategy for the B612 Foundation from 2014-2015. Valerie began her career at the Illinois Institute of Technology in 1989, after which she led a campaign for medical research at Children's Memorial Hospital (now Lurie Children's) in Chicago from 1999 to 2003.

Valerie serves on the Committee on Women in Science, Engineering and Medicine for the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine. She holds a bachelor of arts degree from Northwestern University, and has two grown children.



Sue Merrilees
Advisor

As an Advisor, Sue works with members and advisees on customized science philanthropy strategies, with the goal of increasing private funding to basic science. Sue has more than 25 years of progressive development experience in institutions across the U.S. and abroad, including participation in successful billion and multi-million dollar campaigns at Barnard College, Stanford University, and the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF). At UCSF, she led teams focused on fundraising initiatives for the neurosciences, global health and infectious diseases, and quantitative biosciences, as well as numerous capital projects that compose the Mission Bay campus. Just prior to joining the Science Philanthropy Alliance, Sue led strategic planning and fundraising at the University of Sydney's Medical School where she played an instrumental role in the success of the largest fundraising campaign in Australia.

Sue received a B.Phil. from Miami University of Ohio and a certificate in fundraising management from New York University.

CANDIDATE QUALIFICATIONS AND QUALITIES

The successful candidate for the position of Advisor should have

- a demonstrated ability to build relationships with philanthropists that result in transformative gifts to a research institution, preferably to science;
- an ability to develop trust and strong collaborative working relationships with Alliance staff, member organizations, and advisees;
- strong interpersonal skills;
- attention to detail, especially regarding the management of timelines and critical correspondence;
- a creative approach to problem-solving and the ability to take advantage of emerging opportunities;
- experience building coalitions and partnerships;
- possession of a sense of urgency, a clear set of priorities, and a strong work ethic;
- professional gravitas that will gain the respect of high-net-worth individuals and foundations, as well as members of the Alliance and the scientific community;
- unimpeachable integrity and trustworthiness including a fine-tuned sense of discretion in the handling of confidential and sensitive matters;
- an ability to speak persuasively and knowledgeably about basic science and its impact on technology, health, and society;
- public speaking ability which could include presentations, moderating groups discussions, and serving on panels;
- an ability to inspire enthusiasm about the Alliance mission;
- a high level of energy and self-confidence, and the ability to function at peak levels in a fast-paced, high-expectation environment; and
- comfort working in relational databases with accountability for data entry for the purposes of relationship and activity tracking.

A bachelor's degree from an accredited institution is required for this position as is at least five to seven years in development. An advanced degree is preferred. This position requires frequent travel.

SALARY & BENEFITS

Science Philanthropy Alliance offers a competitive salary and benefits package.

LOCATION

The successful candidate will work from Science Philanthropy Alliance's Palo Alto location on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of each week when not traveling.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

A diverse workforce and an inclusive work environment are top organizational priorities for the New Venture Fund and is integrated into all facets of its work. Over the past year, it has made two additions to its [Board of Directors](#) that have significantly increased its racial and gender diversity: of its seven members, two are women and two are people of color. This will remain a priority as it adds Board members as the organization grows.

New Venture Fund also employs over 330 staff, 67% of whom are women and 27% of whom identify as non-white. As a fiscal sponsor, it gives its projects latitude in hiring staff: while it has an explicit and well-promulgated equal opportunity policy, the projects control the application of this policy in their hiring processes. At the same time, it is always looking for ways to communicate to its projects—many of whom live in and serve underrepresented and minority communities—the importance of diversity and inclusion at the staff level.

New Venture Fund is managed by staff from Arabella Advisors, a philanthropic consulting firm that has invested heavily in diversity, equity, and inclusion. New Venture Fund draws on Arabella's expertise in various ways—for example, Arabella recently led a session for all New Venture Fund staff on how to make a workplace more diverse, equitable, and inclusive through strong recruiting practices. As the organization grows and the social sector evolves, it will continue to work to ensure that its staff and Board represent the diverse populations it serves.

NEW VENTURE FUND CAREERS

Science Philanthropy Alliance is a project of the New Venture Fund, a 501(c)(3) public charity that incubates new and innovative public-interest projects and grant-making programs. The New Venture Fund is committed to attracting, developing, and retaining exceptional people, and to creating a work environment that is dynamic, rewarding, and enables each of us to realize our potential. The New Venture Fund's work environment is safe and open to all employees and partners, respecting the full spectrum of race, color, religious creed, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, political affiliation, ancestry, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, and all other classifications protected by law in the locality and/or state in which you are working.

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

All applications must be accompanied by a cover letter and résumé. Before submitting your materials, please read them over for accuracy. Review of applications will begin immediately and continue until the successful candidate has been selected.

To nominate a candidate, please contact Anne Johnson:
annejohnson@aspenleadershipgroup.com.