



An Invitation to Apply for the Position of

Chief Executive Officer

American Booksellers Association
White Plains, New York

“...the national face of independent bookselling”

THE SEARCH

The American Booksellers Association (ABA), a national not-for-profit trade organization, seeks a visionary and entrepreneurial leader to serve as its next Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The right candidate will have the ability to appreciate and passionately uphold the association’s mission and assertion that bookstores are vital to our communities. At the core of ABA’s mission is providing its independent bookstore members with the tools and resources they need to be successful. Deeply and historically committed to its members and its mission, the ABA and the next CEO will be positioned to enhance the organization’s impact on local communities through a thriving national platform.

Independent bookstores act as community anchors; they serve a unique role in promoting the open exchange of ideas, enriching the cultural life of communities, and creating economically vibrant neighborhoods. Since its creation in 1900, the ABA has been a tireless champion for independent bookstores, helping them flourish in a dynamic and highly competitive industry. The work of the association provides a wide range of educational and networking programs for its members; advocates on behalf of its members with publishers, other vendors, and government; offers cost-effective administrative and marketing services; and offers an exciting platform of digital initiatives, including a full eCommerce platform, to support independent bookstores and booksellers.

The new CEO will join an organization with an extremely strong financial foundation, including an eight-figure endowment; a growing membership base; and a valued set of programs and services. The ideal candidate for this position will combine strong leadership skills, a keen understanding of the book industry, broad experience in managing a multi-faceted organization, and a proven ability to effect change in a positive, collaborative way. They will be a strategic thinker; able to work in partnership with other ABA staff and volunteer leadership, as well as

industry players, to support members; and eager to seize opportunities for greater organizational impact. The position is based at the ABA headquarters in White Plains, New York.

The ABA has engaged Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist with this important search. Inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed in confidence to the firm as indicated at the end of this document.

THE AMERICAN BOOKSELLERS ASSOCIATION

Founded in 1900, the American Booksellers Association is a not-for-profit 501c(6) trade organization devoted to meeting the needs of its core members — independently owned bookstores with storefront locations nationwide — through education, information dissemination, business products and services, and advocacy.

Over the past ten years, there has been a national resurgence for independent bookstores. Nationally, new stores are opening, established stores are finding new owners, and a new generation is coming into the business as both owner/managers and frontline booksellers. For the ninth year in a row, ABA bookstore membership has grown, with stores operating in more than 2,400 locations.

And, as a channel, independent bookstore sales are up. Overall, book sales across indie bookstores for 2017 increased 2.6 percent over 2016, and sales in 2018 increased nearly 5 percent over 2017. The compound growth in the indie channel over the past five years is 7.5 percent. All of this is a result of the fact that indie booksellers remain a resilient and entrepreneurial group, and that independent bookstores offer a unique -- and unparalleled -- opportunity for the discovery of new authors and great writing.

While not every bookstore or community has seen this growth, the national trends are clear. Because indie stores have vital and unique ties to their communities, they serve as important community centers, connecting readers and book buyers more closely with authors, great writing, other passionate readers, and their neighbors. For publishers, the indies serve as an invaluable promotional voice for emerging authors and titles.

The ABA exists to protect and promote the interests of independent retail book businesses, as well as to protect the First Amendment rights of every American. The five specific ABA Ends Policies approved by the Board are as follows:

1. Members will have the necessary business skills to professionally operate profitable independent bookstores.
2. Member bookstores will be vital and valued partners to publishers, wholesalers, authors, agents, and vendors and will constitute a vital portion of the U.S. book market.
3. Member bookstores will be effectively promoted as the preferred marketplace for the public.
4. Member bookstores will be heard on advocacy issues pertinent to the bookselling trade.

5. Professional and prospective independent booksellers who plan to open new stores, purchase existing stores, or expand existing stores will be provided with programs that facilitate participation in the complex world of bookselling.

Certain programs and benefits available to ABA members are managed and administered by Booksellers Order Services, Inc. (BOS), a for-profit holding company owned by the American Booksellers Association. BOS operates two subsidiary companies: Book Sense, Inc. and LIBRIS. Book Sense, Inc. administers the IndieCommerce program; efforts regarding publisher-sponsored promotions for independent bookstores; The White and Red Box mailings; the Indie Next List program; and the Advance Access program. LIBRIS administers the LIBRIS insurance program.

Membership

ABA member resources offer support and solutions for the day-to-day operations of today's independent bookseller. Most memberships provide full access to the ABA's business service affinity partnerships; educational events and networking; the opportunity to buy into the LIBRIS business insurance plan; the IndieBound marketing programs; and the ABA's various marketing, news distribution, and research tools.

ABA membership has grown consistently over the last ten years. It represents the overwhelming majority of independent bookstores. Members also include some used and antiquarian bookstores, publishers, and bookselling vendors. Membership satisfaction is high, with the majority of respondents in a recent survey saying that they were "Extremely satisfied" with ABA membership. Highly-rated benefits included IndieCommerce, Industry Information, Marketing Materials, Networking, Trade Relations, the Children's Institute and the Winter Institute.

Leadership

A volunteer board of eleven booksellers governs the Association. The Board meets quarterly to review programs and set policy. The ABA's \$7 million budget is approved by the Board annually. The Board follows [Carver's Policy Governance Model](#).

The ABA's current Chief Executive Officer is Oren Teicher. A graduate of George Washington University, Teicher spent several years on Capitol Hill as a congressional Chief of Staff before coming to the ABA in 1990. Initially hired as president of the American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression, Teicher has also served as the ABA's Director of Government Affairs, Deputy Executive Director, and Chief Operating Officer. He was appointed as CEO in 2009 and will be retiring December 2019.

Staff

At present, the American Booksellers Association maintains a fulltime staff of 30 employees, including the position of Chief Executive Officer. The Association's Senior Staff Executive Committee consists of the Chief Financial Officer; the Senior Program Officer; and the Senior

Strategy Officer who all report to the CEO. Additional members of the Senior Staff include the Membership and Marketing Officer; the ABA Technology Director; the Content Development Director; the Director of ABFE, Advocacy and Public Policy; the Director of IndieCommerce; the Meetings and Planning Officer; and the Director of Development and Publisher Relations.

Budget and Finances

The 2020 budget will be approved by the Board in October 2019, which is expected to carry over many of 2019's priorities. The ABA's total operating expenses for fiscal-year 2018 were \$6.93 million, down slightly from \$6.98 million for fiscal-year 2017. Operating revenues totaled \$6.53 million in 2018, compared to \$6.32 million in 2017, yielding operating deficits of \$398 thousand and \$659 thousand, respectively.

At present, the ABA's endowment comprises approximately \$25 million in assets under management. According to the investment statement, the ABA rolls off approximately 4% of the endowment's value for operations each year, or ~\$1 million annually in recent years. Endowment returns have historically averaged 8.5%. As such, the ABA does not usually draw from the endowment's principal, though exceptions have occasionally been made to finance major projects.

Office Location

The ABA's offices are located at 333 Westchester Avenue in White Plains, New York. Located in close proximity to the 287 Cross Westchester Expressway, the ABA is approximately a 45-minute drive from midtown Manhattan and about 10 minutes from the New York-Connecticut border. The White Plains Station on the Harlem Line of Metro North is about five minutes from the office by car.

THE EXTERNAL CONTEXT

The ABA operates in a dynamic environment of rapid social, economic, political, commercial, and technological change. Most notably, the organization is affected by the following key external trends:

Retail and Commerce Developments

In the last thirty years, the bookselling industry has transformed, first due to the proliferation of commercial-chain bookstores, and then through the expansion of online retail. In partnership with the ABA, thousands of independent bookstores have adjusted their business practices and remained profitable. They have had to become better businesses, innovative, and entrepreneurial. Among the methods developed by independent booksellers, stores have expanded their non-book sales (now averaging 18% of revenue), created new revenue streams, improved the management of their expenses, increased efficiency of operations, and developed improved business practices.

The ABA supports the commercial efforts of its members in several ways. Among these are educational programs and events such as the Winter Institute, an annual three-day conference attended by hundreds of the ABA's member stores, the Children's Institute, the IndieCommerce Institute, ongoing discussions with publishers, Book Expo, and at the regional Fall Shows and Spring Forums. ABA conducts an annual independent bookstore profit and loss survey, ABACUS, analyzing present business practices and challenges. ABA also engages on public advocacy at the state and federal level.

The Changing Habits of Reading

The American consumer continues to face an increasing number of content channels vying for their time and attention. Social media, streaming video, podcasts, the decline of long-form journalism, and others trends all continue to exert pressure on the historical relationship readers have with the written word. Changing demographics and priorities have also had an effect; children's literature is in fact one of the fastest growing areas in bookselling. With so many ways to consume content and with so much new literature on the market, indie booksellers have had to adapt in order to capture the attention of the American public. The ABA has helped independent bookstores forge a renewed competitive identity, evolving into something that goes beyond bookselling, focusing on curation and community building.

The ABA helps bring the individual curation of stores from around the country to a national level through the IndieNext List (a monthly selection of staff picks from ABA member stores), Indies Introduce (a program that promotes debut authors handpicked by independent booksellers) and the Indie Bestseller List.

Technological and Digital Developments in Bookselling and Publishing

In the last fifteen years, the single greatest change in the bookselling industry has been the advent of and massive growth of online commerce. The ABA has developed IndieCommerce and IndieCommerce Lite, two ecommerce solutions for independent booksellers that allow them to remain competitive and relevant in the world of online retail. ABA also has its own central selling site, Indiebound.org, which allows authors, publishers and consumers a central independent alternative to other online book retailers.

ABA has helped independent booksellers respond to the advent of eReading and the ongoing growth of digital audio books in a number of ways. Most notably the ABA has partnered with eBook providers and the digital audiobook providers to allow member stores to provide eBooks and digital audio books to their customers. ABA also hosts an online bookseller resource center, bookweb.org, that provides a Book Buyers Handbook, Bookseller DIY marketing materials, bookseller discussion forums, and an archive of video and print educational sessions that help member stores develop best practices in the bookselling business.

The Role of Localism and Community in Bookselling

One of the most effective ways in which independent bookstores have responded to their changing market is through an increased commitment to localism and the recognition that they

serve as important community gathering places. By actively participating in their local communities, brick-and-mortar bookstores remain relevant and profitable businesses by offering their customers services and experiences that neither online retailers nor chain bookstores can offer.

The ABA has sought to assist its members in leveraging localism through a variety of undertakings. ABA has initiated studies, including “Amazon and Empty Storefronts” that quantifies the immense negative impacts online shopping has to local jobs, collection of local taxes as well as the loss of retail stores. ABA’s bookweb.org has been instrumental in highlighting the unique role of independent bookstores in their communities, particularly through the development of adaptable marketing materials. The ABA’s ongoing educational programming has also helped members learn how to transform their stores into cafes, coffee shops, and the other kinds of highly sought-after locales that the localism movement rewards with business.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

The Chief Executive Officer position offers an exciting opportunity to provide vision to an impactful organization and help the ABA enhance its contributions to independent bookselling. To do this, the individual must be able to meet the following inter-connected challenges and opportunities:

Provide Strategic Vision and Strong Leadership

The CEO, working with the Board of Directors, must be an astute strategic thinker, fully focused on concrete results and able to translate plans into action. They will work in partnership with the Senior Staff Executive Committee to devise strategy and tactics that advance the overall mission of the ABA. The next CEO will review organizational structure and strategy to find effective and efficient ways to promote and protect member interests. They will need to consider all structures and functions to ensure relevance and impact. At the same time, the CEO will be expected to think strategically about additional ways to support ABA members in the future.

The next CEO will establish trusted, collaborative relationships with member booksellers to ensure that the diverse needs and concerns of ABA members are accurately represented. The CEO will provide direction to staff and leverage their expertise to the fullest extent possible. They will ensure that the ABA Board is engaged and productive in its decision-making process and will seek the Board’s guidance on all matters within its purview.

Serve as Effective Industry Spokesperson, Advocate, and Collaborator

Backed by the strength of its membership, the ABA gives voice to thousands of booksellers, influencing publishers and advocating for small businesses. ABA events and workshops bring members together, creating communities that learn, network, and form bonds. The next CEO will need to ensure that the ABA delivers clear and compelling messages about the industry and the importance of supporting independent booksellers. They will be expected to serve as a powerful and visible external spokesperson working to increase the ABA’s influence within the policy and

regulatory community and to promote understanding within the general public about the vital role of indie bookstores. The CEO will also need to build creative and productive relationships with other organizations that help ensure a healthy retail ecosystem.

Provide Astute Financial Stewardship

Working with the Chief Financial Officer and the Senior Staff Executive Committee, the next CEO will protect the strong financial foundation of the ABA through diligent management, accurate monitoring of expenses, and careful stewardship of endowment investments. They will provide transparent leadership on the allocation of resources, and ensure the efficient and effective day-to-day operations and finances of the ABA. The CEO will be expected to assess the financial implications of current and proposed initiatives, grow existing revenue streams, as well as identify new sources of support. The CEO will be expected to ensure that all resources are carefully monitored and fully leveraged through fiscally prudent leadership.

The CEO will need to understand the current financial realities and obstacles that face indie bookstores. Rising real estate costs, rising payroll costs, tight margins, and insurance are among the top challenges. The ABA and the next CEO will take a leadership role in addressing the financial concerns of ABA members and across the industry.

Program Review, Management, and Innovation

The membership of the ABA is broad and diverse presenting a variety of unique needs. The ABA has worked to find ways to serve all members, which has resulted in an enormous variety of programs and offerings. The next CEO will be an effective manager who is able to assess programs and ensure their sustainability and effectiveness.

Understand Emerging Trends in Technology, Law, Publishing, and Retail Environments

The new CEO must thrive in a shifting world and relish the opportunity to understand the ways our changing society affect the American reader. They should be able to discern which trends are most important to the ABA and work with the board and other collaborators to propose responses that further the work of independent booksellers.

Diversify the Sellers and Buyers of Books

The ABA recognizes the demographic shifts occurring in the U.S. population and wants to welcome a new and diverse generation of booksellers and readers. The new CEO should be passionate about stimulating booksellers and reading in communities that are historically underrepresented by this sector.

Manage a Positive, Diverse, and Transparent Office

The ABA staff is a dedicated, dependable, service-minded, and collaborative team. This community of professionals is proud of the ABA's work that serves the organization's mission. In addition to inspiring and leveraging this capable team, the CEO must empower and enable

further staff development. This leader must also practice openness in planning and decision-making, teamwork, strong internal communication, and an authenticity in cultivating trust and respect, fostering high morale in the ABA workplace.

THE IDEAL CANDIDATE

For this transformative role, the ABA seeks a dynamic, visionary leader who is passionate about the association's mission and farsighted about its potential. Although no one person will embody all of the qualities enumerated below, the ideal candidate will possess many of the following professional and personal characteristics:

- Genuine passion for the mission of the ABA; understanding of the core issues, policies, and regulations affecting the book industry domestically;
- Ambition for the organization to achieve greater impact and prominence for its members and those who care deeply about the current and long-term success of independent bookselling;
- Demonstrated success in a senior-level role of comparable complexity in the not-for-profit, public, or private sector;
- A high-level, strategic orientation with the ability to grasp details and work on an operational level;
- Collaborative and collegial orientation and ability to build strong professional relationships; ability to become an effective and trusted partner with the Board of Directors, the members of the ABA Senior Staff Executive Committee, and key external partners;
- Comfort with technology and the digital world; familiarity with how technology is impacting the book industry;
- Strong management and organizational abilities; demonstrated success overseeing internal staff and collaborating with external stakeholders;
- Powerful communications skills, able to translate complex, technical issues to all audiences;
- An approach that stresses valued service to members;
- Strong personal integrity and work ethic, as well as a sense of perspective; dedicated to making ethical judgements;
- Interest in making a long-term commitment to the organization.

If a potential candidate does not meet all of these qualifications but believes that their background and interest position them to be an outstanding Chief Executive Officer, it is suggested they apply. All applications are read and are evaluated for interviews on a case-by-case basis.

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Evaluation of prospective candidates will begin immediately and continue until the position is filled. Applications, including a resume and cover letter responding to the qualifications and challenges outlined above, should be sent electronically and in confidence to:

Andrew Lee, Partner
Carmen Delehanty, Senior Associate
Isaacson, Miller
www.imsearch.com/6980

The American Booksellers Association is an equal opportunity employer and welcomes a diverse pool of candidates for this search.