

Institute Chief Operating Officer (ICOO)

Sisters of Mercy of the
Americas, Inc. (SMA, Inc.)

Position Specification
2026-2027



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The Organization

The Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas (Institute) is an international community of Roman Catholic women religious, rooted in the tradition of its founder, Catherine McAuley, and committed to embodying the Mercy of God through prayer, service, advocacy and systemic change. The sisters dedicate their lives and resources to people who are economically poor, sick and uneducated, with a particular commitment to a more just and inclusive world.

Nearly 1,600 Sisters of Mercy live and serve across the United States, Jamaica, Central and South America (Argentina, Belize, Chile, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Panama and Peru), the U.S. Territory of Guam, and the Philippines. Together with Mercy Associates, Companions in Mercy, Mercy Volunteer Corps alumni, co-workers, and volunteers, they sponsor and operate more than 160 service organizations spanning education, health care, social services, pastoral ministry, retreat and spiritual centers, and other ministries.

The Institute is guided by five interconnected Critical Concerns: care for the Earth, immigration, nonviolence, racism, and the rights and needs of women and children. These priorities inform the Sisters of Mercy's ministries, advocacy, and institutional life and are central to how the community understands mission, stewardship and service.

While the median age of the sisters is eighty-three and the overall number of sisters is declining, the Sisters of Mercy—unlike 50% of their U.S. women religious community counterparts—have accepted and are continuing to accept new members into the Institute. The Institute is planning for a vibrant and financially funded future for its sisters. Facing both current realities and a long-term organizational future, the Institute is thoughtfully planning for the evolving care needs of its sisters, the divestment of a substantial number of its properties, the long-term sustainability of over 160 sponsored ministries, and the succession of its canonically (Catholic Church) elected body, the Institute Leadership Team (ILT).

The governance of the Institute is entrusted to the ILT, the elected body that leads the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas in accordance with canon (Church) law, the *Mercy Constitutions* and the directives of the Institute Chapter. In administrative matters related to the sisters' life, governance, mission, and ministries, the ILT holds final decision-making authority.

The Institute operates through a complex, geographically dispersed structure with interconnected leadership and operating responsibilities. Guided by the ILT, the ICOO has direct operational oversight of Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Inc. (SMA, Inc.), the corporate arm of the Institute that employs 800 in the continental United States and the Territory of Guam. The ICOO provides administrative, legal and organizational support to the ILT in connection with other Mercy corporations, ministries and entities where the ILT holds broader canonical or corporate responsibilities.

While many Catholic religious communities of sisters are “coming to completion,” the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas (SMA) have new members at every stage of the incorporation process. The Community is financially stable and is actively planning to ensure a secure financial future. Working with the Institute Leadership Team, the sisters in the community are implementing a strategic plan and have prioritized several ways to move forward.

The Opportunity



Position

Institute Chief Operating Officer (ICOO)



The ICOO is the senior operating partner to the Institute President and ILT, translating mission and strategic direction into disciplined implementation across a complex, geographically dispersed organization.



Location:

Ideally based within commuting distance of one of the Institute's administrative offices (Silver Spring, MD; Cumberland, RI; Rochester, NY; Belmont, NC; Burlingame, CA; St. Louis, MO; Chicago, IL; or Omaha, NE, with a commitment to working on site for one week a month at the Silver Spring, MD HQ. Regular travel, primarily throughout the continental United States, is required.



Reporting Relationship:

Institute President

(Sister Susan Sanders, RSM)



Website:

sistersofmercy.org

Purpose of the Position

The Institute Chief Operating Officer (ICOO) leads in service to the Institute President and Institute Leadership Team (ILT) and is the principal operating and administrative lay leader. With a system-wide view of Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Inc. (SMA, Inc.), the ICOO translates the ILT's mission, priorities and direction into coordinated implementation; leads the Institute's core operational functions; and builds the systems, leadership and shared accountability needed to support the life and mission of the Sisters of Mercy. The ICOO also provides administrative, legal and organizational support to the ILT as it fulfills its canonical and corporate responsibilities across the broader Mercy community. Success in this role calls for a multi-talented, straightforward, trusted, and collaborative partner who brings sound business judgment while respecting the ILT's organizational decision-making and canonical authority. The ICOO must strengthen organizational effectiveness with patience, transparency, and respect for the sisters' history, relationships and distinctive culture of collaboration. We are seeking a seasoned leader who approaches the work with both compassion and professionalism and brings the judgment and resolve to move the organization forward into its next chapter.

Key Responsibilities

Organizational Leadership and Implementation

- Serve as a trusted advisor and thought partner to the Institute President and ILT, bringing a system perspective to priorities, organizational design, decision-making, and implementation, in service to the sisters.
- Translate ILT direction into clear operating priorities, departmental goals and accountability across SMA, Inc.; ensure resources and structures are aligned to those priorities.
- Lead and develop the Institute's operational lay leadership team and the functions reporting through the ICOO, fostering collaboration across a geographically dispersed, matrixed organization.
- Assess and strengthen organizational systems, policies and practices to improve effectiveness and service to the Sisters of Mercy and the Institute's mission; continue the Journey of Oneness by fostering greater collaboration, consistency and shared practices across the Institute while respecting local leadership and the sisters' discernment-based decision-making culture.
- Lead major organizational change and cross-functional initiatives with patience and transparency, strengthening operational disciplines and technology while balancing system-wide consistency, local leadership, the Institute's discernment-based decision-making culture, and its history of Catholic women religious.
- Ensure that accountability structures are developed and maintained both vertically and horizontally through SMA, Inc.
- Identify opportunities across the Institute and the broader organization for collaboration and simplification. Maintain service agreements and civil relationships between multiple corporations.
- Direct reports include Communications, Health and Wellness, Information Technology, Mission Advancement, Mission Integration, Stewardship, Real Estate and Property, Office of Anti-Racism, Administrative Services, Archives, Human Resources, Association, and Justice.

Financial, Risk and Organizational Stewardship

- Partner with the Institute Chief Financial Officer (ICFO), who reports to the ICOO, on financial planning, operating and capital budgets, resource allocation, contracts, expense management, and fiscal stewardship on behalf of the sisters.
- Oversee organizational risk, legal and regulatory matters for SMA, Inc., including the effective use of legal resources, policies, signatory authority and appropriate escalation of personnel and whistleblower matters.
- Ensure robust business continuity, cybersecurity, emergency preparedness, crisis response, safety, and operational risk management.
- Provide strategic oversight of direct reports across fourteen departments, ensuring alignment with Institute priorities; partner with the ILT and relevant leaders on long-term property and Sister care planning informed by changing demographics, health needs, and capital requirements, recognizing that any potential property decisions involve not only financial considerations but also the homes, histories, and communities of the sisters and should be approached with thoughtful sensitivity.
- Serve as the administrative liaison to other Mercy corporations, ministries, trusts and fiscal or legal agents; develop service arrangements with allied organizations and ministries and provide support to the ILT where its canonical or corporate responsibilities extend beyond SMA, Inc.

People, Mission, and Organizational Culture

- Build, develop and support a strong administrative leadership team; strengthen succession planning, knowledge transfer, talent development, and employee engagement across Institute functions, anticipating evolving staffing needs and a growing role for lay leadership alongside Sister leadership.
- Partner with Human Resources and Mission Integration Departments to ensure staffing practices, leadership development, Mercy orientation, and mission formation reinforce the mission, values, and Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy, including the community's commitments to interculturality and anti-racism.
- Strengthen trust, communication, and coordination among the ILT, Institute Operations Team, staff, Sisters of Mercy and other constituencies; translate complex operational issues clearly and ensure information is timely, transparent, and appropriate to the Institute's international and intercultural context.
- Collaborate closely with leaders across Mercy corporations, ministries, and programs to advance shared priorities and sustain the life and mission of the Institute; support Mission Advancement and the Office of Association and the departments, structures, and people who will carry the Mercy charism forward.

The Candidate

Experience and Professional Qualifications

- Deep personal respect for, and commitment to advancing the mission, values, charism, and Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy; supportive of lay organizational leaders in a canonically governed Roman Catholic religious institute; appreciation for Catholic social teaching and the spiritual, communal, and ministerial life of Catholic women religious.
- Senior executive leadership experience in a large, complex, mission-driven, geographically dispersed, or similarly multi-entity organization, with broad responsibility for system-wide operations, significant teams, and change leadership.
- Broad fiscal, business and operational acumen across finance, human resources, information technology, properties and facilities, legal and risk, communications, mission advancement, and administration, especially within organizational structures and systems; sufficient technical fluency in healthcare, real estate, technology and advancement to oversee functional experts and understand organizational implications of their work.
- Demonstrated success integrating operations, modernizing systems, and translating strategic priorities into effective and sustainable implementation; ability to build stakeholder trust through consultation, clear communication, and consistent follow-through.
- Experience navigating matrixed environments, shared or distributed authority, formal and informal leadership, and consultative decision-making; ability to distinguish operational decisions from matters requiring ILT discernment, with an understanding of, or willingness to learn, the distinction between canonical and civil governance.
- Strong record of resource stewardship, strategic system-wide planning, and thoughtful management of significant budgets, assets, and organizational risk, in partnership with finance leadership.
- Bachelor's degree required; an advanced degree in business, law, finance, public policy, health care administration, or a related field is preferred.
- Roman Catholic Church affiliation preferred but not required.

Leadership Profile

- Values-driven leader who ensures that the Catholic and Mercy mission, values, and Critical Concerns are the driver and context for all organizational plans, decisions, and actions; appreciates the need for listening and discerning before acting.
- Self-assured servant leader who works in close partnership with and in service to the Institute President and ILT, balancing the roles of trusted advisor and effective operator and carrying substantial responsibility without needing to be the visible person in charge.
- Systemic thinker with sound judgment, strong analytical and problem-solving skills, and the ability to see both organizational detail and broader implications; a courageous yet discerning thought partner who offers well-supported recommendations, respectfully challenges when warranted and fully supports ILT decisions.
- Skilled project manager who sets high-impact goals, ensures cross-functional collaboration, measures outcomes, and recognizes team contributions.
- Exceptional listener and communicator who can make complex issues understandable, build alignment and trust over time, and communicate effectively and respectfully across diverse constituents; understands organizational history and culture and connects with sisters, lay leaders, staff, professional advisors, and external stakeholders.
- Skilled people leader who develops and inspires others, establishes clear expectations, and fosters an inclusive, intercultural, anti-racist and service-oriented culture; builds consensus while ensuring commitments are carried through, respecting the sisters' local voices, and maintaining momentum; knows when to act, consult or revisit an issue.
- High integrity and emotional maturity; perceptive, flexible, and resilient in navigating ambiguity, complexity, sensitive issues, discernment-based decisions, and differing perspectives with patience, discretion, and perseverance; comfortable with evolving systems and structures.
- Genuine appreciation for the history, culture, Gospel-based values, the Catholic faith tradition, and the commitments of the Sisters of Mercy, including their international and intercultural realities.
- Prepared to invest considerable time in face-to-face relationships and extensive travel across the Institute, with a long-term commitment that supports continuity through leadership transitions.
- Prepared to be available on short notice and manage a flexible schedule.
- Brings warmth, perspective, and an appropriate sense of humor.

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About Korn Ferry

Korn Ferry is a global consulting firm that powers performance. We unlock the potential in your people and unleash transformation across your business - synchronizing strategy, operations, and talent to accelerate performance, fuel growth, and inspire a legacy of change. That's why the world's most forward-thinking companies across every major industry turn to us - for a shared commitment to lasting impact and the bold ambition to *Be More Than*.