



**Search for Executive Director  
Oakland, CA and Washington, DC**

**THE SEARCH**

The National Center for Youth Law (NCYL – pronounced “nickel”) is seeking a youth-centered, strategic, and empathetic leader to serve as its next Executive Director (ED). NCYL is one of the nation’s pre-eminent social justice organizations dedicated to improving the lives of children and youth impacted by the interlocking systems of education, health, immigration, foster care, and juvenile justice. Driven by the voices and experiences of the youth it serves, and with a strong focus on racial and social justice, NCYL works tirelessly to transform government agencies and public systems to center youth with equity, dignity, and care. Through legal advocacy and impact litigation, local and public policy, programmatic work, and community collaborations and partnerships, it seeks to amplify youth power and fundamentally change how our nation approaches issues affecting youth wellbeing. To build a multifaceted and intersectional approach to these issues, NCYL currently works in the areas of Education, Foster Care, Health, Reproductive Health Equity, Immigration, Commercial Sexual Exploitation, and Youth Justice. Its efforts have led to critical changes in policy and standards of practice in communities, states, and nationwide.

Working in collaboration with the Board and Staff, the ED will provide the strategic vision and organizational leadership to ensure that NCYL has a deep and lasting impact on the lives of young people. In addition to the executive oversight of operations, finances, and programmatic priorities supported by a team of skilled staff leaders, the ED will bring a clear and focused vision, strong management expertise of people and culture, a keen focus on expanding the public awareness of NCYL and the impact of its work, and a desire and track record to bring diverse financial resources to the organization.

As NCYL continues its growth and evolution, it is imperative that the next ED work to cultivate an organization-wide sense of collective action and impact united by a clear, overarching mission and strategy.

Alongside these leadership skills, the ED will bring an unwavering commitment to improving the lives and outcomes of children and youth that is explicitly rooted in racial and social justice and an anti-racist framework. They will be a lifelong learner, who prioritizes personal learning and growth alongside organizational evolution to drive continued success and excellence. This next leader will inherit an

organization engaged in powerful, multi-stream change work, with a staff that is effective and deeply dedicated to the cause. This is an incredible opportunity to lead an organization that seeks to amplify youth power, dismantle racism and other structural inequities, and build a world where all youth are supported through supportive policies, practices, communities, and cultures.

The salary for this position is \$305,000.

NCYL has engaged Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist with this important search. Inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed in confidence, as indicated at the end of this document.

## **THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR YOUTH LAW**

### ***History***

NCYL was founded in 1971 in San Francisco by board members from the Legal Aid Society of San Francisco. Originally called the Youth Law Center (different from the current Youth Law Center in San Francisco), its focus was on children confined in horrible places, like juvenile institutions and congregate care settings, with the addition of foster care soon after. In 1978, the Youth Law Center merged with the National Juvenile Law Center in St. Louis and became NCYL, with federal funding from Legal Services Corporation. That same year, the organization became a Washington, DC nonprofit corporation.

In 1982, NCYL consolidated offices, establishing its sole headquarters in San Francisco. Throughout the 80s, NCYL continued to pursue groundbreaking impact litigation, expand its policy work, and serve as a resource for community-based legal programs for individuals with limited financial resources, furthering their commitment to equity and justice. By the 90s, NCYL was one of just a handful of youth-focused organizations that pursued and achieved broad impact in multiple jurisdictions.

Since its founding, NCYL has adapted to changing needs and circumstances by developing strategies beyond litigation to fulfill its mission. Today, NCYL's activities have expanded to cover multiple issues, using multiple tactics, adding adolescent health, mental health, foster care, juvenile justice, and public benefits for children alongside their core issue areas. In addition, it has a number of special initiatives that address emergent needs.

### ***Current Context***

Currently, NCYL maintains key offices in Oakland, California, Phoenix and Tucson, Arizona, and Washington, DC. NCYL also has programmatic and staff presence in Arizona, Los Angeles, Denver, Chicago, and other parts of the country.

At its core, NCYL works on deep advocacy using multiple strategies and targeted impact litigation to represent the interests of broad classes of children and youth across multiple public systems. NCYL works to reform the public systems that impact the lives of children and youth through litigation; legislative,

policy and administrative advocacy; programmatic work that includes collaborations with public agencies and the provision of direct services through demonstration sites. NCYL also publishes materials in its focus areas: child welfare/foster care, education, youth justice/juvenile justice, youth health including mental health and reproductive health, and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Additionally, NCYL maintains one of the nation's most comprehensive databases of foster care reform litigation. You can find a full library of NCYL's cases [here](#), and more about NCYL's policy work can be found [here](#).

Of course, much of this work cannot be done alone. NCYL has worked to create strong [strategic collaborations](#) with community-based organizations, national advocacy organizations, government agencies, school districts, and young people, families, and communities, to drive meaningful changes to systems, policies, and practices. Through these collaborations, NCYL achieves its goals while modeling the power of collaborating and organizing as a community in support of children and youth. One powerful collaborative model NCYL leads is the Compassionate Education Systems initiative, in which the organization partners with local school districts and child welfare agencies to support students experiencing homelessness, in foster care, or under probation supervision to graduate high school with a full range of college and career opportunities. Another powerful collaboration includes the [Education Civil Rights Alliance](#), an experienced group of organizers; educator organizations; community groups; professional associations; civil rights organizations; and government agencies launched by NCYL in 2017 to protect the civil rights of marginalized students.

NCYL also leads the Debt Free Justice Campaign in partnership with the UC Berkeley Policy and Advocacy Clinic and Juvenile Law Center, an initiative dedicated to abolishing the harmful practice of saddling youth and families with fees and fines. NCYL convenes and supports several advocacy forums comprised of young people, as they lead change initiatives and shape system reform efforts. For example, NCYL has organized the [CSEC Action Team, a group of youth leaders working to reform systemic approaches to young people who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation](#). Additionally, and in order to further center the voices of youth, NCYL established another Youth Advisory Board, made up of current and former foster youth who work within their communities to ensure all young people in foster care receive appropriate sexual and reproductive health information and support and feel comfortable and safe in their gender and sexual identity. NCYL deeply values its partnerships with youth and communities in the collective efforts to achieve systemic change.

### ***Areas of Focus***

NCYL's teams are organized around six different focus areas:

**[Education](#)** – NCYL works to create an education ecosystem that centers youth, and often partners directly with young people to improve educational outcomes. Some of NCYL's education work includes deep collaborations with school districts. Other times NCYL's partnerships with youth and communities lead to the identification of opportunities for reform that result in litigation or policy advocacy. Initiatives in Education include, [building compassionate educational systems for system-involved students](#), [ensuring educational equity, inclusion, and civil rights for students](#), [establishing youth-centered approaches to education](#), and [ending the school-to-prison pipeline](#).

**Foster Care** – NCYL works to dismantle practices that harm children in the child welfare system, and promote youth-, community-, and family-centered policies to prevent harm, address harm when it occurs, and promote healing. By litigating in partnership with, and on behalf of, youth to hold the child welfare system accountable, NCYL works to ensure children and youth who are involved in the system are treated humanely and with dignity. Initiatives include, [preserving families and reducing entries into foster care](#), [ensuring that youth in foster care receive whole-health care and support](#), and [establishing youth-centered education for youth in foster care](#).

**Health** – NCYL works to ensure that all children have equitable access to whole-health care and support that meets their physical, emotional, and psycho-social needs. It aims to dismantle the barriers to care that children and youth experience across multiple systems. Initiatives include, [upholding consent and confidentiality](#), [empowering youth to lead and make decisions about their sexual and reproductive health](#), and [equipping health systems and professionals to meet the needs of youth](#).

**Immigration** – NCYL works to ensure that children who are immigrants are able to live in communities rather than in government custody and have access to the resources and opportunities they need to heal and thrive. Through a combination of federal litigation, state and federal policy advocacy, stakeholder education, and coalition building, NCYL works to uphold and expand the rights of detained immigrant youth as well as immigrant children in the community. In its capacity as co-counsel on *Flores v. Garland*, NCYL represents the class of all immigrant children in federal custody. Initiatives include, [upholding and expanding the rights of detained immigrant youth](#) and [educating and guiding the systems that serve immigrant children](#).

**Commercial Sexual Exploitation** – NCYL seeks to end the commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) of children and youth and support those who have been impacted by CSE to experience safety and healing so that they may achieve their goals. Working with [adult and youth survivor leaders](#), NCYL seeks to support and amplify their voices in conversations around policy and creating meaningful collective systems change. Initiatives include [transforming the legal landscape to recognize and treat CSE as child abuse](#), [equipping communities, systems, and professional to provide holistic, youth-centered supports](#), and [building systemic and community-based collaborations to support youth](#).

**Youth Justice** – NCYL works to transform the youth justice system so that it better embodies true justice and equity for children. It works to advance community-based, health-centered [alternatives to harmful system practices](#), build a culture in which the system responds appropriately to the needs of children and youth, and eliminates fines and fees imposed on system-involved youth. NCYL partners directly with youth and communities to reform the juvenile justice system through litigation, policy advocacy and reform, and grassroots capacity building through partnerships with community-based organizations. Other initiatives include, [ending the school to prison pipeline](#) and [achieving #DebtFreeJustice](#).

#### **Governance and Finances**

NCYL's [Board of Directors](#) is currently comprised of 15 members and can accommodate up to 21 people according to the bylaws. Board appointments are made to ensure that those who have been historically

excluded from such spaces are engaged and reasonably reflect the interests of the populations NCYL serves. Board members serve a term of three years, which are renewal with term limits, and are expected to meet at least three times during the fiscal year.

Jesse Hahnel became the third ED in the organization's history in 2015 after the retirement of long-serving ED, John O'Toole. Hahnel previously served as Founder and Director of NCYL's FosterEd program and as a public school teacher in Washington, DC, and New York City, as Senior Analyst at the KIPP Foundation, and as an attorney representing at-risk children and youth. He is a recipient of the prestigious Skadden and Mind Trust fellowships. During his time as ED, NCYL's operating budget has tripled, and staffing has doubled from approximately 50 staff in 2015 to nearly 100 today.

NCYL's funding base consists of both individual and institutional support. In 2022, NCYL's budget is \$18.5 million, with approximately 70% of the revenue coming from foundation. 20% government grants and government grants and contracts with the remainder from attorneys' fees, individual donors, and law firms.

## **THE ROLE**

As ED, this leader will work alongside the Board and Staff to continue to refine NCYL's organizational identity, strategy, and work. The ED will be a visible leader internally and externally, setting the overall tone of the organization and creating an equitable and inclusive workplace where staff can sharply focus on the substance and impact of the work.

The ED will be responsible for supporting, mentoring, and developing a highly experienced and passionate team of staff professionals and creating a culture of open transparency, integrity, and excellence. They will work to evolve and manage an efficient and effective organizational infrastructure and ensure that both staff and board are connected to and aligned with the mission and given proper guidance and support. To further ensure the highest standards of governance and transparency, the ED will present accurate, effective, and timely reporting to the Board and manage Board communications. Above all, the ED must share the values of deep collaboration, teamwork, and transparency, as well as embrace the benefits of diverse perspectives.

Additionally, as NCYL's profile continues to grow, the ED will continue to represent the organization externally across diverse sectors and fields and will work to maintain and establish mutually beneficial relationships and partnerships. With the Board and Staff, the ED will also develop, oversee, and manage a comprehensive fundraising program, monitor the results, and assist the Board in evaluating the effectiveness of NCYL's fund development programs. They will also lead efforts to identify and engage new funding streams, including looking to foundations and individual philanthropic giving to augment current programmatic funds.

## **OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

***Articulate and refine a clear overarching vision and implementation strategy for NCYL's future success to ensure that all parts of the organization are aligned and moving in the same direction***

NCYL works at the intersection of youth advocacy and racial justice. Without that focus, NCYL would be working around the edges of issues, treating symptoms, and not addressing root causes. NCYL is comprised of talented and distinct programmatic teams, all working on important campaigns, which means that sometimes staff are working on projects seemingly in conflict with one another. For example, one group may be working within the justice system to help children prevail in that system, while another may be working to reform or abolish that same system. Additionally, challenges to collaborating across teams risk reinforcing this divide at the structural level. As NCYL continues its growth and evolution, it is imperative that the next ED works to cultivate an organization-wide sense of collective action and impact united by a clear, overarching mission and strategy.

This ED will be an institution and coalition-builder, able to align all parts of the organization around the central focus of justice and equity for children and youth to effectively carry out the work into the future. They will bring a clarity of vision, a sharp sense of prioritization, and the ability to make the corollary tradeoffs, and they will develop an organizational structure and culture to reach meaningful collective goals. Success in this regard will require a dedication to transparent communication, clear articulation of organizational goals, a willingness to experiment and do things differently, and determining the best organizational structure for the future. Above all, the ED must build trust across the organization, establishing widespread confidence that decisions are made in the best interest of the organization, its mission, and the youth they serve.

***Serve as a critical external ambassador and relationship-builder for NCYL and continue to amplify its profile locally and nationally***

NCYL does incredible, lifesaving work every day on behalf children, youth, and the people who support them. Regrettably, attacks on children who have been pushed to the margins have increased, especially within healthcare and educational settings. Consequently, there is an unprecedented opportunity for NCYL to continue to center the voices of affected youth to drive meaningful change. This next leader will need to balance fortifying the internal infrastructure and culture of the organization while also working externally to enhance NCYL's presence nationally. As NCYL desires to be the "go to" organization nationally for issues affecting youth, the ED will represent the organization in a wide variety of communities and settings and must be able to establish and navigate relationships confidently, gracefully, and respectfully. They will be charged with establishing and maintaining relationships and partnerships with current and potential funders, the legal community, partner groups, legislators, media representatives, businesses, and the broader children's rights advocacy field.

While NCYL has been successful in the states it currently operates within, the next ED, in consultation with the Board and staff, will have to decide on how and where NCYL will look to expand the scope of its work

to maximize its impact nationally. This ED will be proactive, grounded in the work of today, and able to look ahead for the next issues to arise.

***Continue to ensure NCYL's financial sustainability and deepen/expand NCYL's resource development strategies***

As NCYL continues to fine-tune its influence and grow its impact, the organization has an opportunity to expand and diversify its funding streams. Under the current structure, individual program directors drive much of their own funding strategies and outreach, which diverts their time and attention from the substantive mission-centered work of their teams and reinforces a siloed-approach to work. To alleviate that burden, the ED will work to ensure that programs have the resources they need to commit fully to their work and begin to establish a culture where program staff are able to support, compliment, and work more closely together. The ED will understand the financial context of a complex nonprofit organization doing multi-stream, national work. They will ensure that NCYL's program, finance, and operations teams have the resources, supports, and technology to keep up with the growth of the organization and its increased funding needs.

The ED must have strong practical and strategic fundraising and development abilities and a sophisticated understanding of how diversified funding streams aid in organizational sustainability and growth. They must be experienced at developing and maintaining philanthropic relationships that yield grant funding, which sustains the majority of NCYL's projects and programs at present, as well as other funding sources including major donors, corporate and private sector support, public contracts, and fee-for-service revenue. They will strengthen existing partnerships, while engaging new, innovative collaborations to drive financial and media support for NCYL's campaigns. The ED must be a persuasive and engaging public speaker, able to tell NCYL's story and share their work and successes with audiences ranging from youth leaders to national media outlets, which aid in raising the organization's profile with prospective donors and funders.

***Work to embed equity, inclusion, and justice more deeply into the organization***

The work NCYL does, by necessity, is rooted in racial justice and challenging inequity. As the organization deepens its commitment to dismantling systems of white supremacist culture, the ED will work to ensure internal processes, policies, and procedures uphold NCYL's adherence to justice and equity. The organization has already convened a DEI committee to maintain a critical lens on NCYL and provide recommendations to align its internal practices with its outward justice work. The ED must value all staff equitably, whether they work on internal infrastructure, in direct services, or in litigation to create a strong cohesion among staff across the organization. They will partner with the staff and Board as they jointly usher forward the organization's continuous internal equity and anti-racism journey.

***Leverage the talent, expertise, and commitment of the board in advancing the mission of NCYL***

This ED will serve in the role of trusted partner to the Board, supporting the current board members and investing in their passions, talents, and experiences, while simultaneously growing, tapping into, and engaging new leadership talent that represents the diversity of the NCYL community, the future face of the organization, and the next generation of leadership. This leader will also work to ensure that there is ongoing and clear and transparent lines of communication among the ED, the Board, and staff and that strategic goals are successfully moved forward together.

***Lead through growth and build out systems to establish best practices in human resources, finance, development, communication, and branding***

Over the last seven years, NCYL has enjoyed immense organizational growth, nearly tripling its operating budget, growing to nearly 100 staff members across the organization, and expanding its footprint across the country. Moving forward, it will be essential for this leader to understand how to finely balance organizational growth with internal institutional capacity to support this work. This leader must be a keen systems thinker, able to create and implement scalable operations, structures, and policies to sustain further growth while ensuring that staff on-the-ground and doing the work have all the necessary resources and tools to engage effectively and in a sustainable manner.

Central to the ED's role is ensuring that each team has the structure, staffing, and funds to support their campaigns so they can solely focus on their work. Additionally, this leader will solidify the capacity of the executive team to lead the organization internally, allowing the ED to focus on the necessary external work. They will be adept at change management and create centralized systems, leverage technology, and engage experts to communicate and track programmatic metrics of success to make informed decisions for the NCYL's future. It will be incumbent on this leader to build mutual trust with the staff at all levels and empower them to lead within their spheres.

**QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE**

The next Executive Director will bring many of the following qualifications, professional experiences, and personal attributes:

- Experience in an environment where direct litigation and legal and policy advocacy are central to an organization's mission and impact is essential. A juris doctorate (JD) would be an asset but is not required.
- Proven commitment to, and extensive experience in racial and social justice advocacy. Strong preference for experience in child advocacy and other social policy work. Direct or adjacent experience with complex litigation strongly preferred.
- Significant organizational leadership managing intuitional complexity, as well as demonstrated management experience.

- Confident, engaging, and inspiring public speaker that can represent the organization's work and elevate NCYL's profile, expand the impact of its work, and increase fundraising ability.
- The ability to articulate and implement an intersectional vision and organizational strategy that energizes, motivates, and unifies internal and external stakeholders toward common goals. Additionally, experience managing organizational adaptation to growth and change.
- Fundraising, development skills and a high degree of sophistication in curating and executing a sustainable fundraising strategy with foundations, public sector contracts, and major donors.
- Demonstrated ability to guide, support, and leverage staff and board expertise and the capacity to expand staff infrastructure where necessary.
- An approach to leadership that engenders confidence and trust, is steadfast, inclusive, transparent, accountable, inspiring, and dedicated to both strategy and daily operations.
- Success in nurturing a dynamic, healthy, and balanced work environment.
- Demonstrated commitment to the values of equity, diversity, and inclusion and experience measurably advancing those values in an organizational context.
- Experience with financial oversight, including budgeting, planning, and reporting.
- Demonstrated skill as an effective oral and written communicator.
- Lived experience with the issues affecting youth wellbeing and the impact of interlocking systems of education, health, immigration, foster care, etc. is a plus.
- Residing within reasonable driving distance of Oakland or Washington, DC is preferred. Willingness to engage in frequent travel is essential.

#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO APPLY**

NCYL has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in this search. All inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed in confidence to the search team at the link below. Please include CV/resume and a two-to-three-page letter of interest responding to the opportunities and challenges outlined above.

Ernest Brooks, Partner  
Rebecca Swartz, Partner  
Mx. Angelo Alexander, Associate  
<https://www.imsearch.com/8694>

*Applicants with lived experience within any of our practice areas, and Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, are strongly encouraged to apply.*

*It is the policy of NCYL to provide equal employment opportunities to all Applicants (including Employees) regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, pregnancy,*

*breastfeeding, national origin, age, abilities/disabilities, neurotypicality, socioeconomic status, veteran status, marital status, prior convictions, or any other protected classifications under federal, state, or local law.*