

ARF Announces CEO McDonald To Retire In 2027

NEW YORK--([BUSINESS WIRE](#))--The [Advertising Research Foundation](#) (the ARF) today announced that President and CEO Scott McDonald, Ph.D., will retire in early 2027 after ten years of exceptional leadership. McDonald will serve in his current position until a new chief executive is appointed to ensure a seamless handoff.

Under McDonald, the ARF refocused on its founding mission to advance the scientific practice of advertising and marketing through research. This mission guided conferences, debates, research initiatives, and educational activities. The ARF championed empiricism, grew membership, and expanded scope with the 2018 acquisition of CIMM and the 2021 acquisition of MSI, evolving from arbiter of best practices to incubator of measurement innovation and conduit for advanced academic work in analytics, consumer behavior, and business strategy.

After taking the helm in 2017, McDonald re-established a strong research and data science function focused on member pain points. He created topic-specific working councils and a Research Leadership Committee to align research with member needs; shifted content distribution to webinars and digital formats (crucial during the pandemic); and expanded and updated the ARF's Knowledge Center.

According to Mark Truss, Chair of the ARF Board of Directors, "Scott's successor will inherit an innovative, high performing organization, with an outstanding leadership team and staff."

Recent ARF research addressed the efficacy of attention metrics, the impact of cutting marketing spend during recessions, consumer privacy attitudes in digital targeting, and challenges in cross-platform audience measurement and attribution. In 2022, the ARF partnered with NORC at the University of Chicago to launch ARF DASH, a syndicated universe study that calibrates studies combining big data with probability samples. In 2025, DASH received Media Rating Council accreditation.

During the pandemic, McDonald mobilized ARF Trustees to create a pragmatic training curriculum on research organization, insights, testing, media planning/buying, and effectiveness measurement. The result was the NYU/ARF Certificate in Marketing Optimization and Insights, now offering nine NYU courses and awarding more than 125 certificates.

Also in 2020, the ARF launched ARF WIDE to enhance the caliber and diversity of young entrants into media, advertising, and marketing research/analytics, focusing on undergraduates from low-income backgrounds (including junior college transfers, first-generation and rural students, and Pell Grant recipients). WIDE Scholars attend ARF conferences, receive mentorship, and access internships and entry-level roles. McDonald personally provided a \$150,000 matching

grant to jumpstart fundraising; to date, WIDE has raised more than \$2 million and named 139 Scholars.

Staying with his 2017 plan to serve ten years, McDonald stated: "It has been an honor and privilege to serve as President of the ARF, and I am proud of what we have accomplished. My retirement plans reflect my judgment that generational change is healthy for any organization, especially one that witnesses so much technological and structural transformation. It was 90 years ago that the ARF was founded by some smart and far-sighted people, and it has retained its commitment to objectivity, scientific rigor and empirical evidence throughout its history. That remains our True North and the baton I pass to the next generation of leadership."

The ARF Board is collaborating with McDonald on an orderly transition and working with CBIZ Talent Solutions (which led the 2017 search) on a new CEO search expected to launch in late Spring 2026.

About the ARF

Founded in 1936 and celebrating its 90th anniversary this year, the Advertising Research Foundation (ARF) is the preeminent authority on unbiased quality in advertising, media and marketing research. With more than 400 member companies, the ARF advances industry standards and best practices through collaboration, innovation and evidence-based insights. Through events like AUDIENCExSCIENCE and initiatives such as the Great Mind Awards, the ARF continues to shape the future of advertising and marketing research. For more information on the ARF, visit www.thearf.org or find us on LinkedIn, YouTube, X or Facebook.