



Inaugural Executive Director/CEO
Hilton Family Holocaust Education Center
Phoenix, AZ

THE SEARCH

The Arizona Jewish Historical Society (AZJHS) is seeking a dynamic, strategic, and creative leader to serve as the inaugural Executive Director/CEO (CEO) of the Hilton Family Holocaust Education Center (HFHEC). This new 30,000-square-foot institution will be located on the grounds of the Cutler Plotkin Jewish Heritage Center and will represent AZJHS's largest and most ambitious initiative to date. HFHEC is built on the principle that knowledge and empathy empower individuals to take a stand against hate. Its mission centers on educating students in grades 7 to 12, as well as the broader public, about the Holocaust and other genocides while emphasizing a call to action that inspires positive societal change.

The HFHEC will provide an engaging, multi-media, immersive experience that inspires visitors and motivates them to take meaningful action. HFHEC will facilitate school group tours and host various educational activities, including exhibits, lectures, and classes, thereby enriching the educational landscape surrounding these critical historical topics. In addition to in-person programming, the HFHEC will provide Holocaust-related curricula and resources for teachers, ensuring that educators have the tools they need to teach this important subject effectively.

To further enhance accessibility and engagement, the HFHEC will offer a variety of online resources, including links to other Holocaust museums, a digital library, and virtual lectures and exhibits. With an anticipated annual attendance of 50,000 students, the HFHEC aims to fill a significant gap in Phoenix, the fifth largest city in the United States, which currently lacks a dedicated Holocaust museum or education center. This initiative addresses an essential educational need and positions Phoenix as a more inclusive and informed community regarding Holocaust history and its lessons.

In alignment with a law enacted in Arizona in 2021 and amended in 2024 requiring students to learn about the Holocaust and other genocides for at least three school periods or the equivalent on two separate occasions during grades 7 through 12, the HFHEC is anticipated to open in April 2027 and will provide critical educational programming mandated by the state. By doing so, the HFHEC will ensure that the Holocaust's important lessons are taught meaningfully, fostering awareness and understanding within the community while assisting educators in fulfilling the state's educational requirements. Additionally, the HFHEC will serve as an invaluable cultural hub for the broader Arizona community and beyond.

This is an exceptional opportunity to shape the direction of a state-of-the-art cultural and educational institution from its inception. The CEO will join the project after critical fundraising has been completed (to date, over \$37M has been raised of the \$45M goal), with strong community and political support already in place. The HFHEC will be located in downtown Phoenix, in the heart of the city's vibrant arts and cultural scene. Construction is set to begin in July 2025.

In this pivotal role, the CEO will refine the HFHEC's strategic vision while laying the groundwork for its organizational structure. The CEO will craft a comprehensive staffing and operational plan, working closely with external consultants and a small, dedicated team. A key responsibility will be engaging with school districts and administrators to book and coordinate student visits for the 2027-2028 academic year, which in Arizona begins in July. The CEO will also play a pivotal role in shaping exhibit content and design, overseeing installations, curating the artifact collection, and developing curriculum and programming specifically designed for middle and high school students. Expanding the HFHEC's outreach to diverse audiences will be a central focus of the role. Additionally, the CEO will collaborate with the AZJHS's Board of Directors and donors to ensure the institution's long-term financial health and growth.

ARIZONA JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

[AZJHS](#) is dedicated to preserving and celebrating the rich heritage of Arizona's Jewish communities. Its mission is to educate the public about the Jewish historical experience and raise awareness of Arizona's diverse Jewish history through arts, culture, and educational programs. The AZJHS offers seminars, a monthly film series, book discussions, and musical concerts and maintains an extensive archive of local Jewish records and artifacts. The AZJHS has long been committed to Holocaust education and has aspired for many years to establish a Holocaust museum or education center. Today, it partners with the [Phoenix Holocaust Association](#) to co-host some of its programming.

The AZJHS is located in the heart of downtown Phoenix, just one block from the Phoenix Art Museum and next to the Phoenix Public Library, in the city's vibrant arts and culture district. The AZJHS owns and operates the Cutler Plotkin Jewish Heritage Center (Center), a historic synagogue that serves as a museum, cultural center, and event venue, welcoming thousands of visitors annually. The site was originally home to the first permanent Jewish congregation in the Phoenix area, Congregation Beth Israel, which dates back to the 1920s. AZJHS purchased the property in 2001 and, after significant renovations, opened it to the public in 2010.

Today, the Center includes a sanctuary, an exhibit utilizing immersive and virtual reality technology entitled "Stories of Survival: An Immersive Journey Through the Holocaust," a classroom building for exhibitions, an administration building, and an outdoor terrace. It is run by an Interim Executive Director who reports to the AZJHS Board.

In spring 2025, the administration building will be replaced by the 30,000-square-foot, three-story structure designed to connect the historic part of the building with the new HFHEC facility.

THE HILTON FAMILY HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CENTER

The HFHEC, operating under the legal entity of AZJHS, will serve as the organization's flagship project dedicated to preserving and sharing the lessons of the Holocaust and other atrocities against humanity. Through powerful survivor testimonies, historical artifacts, and cutting-edge technology, including real-time interactive exhibits, the HFHEC will engage middle and high school students throughout Arizona in reflecting on these profound stories. Specifically, it will encourage students to act as upstanders and advocates for a world free from hatred, prejudice, and bigotry. The HFHEC will offer free entry for Arizona public school groups and students.

The Space

[Gallagher and Associates](#) (Gallagher), an award-winning and internationally acclaimed museum and exhibition design firm, has crafted the master plan for the HFHEC, blending unique layouts, interactive technology, architectural design, project planning, and post-opening operations. The exhibition schematics and blueprints were presented to the AZJHS Board in March 2024 and are set to be finalized in early 2025. While Gallagher will not be responsible for fabricating the exhibits, they will continue to provide support through the installation process and remain involved until the opening of the HFHEC.

Some of Gallagher's notable projects include the National World War II Museum in New Orleans, the International Spy Museum in Washington, D.C., the Musical Instrument Museum in Scottsdale, and the ANU Museum of the Jewish People in Tel Aviv, Israel.

[A.R. Mays Construction](#), an Arizona-based firm, has been hired to lead the construction project for the HFHEC.

The facility will feature two levels that visitors can explore in any order, allowing them to start their journey on either floor. The first floor will feature the Tikkun Olam Galleries, focusing on modern-day hate and injustice. This space will host exhibitions addressing critical issues like history, racism, genocide, and respect among diverse communities, connecting the relevance of the Holocaust and other genocides to visitors' lives. Visitors will gain insights and tools to combat hatred, racism, and antisemitism.

The second floor will feature the Holocaust Galleries, which presents the Holocaust through the perspectives of victims, perpetrators, collaborators, upstanders, and bystanders. This space is dedicated to preserving and sharing Holocaust history for future generations, following a chronological narrative that begins with Jewish life before the war. The galleries will explore the rise of antisemitism, the events of the Holocaust, its aftermath, and other genocides, concluding with contemporary human rights injustices and a message of hope. Administrative offices will be on this floor and in the basement, which will also house archives and collections.

The first floor will feature a conference room, a new entrance, a lobby, a large space that will be used for

orientations of student groups, and a flexible 1,500–3,000 square foot room for traveling or changing exhibits. Additionally, an outdoor patio with picnic tables will offer a gathering space.

With a well-structured operational plan, an efficient scheduling system, and careful attention to visitor flow, the building will remain accessible for HFHEC programs during school day mornings and AZJHS programs in the afternoons, evenings, and weekends.

Budget and Funding

The projected annual operating budget for the HFHEC is estimated at \$2 million. With nearly 800 donors contributing thus far, the AZJHS has launched a capital campaign with a target of \$45 million, which includes \$7 to \$9 million for an operating and programming endowment. To date, over \$37 million has been raised. In June 2024, the Arizona legislature approved appropriation bills signed by Governor Katie Hobbs, allocating \$7 million to the HFHEC. Additionally, the HFHEC has received generous contributions, including a \$5 million naming gift from the Steven J. Hilton Family Foundation for the Holocaust Education Center, \$2 million from Maricopa County, \$2 million from the City of Phoenix General Obligation Bond (approved November 2023), \$2 million from the Molly Blank Fund, \$1 million from the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust, \$1 million from the Steele Foundation, and \$1 million from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

Governance and Staffing

Reporting to a 15–20-member Board, the CEO of the HFHEC will be responsible for the HFHEC budget, staff, and decision-making. The CEO will sit as an *ex-officio* member of the AZJHS Board of Directors and its Executive Board Committee. The current Board Chair is Chuck Gealer, and the incoming Board Chair is Executive Vice President [Rick Naimark](#).

As a board member of the AZJHS, [Steve Hilton](#) is currently serving as Project Chair for the HFHEC endeavor, a role he will hold until the grand opening in April 2027. In this capacity, he is leading fundraising efforts, overseeing the construction of the building, and ensuring that all operational aspects are successfully implemented.

In 2024, an HFHEC oversight committee was established to preserve the spirit and integrity of the project as envisioned by the founding donors. Its primary goal is to ensure the project remains focused on its core mission of Holocaust education. The oversight committee is chaired by Rick Naimark.

The HFHEC's staff will report directly to the CEO and will be hired in sequence as needed. Together, the CEO of the HFHEC and the Director of the AZJHS will recruit the financial and administrative team to support the operational infrastructure of both the HFHEC and the AZJHS.

ABOUT PHOENIX

Phoenix, the capital of Arizona and the fifth-largest city in the U.S. is a dynamic and rapidly growing metropolitan area. Home to Arizona State University— the largest public university in the country under a single administration—the greater Phoenix area serves as the state's urban center, with over two-thirds of Arizona residents living in the metro area. The city's economy is diverse, featuring strong sectors in real estate and construction, technology, finance, healthcare, renewable energy, manufacturing, and telecommunications, positioning Phoenix as a tech hub and economic engine for the state.

Known as the “Valley of the Sun,” due to its year-round sunshine, Phoenix boasts a thriving cultural scene that includes museums, theaters, and music festivals, reflecting a rich cultural diversity encompassing Hispanic, Native American, and African American communities. This diversity is evident in the city’s cuisine and festivals, making Phoenix a welcoming place for newcomers and visitors alike. Phoenix is governed by a Council-Manager system, in which an elected city council provides political leadership while a city manager oversees the city's operations.

The Jewish community in Phoenix is vibrant, diverse, and dispersed, with a population of over 100,000 individuals. While smaller than those in cities like New York or Los Angeles, Phoenix's Jewish population is among the fastest growing in the U.S., fueled by an influx from larger Jewish communities. The city boasts a range of Jewish institutions, including Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox synagogues, schools, cultural organizations, and social services. In Scottsdale, the [Ina Levine Jewish Community Campus](#) is home to The Valley of the Sun Jewish Community Center, the Jewish Federation of Greater Phoenix, the Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Phoenix, and more than a dozen other Jewish agencies.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The key opportunities and challenges for HFHEC’s CEO include:

Shape a Vision and Strategy for the Establishment of the HFHEC

The CEO will have an exceptional opportunity to create a state-of-the-art, technology-driven institution from the ground up. As the inaugural leader, this individual will build upon existing planning efforts to define and implement the HFHEC’s strategic and operational priorities and establish clear metrics for success. Joining the HFHEC at the outset of the new facility's construction, the CEO will play a pivotal role in translating institutional aspirations into actionable plans.

Success in this position will hinge on a deep commitment to young people and education, active community engagement, technological innovation, and the effective operations of a museum and education center to support large numbers of student visitors and school districts.

Serve as the Key Ambassador as well as Drive Branding and Marketing Efforts

The CEO will serve as the HFHEC's primary ambassador, championing its mission and engaging an array of stakeholders throughout the Phoenix metropolitan area, across Arizona, and beyond. This role offers the opportunity to shape and elevate the HFHEC's brand and reputation by leading the strategic development of marketing and communications and highlighting its exhibitions, programs, and resources.

Success in this role requires inspiration, cultural sensitivity, and outstanding communication skills to effectively engage with diverse groups. The CEO will ensure that the HFHEC remains inclusive, accessible, and a vital resource for the community, positioning HFHEC as a central hub for critical discussions and education on the Holocaust, genocide, and human rights.

Build and Lead a High-Performing Operations and Staff Team

The CEO will be a seasoned leader responsible for managing the HFHEC's internal operations while building, developing, and retaining a high-performing, cohesive team and culture. This leader will define the staff structure, roles, and size to achieve the HFHEC's objectives. At the outset, three positions are anticipated to report directly to the CEO: operations and technology, education and programs, and outreach, development, and fundraising. This team will manage the HFHEC's core functions, including administration, exhibitions, and collections management.

Additional support functions, such as finance, HR, and security, will be shared with the AZJHS. The CEO, as a leader within the AZJHS, will align with broader organizational goals and work closely with the AZJHS Director to ensure a productive partnership. While the CEO will have significant autonomy, the success of the HFHEC relies on strong communication, coordination, and data sharing between both entities.

Develop a Sustainable Funding Pipeline to Support and Expand HFHEC's Financial Resources

The HFHEC's fundraising efforts have exceeded expectations, securing over \$37 million to date. This achievement ensures that construction of the new building will begin in July 2025 and will provide organizational operating funds as the HFHEC opens its doors. However, to fully realize the HFHEC's long-term vision, ongoing fund development will be necessary, and a comprehensive fundraising and sustainability plan will be crucial to ensuring continued success.

The CEO will play a key role in cultivating relationships with donors and public/private funders in the Phoenix metro area, including the Phoenix and Scottsdale Jewish communities and beyond. Opportunities to diversify revenue streams include membership fees, earned income from weekend and summer visitors, facility rentals, and endowment and planned giving. Additionally, the CEO will lead the recruitment of a Development Director to support these fundraising initiatives.

QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

The ideal candidate will bring all or most of the following professional and personal qualities:

- Strong commitment to the center’s mission—Jewish history, the Holocaust, human rights, and education—is essential. This leader must be passionate about teaching history’s lessons to inspire youth to combat hate and discrimination.
- Proven leader with strong business acumen, financial management, and operational expertise. Experienced in executing strategies, building infrastructure, and launching complex initiatives.
- Exceptional communication and public speaking skills, capable of inspiring and conveying the HFHEC’s value to diverse stakeholders, including school administrators, donors, non-profit partners, government, media, and the Jewish community.
- Proven leadership in a museum or cultural center, with expertise in visitor services, exhibitions, education, community engagement, collections, research, and facility management.
- A successful record of building and maintaining donor relationships and strategic partnerships to support long-term sustainability and growth.
- Excellent team management skills, with experience in hiring, leading, and nurturing a diverse team. Must foster a positive work culture that prioritizes collaboration and staff development.
- Success in collaborating with a board of directors or other governing bodies and fostering a productive, open, and cooperative working relationship.
- Proven ability to leverage technology, multimedia, and digital content to drive program innovation and improve organizational efficiency and outcomes.
- A forward-thinking, hands-on, adaptable, and creative problem solver who actively listens, collaborates effectively, and takes decisive action. Must also be able to delegate tasks, bring humor and humility to the workplace, and inspire excellence in others.

LOCATION AND COMPENSATION

This is a permanent, full-time position in Phoenix with a targeted salary range of \$175,000–\$200,000.

TO APPLY

Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, has been retained to assist with this search. Confidential inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed confidentially to the search team via the link below. Please include a CV/resume and a two- to three-page letter of interest addressing the opportunities and challenges outlined above.

Rebecca Swartz, Partner
Mia Carpiello, Senior Associate
Harley Bartles, Senior Search Coordinator
Isaacson, Miller

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/hilton-family-holocaust-education-center/executive-director>

AZJHS does not discriminate based on race, color, ethnicity, national origin, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, marital status, and/or political affiliation in its programs, activities, or employment.