



Position Announcement:

Executive Director or Co-Director Team

(Flexible Location / Semi-Remote / New Market, TN)

Application Deadline: June 20, 2025 by 5:00 pm ET.

Applicants for this position are encouraged to note that the process to apply is unique to this position and outlined below. Please do not use the “My Applications” button on the careers page of the Highlander website, but follow the application instructions below.

Highlander Research and Education Center (HREC) seeks an Executive Director or two Co-Directors with a strong commitment to popular education as the basis for social change, practical experience as a community organizer, and a deep understanding of the U.S. Southeast. This is an exciting opportunity for seasoned or first-time executive directors alike, and for leaders from a range of movement spaces who aspire to make a lasting impact on the next generation of leaders who will carry us from the world we inherited to the one we deserve.

HISTORY & THE MOMENT WE ARE IN

For almost a century, [Highlander](#) has been a prominent training ground for emerging and established movement leaders across the South, Appalachia, and beyond, together shaping a more just and sustainable future. From the labor movements of the 1930s and 40s, to the Civil Rights Movement of the 50s and 60s, and into today’s struggles, our workshops and programs bring people together across issues, identities, and geographies to share and build the skills, knowledge, and strategies needed for transformative social change.

Our mission is to serve as a catalyst for grassroots organizing and movement building in Appalachia and the South. We work with people fighting for justice, equality, and sustainability, supporting their efforts to take collective action to shape their own destiny. Social justice leaders and movements are under very real attack from the extreme right-wing forces that dominate our government today. While the challenges are great, Highlander can offer a long history of resistance as well as substantial human, financial, and strategic resources to win the struggle looming in front of us.

We pursue our mission with a diverse and intergenerational staff team of 50+ people and a budget of \$8.99 million. This budget includes ten fiscally sponsored [organizations](#), many of them grassroots, who bring the total staff up to 100+.

The majority of Highlander's funding is raised from foundation grants and individual donations. In the last five years, Highlander's budget has increased by 45%. The organization consistently receives positive annual audits and is actively expanding its fundraising team to grow the resources that will be needed in the uncertain times ahead.

In 2024, Highlander proudly recognized the unionization of its staff under Southern Region Workers United (SEIU). The current bargaining agreement will be ready for renewal in February 2027.

Highlander is the owner and steward of a 186-acre farm in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains of Tennessee. The scenic property accommodates 50 guests (plus space for camping). Over the course of the year, we welcome hundreds of social justice organizations to the Hill and online to meet, learn, and strategize for a more just and equitable world.

In addition to this Radical Hospitality, Highlander conducts the following programs:

- [SEEDS OF FIRE](#) focuses on the power of youth-led organizing, provides on-the-ground support, as well as guidance, mentorship, political education, and skill-based training to the rising activists of today.
- [ECONOMICS & GOVERNANCE](#) supports groups organizing in communities to maintain, deepen, expand, and/or strengthen their solidarity economy organizing and to connect with other communities in the region with similar goals and vision. The [Mapping Our Futures curriculum](#) is one way that Highlander is building a solidarity economy that expands community ownership, participatory democratic governance, and people power.
- [CULTURAL ORGANIZING 101](#) is a program that brings together hundreds of cultural organizers annually to strengthen the strategies they bring back to their communities across the U.S. South. In 2024 the work culminated with a train the trainer toolkit.

- [**SEPTIMA CLARK LEARNING CENTER**](#) is the home of Highlander's library and archive, with collections and programming that weave together the layered history of Southern liberation, through movement memory work. Many resources, including 1200 books, are available [digitally online](#). In 2024 our librarians launched the Southern Memory Workers Institute – a network of community-run archives across the region and beyond that sustain liberation movements by housing and sharing our collective legacies.
- [**CHILDREN'S JUSTICE CAMP**](#) offers a week-long, in-person session for youth at the historic Highlander Center. Young people ages 6-12 mentor one another's leadership, with transformative experiences in community, collaboration, and confidence-building that will last a lifetime.
- [**ELECTORAL JUSTICE PROGRAMMING**](#) supports communities across the U.S. and global south in defending and protecting democracy. The [People Practicing Power](#) series from 2024 is one example of this work.
- [**PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH \(PAR\) INSTITUTE**](#) challenges the belief that only academics and trained professionals can produce accurate information. PAR utilizes popular education, cultural organizing, and other social change tools to support BIPOC artists and other culture workers in local communities. PAR is a collective process of investigation, empowerment and action by the people who are most affected by the problems. Listening to [past PAR Institute presenters](#) is a great way to learn about our methodology.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE NEXT DIRECTOR(S)

Highlander's next executive director(s) will work with the Board and staff to collaboratively renew our vision and strategic direction, while managing and stewarding the overall organization in this new era. The executive director(s) report to a 17-member Board of Directors, composed of activists, researchers and educators.

The major areas of responsibility of Highlander's next director(s) will include:

- **Leadership & Vision** | Collaboratively develop the vision for advancing Highlander's mission, and build aligned strategies, effective communication and coordination, and a sense of community across departments and constituencies. This includes leading organization-wide strategic planning and collaboratively initiating new programs and continued organizational development.
- **Team Management & Organizational Culture** | Develop the Organizational Leadership Team (OLT) and set the tone for collaborative, inclusive, and leaderful management throughout the

organization. Currently, the Co-EDs supervise ten staff, including the nine department directors who comprise the OLT. The executive director(s) will mentor, model and support a climate of learning, wellness and skills development throughout the organization.

- **Fundraising & Relationships** | Work alongside key staff to raise sufficient resources to carry out Highlander's mission. Maintain and build new relationships with funders and donors and represent Highlander with partners, the union, fiscally sponsored projects, and the media. The executive leadership ensures that there are sufficient financial resources for the organization's activities and manages the process for making necessary re-allocation decisions.
- **Board of Directors** | Work collaboratively with the Board Co-Chairs and the Board of Directors as a whole to help them fulfill their governance responsibilities, including attending all meetings of the Board and relevant Board committee meetings.
- **Finance & Operations** | Work with key staff members to ensure that financial, personnel, operations, and union matters are conducted with accuracy, integrity, and in compliance with Highlander's values, as well as best practices and the law. This includes developing the organization's annual budget, authorizing MOUs/contracts, and land management of all acreage and buildings.

CANDIDATE PROFILE

Highlander seeks a strategic and values-aligned director or co-director pair to lead the next chapter of the organization's development and impact, while facing the larger political and economic headwinds. Our team is positioned to play a pivotal role in this political moment. With new leadership at the helm, we look forward to making an enduring impact for our region and beyond, at a time when folks are hurting, motivated, and activated.

We do not call for specific educational degrees or years of work experience. Rather, we are looking for visionary, confident, proven, and practical leadership, regardless of formal credentials. We seek someone who can work effectively alongside our dedicated staff and board and who can engage and inspire our donors, partners, and other allies.

We welcome applicants who have most, but not necessarily every, qualification. The aptitude and willingness to strengthen knowledge and skills will go a long way toward success at Highlander.

- **Leadership & Strategy** | A track record as a senior leader with experience managing people in an organization with values and approaches that are similar to Highlander and its partners.

Direct experience with community organizing and campaigning is highly desirable, as is experience working within an organization that embraces the principles and power of popular education to transform the world. While experience leading at the executive or deputy level is a plus, we welcome interest from first-time EDs and those who have come to their work in nontraditional ways. Highlander's next director(s) will be visionary, strategic, and collaborative in their work. They will be able to make key decisions in complex or fast-paced situations, while listening to and fully engaging stakeholders. Experience working alongside a governing board and with unions is also a plus.

- **Political Alignment & Southern Context** | A deep connection to the U.S. South and Appalachia demonstrated through personal and/or professional experience. Experience specific to East Tennessee is a plus, as is experience participating in Highlander's programs. Highlander's director(s) will possess a sophisticated political analysis regarding the interplay of capitalism, authoritarianism, and structural racism in the South, across the nation, and around the world. They will be able to provide a strong framework for advancing democracy and justice that reflects a deep and layered understanding of multiple contexts. They will hold experience operating in Southern social/political contexts, and possess deep awareness of areas of solidarity and how to navigate outright opposition with effectiveness and sophistication. A background in community organizing, campaigning, base and coalition building, and/or grassroots leadership development in low-income communities is essential.
- **Relationship Building & Collaboration** | Skilled at stewarding longstanding relationships and cultivating new ones with mission aligned partners. Dedicated to creating a workplace that values active listening and learning, and that respects the voices and expertise of colleagues and community members. Our leadership will bring substantial experience working in coalition with multiple and diverse organizations. They will be an effective facilitator who is comfortable with ambiguity and conflict, and who seeks common ground without compromising Highlander's mission. Experience in building alliances with international partners is a plus.
- **Fundraising & Communication** | A clear, compelling, and authentic communicator. Candidates should demonstrate the ability to lead and implement fund development, and to work with fundraising staff with an emphasis on relationship-building, and foundation and grassroots fundraising. Experience with individual donor strategies is a plus. The ability to communicate in Spanish, ASL or another second language would be helpful.
- **Finance, Operations & Union** | Candidates should demonstrate a solid grasp of organizational finance, budgets, and operations, and the sound judgment to consult relevant experts when needed. Experience working with bargaining units is a plus; holding a pro-labor

stance is essential. Experience with landbased management, land use issues, and/or managing a campus/retreat center is welcomed.

- **Team Building & Organizational Culture** | Highlander strives to foster a productive, healthy, joyful, and learning-centered work environment and so we are seeking leadership that cultivates a positive organizational culture. This includes familiarity with team building, conflict management, group process, and trauma-informed methodologies. Candidates should be clear communicators who can mentor staff from all backgrounds, and who thrive in intergenerational work. We expect our organizational leaders to approach work (and life) with radical honesty, humility, accountability, and integrity.

We recognize that no single candidate will possess every qualification. If you are interested in the position and hold many of the experiences and attributes above, we encourage you to apply.

COMPENSATION & LOCATION

Salary: The annual salary for the full-time Executive Director or each full-time Co- Director will be \$116,000. Highlander has established an equity-focused salary scale that currently ensures the lowest-paid employee is not paid less than 65% of the highest-paid employee. We are a human-centered workplace that respects the dignity of our workers and seeks to offer a living wage to employees at all levels of the organization. While the Board is open to revising the salary scale in the future, it will do so within the framework of Highlander's values, and in conversation with the union's bargaining unit.

Benefits: Our comprehensive benefits package includes:

- Fully paid health, dental, and vision insurance for employees, partners, and dependents, as well as a Highlander-sponsored basic life insurance plan, and a long-term disability insurance plan.
- An annual percentage-based contribution to a 403(b) retirement fund.
- Generous time off policies, including 24 paid vacation days per year, ten holidays, plus accrued sick time. In addition, Highlander closes its offices for a week following Homecoming, and for a week at winter break.
- A one-month fully paid sabbatical every three years.
- Access to generous staff and professional development opportunities, including executive coaching for the director(s).

Location & Travel: Highlander is a semi-remote workplace. While regular, physical presence on the Hill is important, the frequency is determined by the needs of the organization. A relocation budget is available. There is no expectation that the director(s) will reside on the Hill full time, however, the director(s) do have sole use of fully furnished accommodations when on the Hill. Frequent travel around the South, the country, and internationally is also required.

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS & REFERRALS

Strategies for Social Change® (SSC) is conducting Highlander's executive search and leadership transition. SSC is a woman of color owned and led capacity building and leadership development practice dedicated to working with social justice organizations. SSC is a nationally recognized leader in leadership transition planning.

Please forward applications, referrals to potential candidates, or requests for an optional, confidential informational call to LeadHighlander@strategiesforsocialchange.com.

Applications are due by June 20, 2025, at 5:00 pm ET.

All documents should be submitted as a single, combined PDF to LeadHighlander@strategiesforsocialchange.com.

We are accepting applications from solo candidates and co-director pairs. Co-directors must apply together; Highlander will not match applicants.

Applications should include the items listed below as a single, combined PDF:

- A thoughtful and compelling cover letter (up to 2 pages for solo applicants and up to 4 pages for team applicants) that:
 - Explains your interest in working with Highlander.
 - Highlights the relevant qualifications and experience you bring to this role.
 - Describes your relationship with the U.S. South.
 - Co-director applicants, please also tell us how you have worked together in the past.
- A resume or CV. (Co-director applicants are asked to submit separate resumes.)
- A list of three references per applicant. Kindly include names, affiliation, relationship to you, email addresses, and phone numbers. We ask that at least one reference is a former/current employer and one is a former/current supervisee. References will not be contacted until the

final stage of the search, and candidates will be given the opportunity to notify their references in advance.

- In addition to the above, co-director applicants are asked to submit a joint, 2-page proposal describing how you envision dividing and sharing leadership roles and responsibilities.

Selected applicants will begin to be contacted for interviews in July 2025. Applications may be reviewed over time, so please be patient if you do not hear from us immediately.

Research and experience tells us that women, as well as BIPOC and trans folks, are reluctant to apply for leadership roles unless they meet 100% of the position criteria. We wish to emphasize again: Highlander welcomes applicants who have many but not all of the skills and experiences outlined in the leadership profile above. We especially encourage applications from women, people of color, people with disabilities, and people who identify as LGBTQ+.

Highlander is an equal opportunity employer and does not discriminate against any individual based on any non-merit factor, and is committed to an equitable workplace where everyone is treated as a respected and valued member of the team. We actively seek to build and maintain a diverse staff with regard to race, culture, ethnicity, class, religion, physical ability, age, gender, and sexual orientation.

As an organization working in solidarity with the racial justice movement, Highlander is committed to fostering the leadership and elevating the voices of women, young people, people of color, Native people, immigrant and refugees, low-income people, LGBTQ+, and transgender, gender non-conforming, and non-binary people, people with disabilities, young parents, people who were formerly imprisoned, and people living in the many intersections of these experiences.

Do not apply to the Executive Director position using the “My Applications” button on the Highlander website. Please follow the application instructions in the job description and send your application to LeadHighlander@strategiesforsocialchange.com.