

**CHERYL MENDELSON**  
**Chief Executive Officer, Van Wezel Foundation**  
**Biographical Summary**



Cheryl Mendelson was appointed CEO of the Van Wezel/Sarasota Performing Arts Center Foundation in 2019 and was chosen to lead the vision to build a \$300 million world-class performing arts center as part of the City of Sarasota's master plan, to develop the Bayfront into a civic asset and gateway for the Gulf coast region. Mendelson brings over 20 years of experience as a nonprofit executive at renowned organizations in education, healthcare, and arts and culture.

Mendelson served as Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer at the Harris Theater in Chicago's Millennium Park. She played a vital leadership role in the strategic vision for the Theater, building a national reputation as a venue of artistic importance. Mendelson was responsible for leading the senior management team in all areas of operations as well as earned and contributed income. Her collaborative partnership with the Theater's artistic director led to the development of innovative new programming including, the Exelon Family Series, MIX at SIX rush hour series, Beyond the Aria salon series with the Lyric Opera of Chicago, To The Edge, produced by Renee Fleming and the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center residency. Mendelson has been recognized as a thought leader in developing award-winning branding programs. She received three national marketing awards for the launch of the U.S. tour of the Paris Opera Ballet. Mendelson also founded Access Tickets, a program that partners with health and human service organizations and schools to provide access to visiting artists and underwrites performance tickets. In addition, she secured the first National Endowment for the Arts grant to establish the Harris Theater Learning Lab, a capacity building program to support the 35 resident music and dance companies who perform at the Theater.

Previously, Mendelson spent 13 years at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago (now the Shirley Ryan Ability Lab), the #1 rehabilitation hospital and research center in America. As Senior Vice President of Philanthropy, Marketing and Strategic Communications, Mendelson led campaigns raising more than \$150 million to establish clinical and research programs. Additionally, she spearheaded pivotal PR initiatives that brought international attention to the groundbreaking research of the Center for Bionic Medicine and the hospital's designation as the only private rehabilitation center to treat wounded soldiers. Mendelson and her team won six national PR awards for the Transforming Medicine – Transforming Lives Campaign, resulting in a \$100 million Department of Defense research collaboration.

Mendelson's career also includes executive positions in higher education, including Vice President of Institutional Advancement and Chief Marketing Officer for Erikson Institute, the premier Graduate School in Early Child Development. Under Mendelson's leadership, Erikson successfully completed a \$58 million Impact and Influence campaign to fund community-based mental health services, and to build endowment investing in the development of innovative distance learning programs to expand Erikson's reach globally.

In addition, Mendelson served as Director of the Annual Fund for the University of Chicago, Booth School of Business during its \$70 million campaign to build the University's first Executive Education Center in downtown Chicago.

In 2016, Mendelson was named to the top ten list of Musical America's 30 Professionals of the Year. She was also featured as a "philanthropic powerhouse" in Chicago Woman Magazine and profiled in Sarasota Magazine's Top Women of Influence. Mendelson was named to the Gulf Coast CEO Forum in 2020, serves on thought leadership councils at PLANit Sarasota, Brain Health Initiative, and the Arts Advocates Advisory Board of Sarasota.

Mendelson received her BA from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and completed the Management Institute Program at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business.