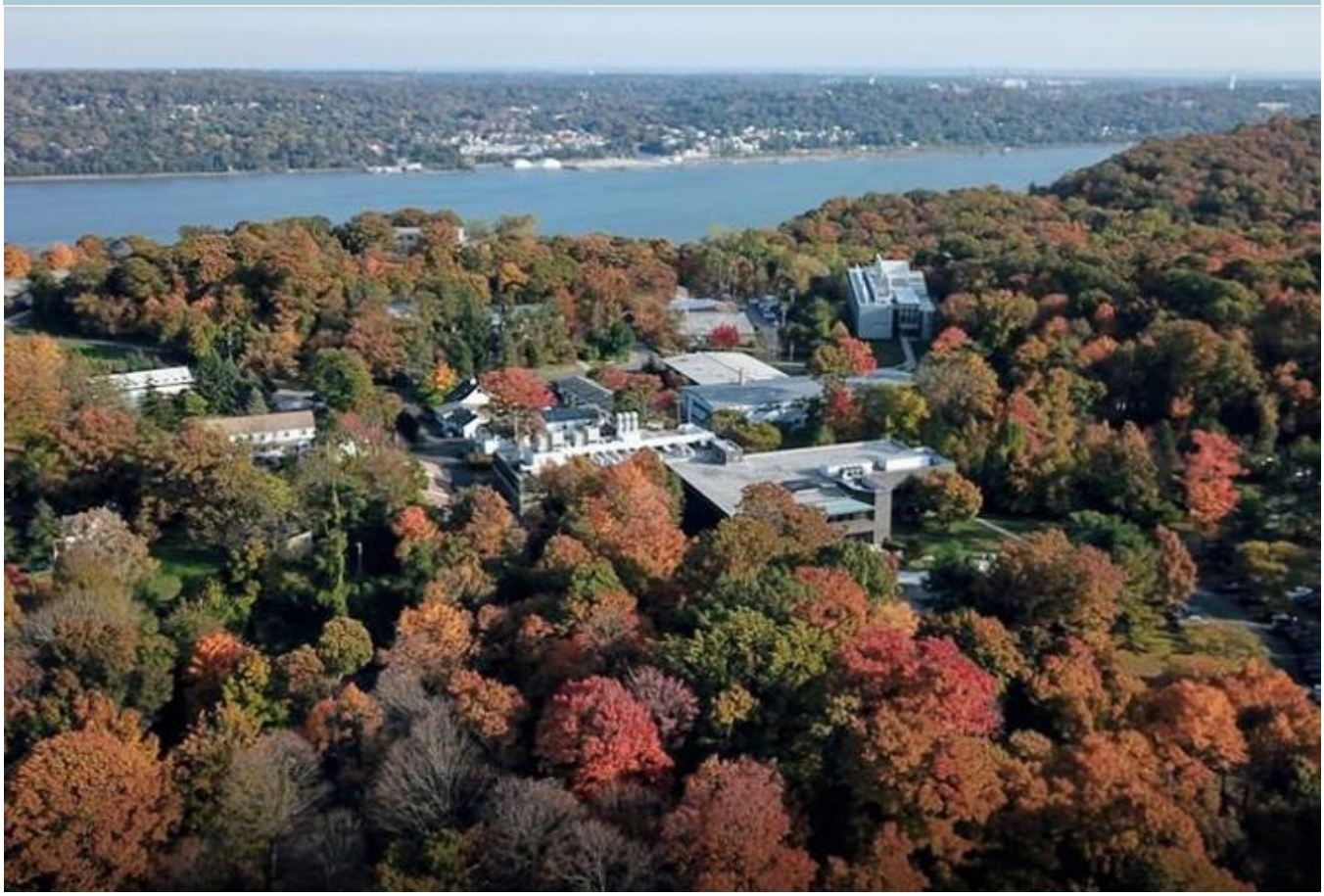
75 YEARS OF DISCOVERY
LAMONT-DOHERTY EARTH OBSERVATORY
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Director

Leadership Profile

Fall 2025-Spring 2026



WittKieffer

Executive Summary

The Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory seeks a visionary, collaborative, and innovative scientific leader to guide one of the most influential Earth Science institutions into its next era of discovery and global impact as its new Director.

Since 1949, Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory (Lamont) has stood at the forefront of Earth Science discovery. From pioneering the first maps of the seafloor that provided much of the critical evidence for plate tectonics, to revealing the oceans' critical role in driving climate change and developing groundbreaking models that predicted El Niño, Lamont scientists have transformed our understanding of the planet.

Today, Lamont is a vibrant hub of exploration and innovation: a community of ~550 scientists, students, and staff, including nearly 200 PhD-level researchers and ~90 graduate students working across every continent and ocean. A hybrid research-educational institution, Lamont is centered on its own campus, focused on fundamental Earth Science, and anchored by large, top-ranked postdoc, PhD, and undergraduate programs. Lamont integrates Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences (DEES) tenure-track faculty with its own research faculty, all of whom are involved in training students and postdocs. Both Lamont and DEES have sizable endowments. This unique structure drives Lamont's success, providing stability, fostering collaboration, and enabling Lamont to remain nimble in addressing emerging scientific challenges.

Lamont researchers study Earth from its deepest interior to the outer reaches of its atmosphere, delivering insights to guide humanity's most urgent decisions. Organized into specialized divisions to provide administrative structure - Biology & Paleo Environment, Geochemistry, Marine & Polar Geophysics, Ocean & Climate Physics, and Seismology, Geology & Tectonophysics - Lamont's PI-driven culture thrives on interdisciplinary work that bridges these areas to tackle complex questions. The Observatory operates the R/V *Marcus G. Langseth*, one of only five global-class vessels in the U.S. academic research fleet and the best equipped for seismic imaging to uncover hidden faults and earthquake hazards beneath the seafloor. At Lamont, discovery never stops: each breakthrough brings scientists closer to understanding how and why Earth changes - and to shaping a healthier, more resilient planet for generations to come.

Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory is stepping into a new era - ready to advance bold research, inspire innovation, and elevate its impact on our changing planet. Its spirit of exploration makes Lamont the scientific heart of the new Columbia Climate School, founded in 2020 to advance knowledge-based solutions and educate future leaders for a just and sustainable world. The next Director will bring strategic vision, collaborative leadership, and fundraising expertise to unify and further ignite Lamont's entrepreneurial culture, modernize its campus, and elevate its visibility globally and within Columbia. Key priorities include crafting a forward-looking, positive vision and research agenda, securing new and diverse funding streams, facilitating partnerships across the Climate School, the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, and other Columbia Schools and institutes, and championing Lamont's societal impact through advocacy and strategic communications.

Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory is seeking an innovative Director to lead one of the world's premier Earth Science research institutes. The ideal candidate will be a visionary leader with proven experience guiding complex organizations, fostering inclusive and collaborative cultures, and driving strategic change. They will possess strong financial acumen, including success in securing philanthropy and other funding sources, managing institutional budgets, and anticipating policy and trend impacts on research. Skilled in administration and operations, they will navigate University governance, modernize infrastructure, and implement initiatives through broad stakeholder engagement. Exceptional communication and relationship-building abilities will be essential, as will be effectively articulating the mission, cultivating partnerships, and leading with transparency and integrity. Successful candidates will have an advanced degree (PhD or equivalent) in an Earth Science discipline or a closely related field, a record of research and scholarly achievement, and proven leadership experience.

To submit a nomination or express personal interest in this position, please see Procedure for Candidacy at the end of this document.

Role of the Director of the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory

The Lamont Director serves as the chief administrative and scientific officer for Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, providing strategic leadership, vision, and oversight for all administrative operations, facilities, research areas, and programs. The Director is responsible for advancing Lamont's mission to seek fundamental knowledge about the origin, evolution, and future of the natural world, with the objective of doing societally relevant research at the forefront of fundamental science.

This role oversees a thriving research enterprise anchored by Lamont's 189-acre campus - featuring state-of-the-art laboratories, extensive deep-sea core and sample repositories, and computer and data facilities. Marine operations include the R/V *Marcus G. Langseth*, a premier research vessel for seismic and oceanographic exploration. Lamont is a hybrid research-educational institution that brings together Lamont Research Professors and Research Scientists with faculty in the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences (DEES) in Columbia's Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Together, they lead one of the nation's top-ranked Geoscience PhD and postdoctoral programs and a large undergraduate program; both research faculty and instructional faculty teach and advise.

The Director determines the Observatory's strategic priorities, manages budgetary planning and resource allocation, and leads fundraising and development efforts. The Director leads a diverse, world-class team of scientists, faculty, and staff, cultivating an inclusive and collaborative culture that sparks innovation and supports professional growth. Beyond internal leadership, the Director role elevates Lamont's global profile, showcasing its groundbreaking research and positioning Lamont as a premier destination for Earth Science talent.

Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory has an operating budget of $77 million (in FY25, ~$61 million of this total budget came from government grants), and an endowment of $160 million that is further underpinned by the $70 million endowment of DEES. Lamont employs ~60 Lamont Research Professors and ~20 Research Scientists and is the research home of ~25 tenure-track faculty members in DEES and 7 in the Columbia Climate School. There are ~60 postdocs, ~90 PhD students, ~150 undergraduate majors and minors between Barnard College and Columbia, and ~220 scientific, administrative, facilities, and ship support staff.

The Director reports to the Dean of the Columbia Climate School. The Directors' leadership team and direct reports currently include:

- Deputy Director
- Deputy Director, Education
- Associate Director Biology & Paleo Environment
- Associate Director, Geochemistry
- Associate Director, Marine Large Programs
- Associate Director, Marine & Polar Geophysics
- Associate Director, Ocean & Climate Physics
- Associate Director, Seismology, Geology & Tectonophysics
- Associate Director, Community Impact and Strategy
- Executive Director, Capital Planning & Facilities
- Director, Finance and Administration
- Administrative & Special Projects Coordinator
- Senior Executive Assistant

Opportunities and Expectations for Leadership

Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory stands at a pivotal moment in its 75-year history. Renowned for its groundbreaking contributions to Earth Science – from seismology to tectonophysics to deep Earth processes to volcanism to ocean and atmospheric circulation to the carbon cycle to climate science to public health – Lamont is a globally recognized institution with extraordinary breadth and impact. Yet, it faces significant challenges and opportunities: a shifting federal funding landscape, evolving relationships within Columbia University, the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, and the Climate School, aging infrastructure, and the desire to amplify its visibility and influence. The next Director will bring strategic vision, fundraising acumen, and collaborative leadership to guide Lamont through a period of change, ensuring that the institution remains at the forefront of fundamental and applied Earth Science research and education.

The following priorities, informed by extensive community feedback, outline the critical areas where the right leadership will ensure Lamont's continued excellence and global impact.

- **Develop a Bold, Forward-Looking Vision**

The next Director will craft a strategic vision that will position the institution for continued success. This vision should build on Lamont's renowned strengths in observational Earth Science and interdisciplinary research, while identifying additional opportunities in areas such as data science, machine learning, and societal impact, among others. The community emphasized the need for a leader who can unify a highly entrepreneurial culture that values independence, around shared priorities, without diminishing creativity. A forward-looking plan should not only anticipate emerging scientific challenges but also create cohesion across the institution, enabling Lamont to compete for major programs and center-level initiatives. By articulating a dynamic, aspirational message that connects Lamont's work to global needs, the Director will inspire internal alignment and external support, ensuring Lamont remains a leader in Earth Science for decades to come.

- **Secure and Diversify Funding**

Funding emerged as the single most pressing challenge. Lamont's reliance on federal grants is increasingly precarious, and the new Director will lead a bold, strategic approach to fundraising. This includes cultivating philanthropic support, engaging industry, and exploring alternative business models beyond traditional soft-money structures. The Director should actively advocate for Lamont within Columbia's development structure, working closely with the rest of the University's fundraising team to build strong partnerships and craft a compelling case for support that highlights Lamont's unique strengths and societal impact. Success will draw on creativity, persistence, and the ability to articulate Lamont's unique value proposition to donors and partners.

- **Elevate Lamont's Visibility and Strategic Communications**

The new Director will support Lamont's global recognition within Earth Sciences as well as the imperative to enhance recognition and engagement within the broader public sphere. They will champion a forward-looking narrative that emphasizes Lamont's relevance to pressing societal challenges, including natural hazard forecasting and adaptation; public health dimensions of air, soil, water, and ocean pollution; and carbon emissions forecasting and mitigation, among others, while celebrating its legacy of discovery. This includes modernizing messaging, strengthening outreach programs (K–12, community science, open houses), and building alliances across Columbia's schools (e.g., Engineering, Public Health, Business, Law, International and Public Affairs). Enhanced visibility will attract collaborators, students, and donors, reinforcing Lamont's stature as a world-class Earth, ocean, atmosphere, and planetary science research institution.

- **Foster Collaboration While Celebrating Entrepreneurial Strengths**

Lamont's entrepreneurial culture is one of its greatest assets, driving innovation through diverse, PI-led research agendas. The next Director has an opportunity to harness this energy and amplify its impact by creating structures that encourage collaboration and entrepreneurial independence. By fostering connections across research areas

and supporting interdisciplinary initiatives, Lamont can position itself to secure major programs and center-level grants that tackle global challenges. Embracing emerging tools such as AI and machine learning will further strengthen Lamont's leadership in Earth Science. This is a chance for the next Director to build on a tradition of creativity while uniting the community around shared goals that expand Lamont's reach and influence.

- **Further Define and Strengthen Lamont's Role Within Columbia**

The relationship between Lamont, the Climate School, and Arts and Sciences offers a unique opportunity to amplify Lamont's impact and forge new collaborations across disciplines. The next Director can position Lamont's full spectrum of Earth Science expertise as foundational for addressing the challenges of the 21st century, while preserving its distinctive identity and leveraging its breadth of research. By building bridges between Lamont's entrepreneurial, interdisciplinary culture and partnering with the Climate School to shape its emerging initiatives, while enhancing relationships with Arts and Sciences and the School of Engineering, the Director can unlock synergies that expand research capacity, attract diverse talent, and elevate Lamont's visibility within the University and beyond. This will require a leader who is strategic, diplomatic, and visionary—someone who can champion Lamont's strengths while shaping a shared future that benefits both institutions.

- **Modernize Infrastructure and Campus Stewardship**

Lamont's physical plant and research infrastructure are aging, with deferred maintenance influencing operational excellence. The Director will prioritize a business plan for campus renewal, including laboratories, computational resources, and shared facilities. Decisions about major assets—such as the future of the R/V Marcus G. Langseth and vessel operations—will be pivotal. A revitalized campus supports cutting-edge science and also attracts talent and funding. Visibility and care for the campus environment can positively impact morale, recruitment, and external perception.

- **Champion Lamont Through Advocacy and Collaborative Leadership**

The next Director has an opportunity to be Lamont's strongest advocate—within Columbia, across the scientific community, and on the national and global stages. This role calls for a leader who can build trust through transparency, foster collaboration across Lamont's diverse research areas, and cultivate strong relationships with University leadership and external partners. By communicating Lamont's unique strengths and societal impact with clarity and conviction, the Director can secure resources, elevate visibility, and position Lamont as a central contributor to Columbia's climate and sustainability mission, and to the nation's research agenda. Strategic vision and interpersonal skills will be essential to unify the Lamont community around shared goals and to amplify its voice in shaping the future of Earth Science.

Professional Qualifications and Personal Qualities

Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory is seeking a collaborative and innovative director to lead one of the world's premier Earth Science research institutes. Successful candidates will have an advanced degree (PhD or equivalent) in an Earth Science discipline or a closely related field, as well as a record of research and scholarly achievement.

In addition, the next Director will have many of the following qualifications and qualities:

Proven Leadership Experience:

- Demonstrated success in leading complex organizations, ideally in a soft-money research environment
- Strategic thinker with experience in organizational visioning and change management
- Skilled in building collaborative, inclusive culture across interdisciplinary teams

Vision and Entrepreneurship:

- Strategic and forward-looking leader who will leverage Lamont's legacy while embracing innovation
- Demonstrated ability to deeply understand Lamont's depth and breadth of interdisciplinary research across Earth, ocean, atmosphere, and planetary science domains
- Capacity to successfully lead in a scientific environment while engaging and supporting scholars from diverse disciplines

Fundraising and Financial Acumen:

- Strong record of securing grants and philanthropic support, including major gifts and partnerships
- Ability to develop innovative funding models beyond traditional federal sources
- Demonstrated experience managing budgets, financial planning, and strategic resource allocation
- An understanding of current and possible future policies, trends, and developments relevant to the financial future of Lamont and its mission

Administrative and Operational Expertise:

- Familiarity with governance structures in large universities and ability to navigate complex systems
- Proven track record of building, leading, and motivating an effective leadership team as well as cross-functional teams that include administrative and scientific staff
- Capacity for implementing and operationalizing new plans and initiatives through broad buy-in and investment of others
- Knowledge of facilities management and infrastructure modernization

Exceptional Communication and Relationship Building:

- Excellent communication skills and ability to articulate Lamont's mission to both external and internal constituents
- Experience stewarding relationships with industry, federal, state, and local government, and other external funders, partners, and organizations
- Commitment to interdisciplinary collaboration and fostering a collegial environment
- Demonstrated ability to navigate uncertainty and complex institutional relationships
- Transparent leader with the highest level of ethics and integrity

About Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory

Overview

The Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory is a world-class, hybrid research-educational institution dedicated to advancing knowledge of Earth's systems and addressing global environmental challenges. Located on its own campus in Palisades, New York, overlooking the Hudson River, ~11 miles north of the George Washington Bridge, Lamont serves as a hub for interdisciplinary research and innovation with Columbia University's Climate School and Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

Lamont also combines research and education through large, top-ranked Ph.D. and undergraduate programs that bring together Lamont's research faculty, Columbia's Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences (DEES) tenure-track faculty, and some Climate School faculty, all of whom contribute to training graduate and undergraduate students and postdocs.

Lamont Research Professors (LRPs) are supported by a combination of institutional and external funding, providing a critical foundation of strength and continuity. LRPs hold rolling five-year appointments and enjoy a unique distinction at Columbia as the only staff members with the title of Research Professor—a designation that reflects the university's recognition of their international standing.

The integration of research and academics underpins Lamont's success, providing stability while enabling agility. The DEES research and educational programs are fully embedded within Lamont and are part of Columbia's Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Lamont has additional long-standing connections to Columbia's School of Professional Studies and the School of International and Public Affairs, where Lamont scientists contribute to professional Master's Degree programs.

Mission and Impact

Lamont's mission is to understand the fundamental processes that govern the Earth System, and to apply this knowledge to inform solutions for the 21st-century challenges facing humanity, such as climate change, natural hazards, public health, and sustainable resource management. It endeavors to make its research relevant, while still being at the forefront of fundamental science and discovery. Lamont scientists have played a pivotal role in advancing oceanographic, atmospheric, and solid Earth research, shaping global climate models, and contributing to international policy discussions on sustainability and resilience.

Research Excellence

The Observatory is home to ~350 scientists, research faculty and professors, postdoctoral researchers, PhD students, and technical staff engaged in cutting-edge research across the following research divisions:

- Biology & Paleo Environment Division
- Geochemistry Division
- Marine & Polar Geophysics Division
- Marine/Large Programs Division
- Ocean & Climate Physics Division
- Seismology, Geology & Tectonophysics Division

Lamont is the research home of Columbia's Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences and its top-ranked PhD program in Earth and Environmental Sciences, and several faculty members in the Columbia Climate School.

Lamont operates state-of-the-art laboratories and manages the R/V *Marcus G. Langseth*, a premier research vessel supporting oceanographic exploration worldwide.

Global Reach and Collaboration

Lamont fosters interdisciplinary collaboration, both externally and internally, including national and international partnerships to position itself as a leader in addressing complex global challenges. Its research informs both scientific understanding and practical solutions for governments, NGOs, and industry. Its global reach also includes a large, devoted alumni community.

For more information about Lamont, please explore the following links:

- Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory
- History of Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory
- Research

- Education & Outreach
- News

About Columbia University

Columbia University, founded in 1754 and located in New York City, is a global leader in research, teaching, and innovation. With a mission to advance knowledge and address the world's most pressing challenges, Columbia fosters interdisciplinary collaboration across its renowned schools and programs. The University maintains a strong global presence through its network of Global Centers and initiatives like Columbia World Projects, translating research into real-world impact. Committed to academic excellence, Columbia attracts top scholars and students from around the world to shape solutions for a sustainable and equitable future.

Columbia Climate School

The Columbia Climate School is the University's hub for climate research, education, and impact, created in 2020 to address the urgent challenges of climate change and sustainability. Its mission is to further knowledge and educate leaders to achieve equitable and just solutions to the changing climate and related sustainability challenges.

The School unites expertise across disciplines—science, engineering, policy, finance, and the humanities—to advance understanding of Earth's systems and translate research into actionable solutions. With more than 500 PhD-level researchers and over 25 transdisciplinary research centers, the Climate School drives innovation in areas such as climate science, adaptation and mitigation strategies, and climate justice.

Through initiatives like Earth Networks and the Action Collaborative, the School fosters collaboration and global partnerships to scale solutions in critical areas, including food, water, energy, and disaster resilience. Its educational programs prepare students to become changemakers, equipped to lead the transition to a sustainable future.

The Dean of the Columbia Climate School is Alexis Abramson, a climate thought leader and an expert in sustainable energy technology, with extensive experience in academic administration. Professor Abramson's research has focused broadly on thermal transport, from designing nanostructured materials to addressing building energy efficiency. Before coming to her role at Columbia in January 2025, Professor Abramson served as the dean of the Thayer School of Engineering at Dartmouth. Before that, she was the Milton and Tamar Maltz Professor of Energy Innovation at Case Western Reserve University and served as a director of that university's Great Lakes Energy Institute, where she focused on creating sustainable energy technology solutions. Abramson also co-founded Edifice Analytics, a start-up that conducts virtual energy audits and manages building efficiency optimization. She earned her BS and MS in Mechanical Engineering from Tufts University and her PhD from the University of California, Berkeley. During the Obama administration, Abramson held the role of chief scientist and manager of the Emerging Technologies Division at the U.S. Department of Energy's Building Technologies Office. She has previously served as a technical advisor to Breakthrough Energy Ventures, established by Bill Gates to invest in startup companies with significant potential to mitigate climate change.

Procedure for Candidacy

Applications, nominations, and inquiries are invited. Applications should include, as two separate documents, a CV or resume, and a letter of interest addressing the themes in this profile.

WittKieffer is assisting Lamont in this search. For full consideration, candidate materials should be received by **February 20, 2026.**

Applications, nominations, and inquiries can be directed to:

Suzanne Teer, Jessica Herrington, and Julia Bradley

LDEODirector@wittkieffer.com

The salary range for this position is $320,000 to $400,000.

Columbia University is an Equal Opportunity Employer / Disability / Veteran.