

academy of american poets

Search for the President and Executive Director Academy of American Poets New York, New York

THE SEARCH

The Academy of American Poets invites applications and nominations for the position of President and Executive Director. Having recently celebrated its 90th anniversary, the Academy's mission to advocate for and increase the visibility of poets and poetry has never been more vital. This is an exceptional opportunity for an experienced and grounded leader, ideally with a passion for poetry or the arts and culture at large, who can mobilize members, donors, the Board, Chancellors, and staff around a compelling vision for the future as this venerable arts organization looks toward its centennial.

The Academy of American Poets is the nation's leading champion of poets and poetry with supporters in all fifty states and around the world. The Academy fulfills its mission through a range of programs, including Poets.org, the world's largest website for poets and poetry; prominent awards and prizes; National Poetry Month; the popular Poem-a-Day series; and *American Poets* magazine. The organization also plays a critical role in bringing poetry into schools through its award-winning resources for K-12 educators. In addition, the Academy plays a leadership role in the national Poetry Coalition, working to promote the value poets bring to our culture.

Reporting to the Board of Directors, the President and Executive Director is the chief executive of the Academy, leading a team of ten full-time employees, as well as consultants and interns, with an annual operating budget of \$5 million. Working collaboratively to develop a compelling vision for the future of an esteemed arts organization, the next President and Executive Director will foster a healthy organizational culture supported by a collaborative, high-functioning team; serve as a compelling advocate for the work of poets; expand visibility of poetry; strengthen philanthropy and grow membership.

The Academy of American Poets has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist with this search. Inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed in confidence to the firm as indicated at the end of this document.

ABOUT THE ACADEMY OF AMERICAN POETS

Founded in 1934, the Academy of American Poets is the nation's leading champion of poets and poetry with supporters in all fifty states and beyond. Its mission is to support American poets at all stages of their careers and to foster the appreciation and production of American poetry.

The organization also produces Poets.org, the world's largest website for poets and poetry; established and has organized National Poetry Month each April for almost 30 years; publishes the popular Poem-a-Day series and *American Poets* magazine; provides award-winning resources to K–12 educators, including the Teach This Poem series; hosts an annual series of poetry readings and special events; and supports a national Poetry Coalition working to promote the value poets bring to our culture. In addition, the Academy reaches millions of individuals each month and awards more than \$1.25 million to poets annually.

History

The Academy was founded by Marie Bullock in 1934 in New York City, and it was officially incorporated as a nonprofit organization in 1936. Marie Bullock founded the organization after returning to the United States from her studies at the Sorbonne in Paris. Concerned about the lack of financial support given to poets in America, she decided to take action. With the advice of friends such as poets Edwin Arlington Robinson and Joseph Auslander (the first Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress), Bullock drew up the plans and started raising funds to advocate for the importance of poetry and to support poets.

Marie Bullock served as the president of the Academy of American Poets for the organization's first fifty years. During the first thirty years, Bullock operated the organization out of her apartment, centering on a core program of awards to poets. The Academy of American Poets awarded the very first cash prize in the United States, recognizing an American poet.

In 1963, Elizabeth "Betty" Kray was hired as the organization's first Executive Director. Kray was a legendary promoter of poetry, especially through poetry readings, and during her tenure, she was instrumental in putting both the organization and the art of poetry on the cultural map. Under Kray's leadership, the organization launched a groundbreaking reading series at the Guggenheim Museum (1963), the first national touring circuits for poets (1965), the first Poets-in-the-Schools program (1966), the Walt Whitman Award (1975), and the Harold Morton Landon Translation Award (1976).

Programs

The Academy of American Poets supports American poets and fosters the appreciation of contemporary poetry by producing [Poets.org](#), [Poem-a-Day](#), [National Poetry Month](#), [American Poets](#) magazine for [members](#), and a wide range of [materials for teachers](#). In addition, the organization curates the following events: annual [fall conversation series](#) between poets and artists in other disciplines; the [Blaney Lecture](#) on contemporary poetry and poetics; and [Poetry & the Creative Mind](#), a virtual reading of favorite poems by celebrities and public figures. There are also special events that feature the distinguished poets who serve on the Academy's Board of [Chancellors](#).

Prizes

Since 1934, the Academy of American Poets has provided visibility and financial support to poets demonstrating artistic excellence. The Academy administers several distinguished award recognitions, including: the American Poets Prizes, a suite of major awards that range from a first-book prize to a lifetime-achievement award; nearly two hundred College Prizes at schools across the country; and the Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellowships, which provide one million dollars to poets annually who serve in civic positions. All poets who receive an Academy of American Poets Prize are strongly promoted, including features in American Poets magazine, on social media, and, of course, on Poets.org. A full list of prizes offered can be found [here](#).

The Staff

The staff includes 10 full-time employees who have responsibilities for content, development, membership, programs, education, marketing, and advertising, as well as consultants and interns. Finance and Human Resources are managed by an external consultant in partnership with the President and Executive Director. Academy staff are guided by the organization's values, which include anti-racism, collaboration, diversity, equity, inclusion, innovation, and leadership.

Financial and Fundraising Overview

The organization has a \$5 million annual budget and awards \$1.25 million each year to 200+ poets at various stages of their careers. The Academy of American Poets is supported by the financial contributions of more than 6,000 members nationwide, and funding from individuals, foundations, corporations, and government sources such as the National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, the New York State Council on the Arts, and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

ROLE OF THE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The President and Executive Director is a full-time position that reports to the Board of Directors. This position provides vision, leadership, strategy, and management for the Academy's programs, publications, partnerships, and operations, ensuring that the organization remains culturally vital and fiscally sound and has a solid and positive presence in the poetry community.

The President and Executive Director will have the background and skills to serve the Academy's many constituencies: poets, readers, teachers, supporters, members, and the larger literary community in meaningful ways. With a strong organizational foundation already in place, a staff of 11, a Board of 22, and an advisory board of 15 Chancellors, the President and Executive Director has an opportunity to lead the organization forward and broaden its services in the field, strengthening its reach to poets and all of its constituents across the country and around the world.

General Management, Operations, and Artistic Programming:

- Responsible for the Academy's artistic direction and development
- Oversee all programs, publications, educational resources, events, and services
- Oversee finance, human resources, and administration

- Ensure the application of organizational policies, guidelines, and processes
- Ensure programmatic alignment with the organization's mission and values
- Oversee and ensure the integrity of the organization's many prizes and grant programs
- Lead ongoing strategic planning and DEIA initiatives for the organization and monitor progress toward annual goals and objectives
- Carry out Board-approved strategic plans and policies
- Ensure the smooth functioning of the organization's day-to-day operations and activities
- Recommend a yearly budget for Board approval and oversee the prudent management of the organization's resources
- Hire, supervise, inspire, and evaluate staff; support their efforts, develop, and enrich their skills

External Relations and Communications

- Serve as a spokesperson for the Academy; reinforce and build positive understanding of its mission and programs, and champion poetry today
- Steward the brand; direct and approve design, marketing, and promotion; ensure quality of organizational materials and products
- Identify ways to leverage technology and social media to help reach organizational objectives
- Develop and implement an effective communications strategy to widen the audience for Academy programs and publication, and poetry
- Introduce and preside over public events
- Maintain contact with poets, writers, translators, publishers, and editors
- Maintain a positive and collaborative working relationship with partner organizations
- Expand partnerships and programmatic collaborations that can extend the reach and assistance the Academy provides to the field
- Advocate for poetry and the Academy to education, arts, humanities, media, publishing, and philanthropic communities
- Attend literary and other cultural events, representing the organization
- Coordinate and liaise with the Board and Chancellors on official public statements issued by the organization

Fundraising

- Oversee all efforts to grow the organization's bases of support: members, donors, foundations, government funders, corporate sponsors, advertisers
- Oversee annual fundraising gala event
- Oversee year-end and spring fundraising campaigns
- Develop and implement new fundraising strategies for expanding the organization's individual supporters, particularly online and major gifts
- Establish and execute a campaign to build the organization's endowment
- Maintain contact with the NEA, NEH, other government funders, and private foundations that provide funding for the organization
- Maintain contact with major donors
- Develop new contacts in philanthropy and work in close partnership with other organizations to help grow financial support for poetry

Board and Chancellor Relations

- Serve as an ex officio, non-voting member of the Board

- Working closely with the Board Chair, coordinate and support the efforts of the Board, its officers, and its committees
- Ensure the Board Chair is advised of any matters of importance or concern, both internally and externally
- Execute documents and contracts and otherwise act on behalf of the Academy in the day-to-day business and on matters authorized by the Board
- Help identify and cultivate new Board members from diverse backgrounds whose talents, commitments, and contacts are congruent with the needs of the organization
- Maintain regular communications with Board members and Chancellors, and solicit their advice on organizational finances and activities
- Chair the annual business meeting of the Chancellors and oversee Chancellor elections
- Oversee and support the efforts of Chancellor committees
- Oversee Chancellor's participation in programs
- Ensure that the role of Chancellor continues to be valued and visible

As the Academy of American Poets looks to the future, the next President and Executive Director will be expected to embrace the following:

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Develop and implement a bold vision for the future that builds on the Academy of American Poets' strengths and is responsive to the current moment.

As the Academy of American Poets looks toward its centennial, it needs a President and Executive Director who can work with the Board and staff to develop and implement the next strategic plan that capitalizes on the historic strengths of the organization and includes thoughtful planning around infrastructure, staffing, and operations. In collaboration with the Board, the President and Executive Director will also need to assess where the Academy should evolve in light of current conditions and the political landscape, with attacks on the arts, libraries, and censorship on the rise.

Foster a healthy organizational culture supported by a collaborative, high-functioning team.

The next President and Executive Director will be responsible for cultivating a healthy culture with a high-functioning team. They should serve as a bridge between the staff and the Board to ensure there is clear communication and alignment around the vision and goals for the organization. They will also have the opportunity to grow and develop the team in alignment with the Academy's mission and strategic priorities.

Serve as a compelling advocate for the work of poets and expand the visibility of poetry.

Ideally, the next President and Executive Director will have a deep understanding of and commitment to supporting the work of poets, but candidates with an interest in the arts and culture at large are welcome to apply. The President and Executive Director should work collaboratively with the team to identify how best to elevate the voices of poets and make the case for how their work is consequential and holds a unique place in public discourse.

Expand philanthropy and grow membership.

The Academy has the opportunity to engage an intergenerational public in a meaningful way and lead an organization that depends on diversity for its voice and reach. The next President and Executive Director should be a proven fundraiser who can speak confidently and persuasively about the power of poetry. They should also be prepared to develop and implement a clear strategy for growing membership and membership engagement across the country.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The Academy of American Poets seeks an energetic, thoughtful, and visionary leader and an effective, seasoned administrator to serve as its next President and Executive Director.

The successful candidate will bring many of the following experiences, characteristics, and abilities:

Experience:

- 10+ years of experience in nonprofit administration at a senior or executive level
- Bachelor's degree in related field

Competencies and Commitments:

- Knowledge of contemporary poetry and a passion for the literary arts
- Demonstrated expertise in strategic planning, nonprofit finance, management, and staff supervision
- Strong experience working with a Board of Directors
- Proven fundraising track record
- Exceptional past editorial and curatorial work
- Working knowledge of K-12 educational programming
- Impeccable public speaking and communication skills, written and oral
- Excellent judgment and decision-making skills
- Commitment to diversity, equity, inclusivity, accessibility, and collaboration
- Working knowledge of technology, content management systems, digital publishing, and social media platforms
- Ability to effectively respond to multiple constituencies
- Ability to manage multiple projects
- Commitment to best nonprofit practices

Compensation and Location

This is a permanent, full-time position in New York, New York, with a starting salary range of \$170,000-\$200,000, not including benefits, commensurate with experience.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the close of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website for the search. Electronic submission of materials is strongly encouraged.

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/academy-american-poets/president-and-executive-director>

Karen Avery, Partner
Liz Braun, Senior Associate
Caroline Corry, Senior Search Coordinator
Isaacson, Miller

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION: *The Academy of American Poets is an Equal Opportunity Employer, committed to building a diverse and inclusive staff. Qualified candidates of all backgrounds are welcome to apply. The Academy of American Poets does not discriminate in employment opportunities or practices on the basis of religion, race, creed, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, gender expression, or any other characteristics protected by law. Candidates of color are strongly encouraged to apply.*