



# Position brief for the position of Chief Executive Officer/Executive Director Mississippi State Port Authority (MSPA)

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# About Mississippi State Port Authority

The Mississippi State Port Authority oversees the Port of Gulfport, a bulk, break-bulk, and container seaport, located on the Gulf of Mexico. Today the Port serves as an important economic catalyst for the surrounding community and region.

The Mississippi State Port Authority is governed by a five-member Board of Commissioners that represent a cross-section of Gulfport and Harrison County. As an Enterprise Agency of the state, the Port Authority receives no annual general fund allocations from the Mississippi Legislature. Instead, it operates much like a private business in that it must plan and set its budgets based upon projected and actual revenues.

The present day Port of Gulfport was established in 1902. In 1961, the Port became a state-owned facility and today is an Enterprise Agency of the State of Mississippi.

The Port is located on the Gulf of Mexico, just 16 miles from the international shipping lanes and five nautical miles from the Gulf Intracoastal waterway. The Port encompasses a 300 acre deep-water port and a 116 acre inland port facility.

The Port handles refrigerated cargo, containerized cargo, bulk, and project cargo. In addition to traditional maritime commerce operations, in November 2015, the Port was notified of its designation as a Strategic Seaport, and America's military is now able to utilize the Port of Gulfport for cargo and equipment shipments.

The Port of Gulfport offers significant logistical reach across the US, with a distribution network that extends as far north as Chicago, east to Charleston, SC, and west to El Paso, TX. In addition to its direct access to a State highway and nearby US Interstate for trucking, the Port also has Class I rail service provided by Kansas City Southern Railway Company (KCS). CSX can also access the Port via KCS' line.

The Port of Gulfport is essentially an economic development agency with transportation at the core. Through the Port's partnership with The University of Southern Mississippi, the Port has developed a roadmap that will build new capacity for Mississippi's Blue Economy. From serving as home port for USM's R/V Point Sure, to the Marine Research Center and now the Center for Ocean Enterprise, which broke ground in November 2019, the Port's efforts will bolster the region's Blue Economy and create a unique maritime technology environment for the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

For more information about the MSPA/Port of Gulfport, please visit:

- [Port of Gulfport](#)
- [2019 Audit & 2020 Operating Budget](#)



# The Position

Our client the Mississippi State Port Authority (MSPA) is seeking a dynamic individual for the role of Chief Executive Officer/Executive Director. This position is located in Gulfport, MS.

The CEO/Executive Director reports to the MSPA Board of Commissioners and directs and manages the operations of the Port of Gulfport. The Board consists of five members, three appointed by the Governor, one by Harrison County, and one by the City of Gulfport, to staggered five years terms. The Board has sole responsibility for the election of the CEO/ED, sets the terms of his/her employment, and conducts his or her annual performance review. The CEO will oversee executives and senior leadership in Administration, Community Engagement, Engineering, Finance, Government & Legal Affairs, Human Resources, Marketing, Operations, and Workforce and Grant Development.

The selected individual must have the ability to establish effective and collaborative working relations with the Board of Commissioners, other agency stakeholders in the State, management staff, employees, the maritime business community, industry professional associations, tenants, developers, and the general citizenry.

## Duties & Responsibilities

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- Serving as the Commission's principal executive officer whose responsibility is to execute the policies and projects of the Commission as a prudent administrator and Chief Executive Officer
- Overall management and direction of all Port affairs to include administrative, financial, engineering, operations, traffic, business/trade development, real estate development, economic development, railroad relationships, and public relations affairs
- Keeping the Commission apprised of all significant activities in the areas of international trade, competitor port activities, carrier and rail relationships, cargo movements, proposed legislation affecting ports and the business of the ports, port operations, and internal affairs of the agency
- Serving as the Commission's official spokesman on all official Commission matters whenever official statements are to be made
- Employing or authorizing the employment of, and having control over all of the employees of the Authority, covering all of its departments and forces, and fixing the duties, powers, and compensation of all personnel in such departments; this will be governed by need and necessity in the judgment of the Executive Director, for the prompt execution and efficient performance of the work of the Commission
- In cases of extreme public emergency requiring public work to purchase any commodities or repair contracts to be done by contract, including both labor and materials, necessitating the waiving of public advertising for competitive bids, the Executive Director shall have the authority to make the purchase or repair, obtaining verbal approval of the President to take such action as the emergency and public interest may require; following such action as an emergency purchase, a report must be submitted to the Commission in writing of actions and the reasons thereof



- Publishing an annual financial report within 90 days of the close of the fiscal year
- Liaising proactively with the Mississippi Development Authority, the Governor, the Mississippi Legislature, and other officials relative to the mission and growth of the Port



# The Candidate

The CEO/Executive Director must be a confident, highly communicative, high-energy, inclusive, and collegial leader who has a passion for the transportation industry and State economic development issues.

## Competencies & Areas of Expertise

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- Possesses an understanding of what it takes to succeed in a public sector/political environment and the ability to effectively develop relationships with both internal and external constituents
- Solid business development, strategic planning, financial management, marketing, economic development, and property development experience
- Proven track record of strong leadership in making an organization's mission a success
- Be outward facing and have a strong commercial orientation along with operational and financial (fiscal management) leadership experience
- Strong business savvy with attention to detail
- Knowledge and experience in national and international commerce including logistics, distribution, and 3PL activities
- Understanding of P3 initiatives
- Solid understanding of economic development issues
- Experience in leading in both up and down business cycles
- Outstanding interpersonal skills and proven experience in leading and motivating staff
- Strength in team building and ability to train, mentor, and motivate colleagues as well as younger professionals
- Possesses an understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures

## Essential Qualifications

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- Visionary, innovative, and having a strategic focus
- Experienced and decisive in dealing with crisis management
- Possess the gravitas to effectively deal with senior State and Federal officials and the public
- Results oriented
- Ability to see the big picture
- Excellent interpersonal skills
- Outstanding communications, listening, and presentation skills
- Collegial
- Strong delegator



- Decisive and calm under pressure
- Transparent and accountability oriented
- In control of one's ego
- Possesses Emotional Intelligence
- Industry reputation for unquestioned ethics and integrity
- Having a healthy sense of humor

Candidates for this role must have a Bachelor's Degree from an accredited college or university with a focus in business administration, economics, transportation, law, or an equally related discipline. Possessing an MBA or related advanced degree is a distinct plus. Ideal candidates will have a minimum of 10 years' experience in a senior management role with broad functional and span-of-control responsibilities. Prior seaport/maritime experience, while highly desirable, is not an absolute requirement.

Candidates must be a US Citizen or have a Green Card and be able to obtain a TSA TWIC Card. Permanent full-time residency in the Gulfport area is required.



# How to Apply

To apply, please submit a comprehensive CV along with a cover letter which sets out your interest in the role and encapsulates the aspects of your experience relevant to the required criteria. Please include the names and addresses of three references. References will not be approached until the final stage of the search and not without prior permission from a candidate.

The preferred method of application is by email to:  
[Judy.Whitaker@odgersberndtson.com](mailto:Judy.Whitaker@odgersberndtson.com)

## Contact Details

For a conversation in confidence, please contact:

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# About Odgers Berndtson



Odgers Berndtson Executive Search is a leading global executive search firm, assisting private and public sector organizations find the highest caliber people for senior management appointments across North America and internationally.

Our reputation at the top of the executive search profession is over 50 years old. With offices in over 60 cities worldwide, our experienced executive search specialists operate with absolute discretion, integrity, and care, and are expert in finding exceptional individuals for challenging roles.

## WE ARE GLOBAL

We have the support of an excellent international network of offices on the ground.

## CANDIDATE CARE

We take great care in ensuring that the candidates with whom we engage on behalf of our clients receive a professional, positive, thoughtful, and candid experience. Whether we are contacting someone about a search or offering career guidance, we strive to always be professional, courteous, rigorous, and honest. We set out this commitment in our [Candidate Charter](#).





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