

SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE

Search for the Executive Director Atlanta, Georgia

THE SEARCH

The Society of Biblical Literature invites nominations and applications for the position of Executive Director. The Society of Biblical Literature (the “Society” or “SBL”) is the largest international association devoted to the critical investigation of the Bible from a variety of academic disciplines. Founded in 1880, the SBL is quickly approaching its sesquicentennial of service to those who engage in the academic study of biblical texts and their contexts, of interpretation of the Bibles and their many traditions and contexts, as well as comparative studies that focus on other culturally-central texts. The SBL stands at a pivotal moment. At a time of transformation and promise, the area of biblical studies and cognate fields includes diverse disciplinary approaches, engages questions about the role and function of religion in higher education, and is a forum for understanding how biblical texts are used and experienced in society as a whole. The next Executive Director has an opportunity to leverage SBL’s core strengths and values to address these challenges and to lead the Society into its next chapter to further its international impact.

With over 8,000 members who share a mutual interest in the critical investigation of the Bible, SBL provides a forum to test ideas and advance the understanding of the Bible’s history and its role in the public arena. Services include, but are not limited to, providing networking and community; a flagship journal, the *Journal of Biblical Literature*; publications; a forum for publicly accessible information about the Bible (<https://www.bibleodyssey.org/>); and review of books in the Review of Biblical Literature (<https://www.sblcentral.org/home/rbl>). Members also have access to congresses including annual international, U.S.-based, and global virtual meetings. To learn more about the work of the Society, please go to <https://www.sbl-site.org>.

Reporting to a dedicated 14-member active governing body, the Council, the Executive Director leads an experienced and talented staff of 14 full-time employees and oversees a \$3.8M budget. Working with Council, membership, staff, and partners, the next Executive Director will create a compelling vision and strategy for SBL, demonstrating the Society’s ability to adapt to the changing social and cultural dynamics

locally and globally, as well as the shifting landscape in higher education, while maintaining its core values and mission. In particular, the Executive Director will sustain membership and service to members, enhance partnerships, and further advance SBL's core values of inclusivity and respect for diversity, within the Society and across the field. The next Executive Director will have the opportunity to build on the Society's financial foundation and to identify new revenue-generating initiatives and funding sources.

This is an exceptional opportunity for an experienced and innovative leader who is energized by bringing together people of diverse scholarly approaches and commitments. The ideal candidate will have a passion for biblical scholarship with an inclusive, global, forward-looking perspective; demonstrated business acumen; excellent communication, relationship building, and negotiation skills; deep experience promoting and sustaining diversity, equity, and inclusion; the ability to develop effective strategies within a complex environment; and preferably five years of senior management experience developing and managing people, plans, and budgets. Ideally the candidate will have knowledge of publishing, copyright, and licensing agreements and experience working with, or within, non-profit associations. A doctoral degree in biblical studies or the humanities is preferred.

Inquiries, nominations, and applications, which will remain confidential, should be directed to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

ABOUT SBL

Founded in 1880, the Society of Biblical Literature is the oldest and largest learned society devoted to the critical investigation of the Bible from a variety of academic disciplines. As an international organization, the Society offers its members opportunities for mutual support, intellectual growth, and professional development through the following:

- Advancing the academic study of biblical texts and their contexts, of interpretation of the Bibles and their many traditions and contexts, as well as comparative studies that focus on other culturally-central texts
- Promoting broad, open academic cooperation and critical perspectives within and among fields of study and across global boundaries
- Collaborating with relevant educational institutions, including colleges, universities, and institutions of theological and religious education, as well as other appropriate organizations, to support academic biblical scholarship and teaching
- Facilitating the production and dissemination of new knowledge in the relevant areas by, e.g., organizing scholarly conferences, webinars, and publishing scholarship in print and online.
- Developing resources for diverse audiences in multiple languages, including students and general publics across global boundaries
- Publishing biblical scholarship
- Promoting cooperation across global boundaries

Supporting this strategic vision, the Society is grounded by its core values:

- Inclusivity
- Equity
- Diversity
- Scholarly Integrity
- Transparency
- Accountability
- Critical Inquiry
- Openness to Change

SBL's mission, to foster academic scholarship in biblical studies and cognate areas across global boundaries, is in pursuit of the public good. Its resources, services, and programs support that mission, core values, and strategic direction.

Resources and Programs

Through the SBL Press, the Society publishes books and journals, including the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, as well as additional resources for classrooms and research to support the needs of biblical scholars and students. SBL members have access to subscriptions, software, and books through the SBL, at discounted rates. SBL creates educational resources for diverse audiences and uses, such as [SBL Central](#) as a scholarly research site, the [Bible Odyssey](#) website for teachers and for the public, the SBL Hebrew and Greek fonts for publishers and scholars, and a developing collection of resources on Africana Scholarship.

Through the SBL Annual Meeting, which is co-hosted by the American Academy of Religion (AAR), SBL brings together scholars at all stages, authors and publishers, religious leaders and interested non-scholars for over 1,200 academic sessions on biblical scholarship and research, religious studies, and theology. AAR and SBL are co-owners of the Luce Center located on Emory University's campus.

SBL promotes cooperation across global boundaries by holding a yearly International Meeting outside the borders of North America. The International Cooperation Initiative, which fosters engagement and collaboration with members around the world, was started in 2007. A newly formed Global Virtual Meeting aims to serve the international membership as well as to create a new, low-cost mechanism for members to present their scholarship to colleagues, increasing accessibility and diversity in the SBL. SBL has been a member of the American Council of Learned Societies since 1929 and actively participates in it.

Volunteer Leadership and Governance

Distinguished biblical scholars lead the Society through its active governing body, the Council, which is responsible for setting the mission and strategic direction of the organization and for oversight of the finances, operations, and policies of SBL. Council members serve on a voluntary basis and are elected each year by the Society membership for three-year terms.

Officers of the Society include President, Vice President, Chair of Council, Secretary of Council, and Executive Director. The President and Vice President are elected by the Society, and each serve one-year terms with the Vice President assuming the role of President at the end of the Vice-Presidential year. The Chair and the Secretary are elected from within Council to serve a term of one to three years but not to exceed the member's term of service on Council. The Executive Director is an ex-officio member of Council.

In addition to Council, members serve in hundreds of other positions—on committees, task forces, editorial boards, and program units. Standing committees and chairs of standing committees are appointed by Council. Task Forces of shorter duration are established by the Chair of Council in consultation with the Council.

Staff and Staff Leadership

SBL's current Executive Director, John F. Kutsko, will step down on December 29, 2022, after 12 years of service. SBL's next leader will join a dedicated and talented team of 14 full-time staff and five part-time staff and interns who are a core strength of the organization and provide exceptional resources, programs, and services to the membership. A five-person senior leadership team reports to the Executive Director. SBL staff work on a hybrid schedule and the Executive Director will lead and enrich a culture that supports individual professional development and team effectiveness to further advance SBL's mission.

THE ROLE AND LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Reporting to the Council, the Executive Director of SBL is the Chief Executive Officer of the Society and serves as its Treasurer. The Executive Director is responsible for providing support to the Council, managing the programs and operations of the organization; leading, supervising, and managing staff resources; driving the strategic direction of SBL; and coordinating professional relations. SBL seeks an astute administrator who has a passion for and understanding of the complexities of the field and methodological plurality of biblical scholarship. Candidates should have a history of strategic organizational leadership; the ability to maintain financial stability and creatively grow revenue; the diplomacy and political acumen to navigate contemporary cultural issues; a record of building and fostering an inclusive community, partnerships, and programs; and experience successfully leading staff and operations.

The next Executive Director will inherit a strong organization that has the opportunity to deepen and broaden its impact on the field and the world. As SBL looks to the future, there are several key leadership expectations, outlined below, the next Executive Director will be expected to embrace. They include:

Visionary Leadership

Working closely with Council and integrating ideas and insights from the staff and the broader membership, the Executive Director will develop a clear vision and strategic direction for the next chapter of SBL that builds on the Society's strong foundation. SBL's future strategy must be innovative and inclusive to balance existing scholarship while advancing new approaches to SBL's mission and new ways of thinking about scholarship regarding the Bible and other culturally-central texts. Given the Society's long-standing leadership in this area, it is uniquely positioned to embrace the complexity of the field, honoring traditional and contemporary interpretations of the Bible, bridging divisions in our society, and leading vibrant and civil dialogues to shape a future of even greater relevance and impact.

Enhance Membership and Partnerships

Due to the strength of the Society, SBL membership has remained steady at a time of declining membership in other learned societies. To continue its strength and relevancy, there are exciting opportunities for the Executive Director to work with the staff and Council to identify, establish, and maintain relationships with U.S.-based and international professional/community organizations, religious groups, and government agencies as they relate to the mission and future of SBL. The next Executive Director will creatively expand and enhance membership by exploring and evaluating opportunities for members to come together both in person and virtually, paying attention to issues of disability and access, economics and access, and climate and access in a global Society. With the changing landscape in higher education, evolution in the field and commitment to the public good, the Executive Director will lead the Society to embrace the larger landscape to support the growing adjunct community, to provide access and mentoring for new scholars, to expand its international focus, and to engage scholars in subfields of biblical scholarship and related humanities.

Inclusivity and Diversity

Two of SBL's core values are Inclusivity and Diversity and the next Executive Director will demonstrate their commitment to these values in all aspects of their leadership and work. SBL members represent a diversity of academic disciplines, approaches to biblical scholarship, faiths, and regions and it is vital that the Executive Director promote, foster, and cultivate diverse voices—both intellectually and along the axes of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and disability, *inter alia*—in biblical studies to ensure an inclusive, respectful culture. SBL is committed to diversifying its membership to better reflect the world, and the work, and the Executive Director will lead the Society to uphold and realize this commitment.

Global

As SBL is an international organization, it is vital for the next Executive Director to continue to expand the Society's global engagement, working closely with members, staff, and Council to explore creative ways to broaden SBL culture beyond a North American and European focus; to further real connection to scholars in the Southern Hemisphere and Asia, and to ensure that members across the globe are welcomed, intellectually and professionally supported, and have access to Society leadership positions.

Financial Stewardship

The Executive Director serves as the Society's treasurer and carries a wide range of fiscal responsibilities including the management and financial compliance of an operating budget of \$3.8M, and total net assets of \$8.5M. The next Executive Director will be an astute financial steward to maintain the financial stability of the Society and an equally enthusiastic advocate to creatively guide revenue-generating activities, identify new revenue streams, and expand fund-raising initiatives. The Executive Director also shares responsibility for the management of the Luce Center, which provides additional financial and partnership opportunities.

Staff Development

The SBL staff is experienced and passionately dedicated to SBL members and mission. Recognizing team and individual strengths, the Executive Director will work with staff to create a shared vision that supports individual professional development and team effectiveness to further support the Society. The Executive Director will collaboratively and strategically lead and support the team to accomplish current initiatives to enhance access, services, and resources for members and build future initiatives to ensure and enhance the success of the Society. Recognizing the staff as a core strength of the Society, the Executive Director will continue to prioritize staff development and a positive, supportive work culture.

DESIRED QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

The successful candidate will bring many of the following qualifications and attributes:

- Passion for biblical scholarship with a global, inclusive, forward-looking perspective
- Demonstrated business acumen and preferably five or more years of senior management experience developing and managing people, plans, and budgets
- A commitment to and demonstrated track record promoting and sustaining diversity, equity, inclusion
- Excellent relationship builder with demonstrated ability to build and maintain relationships with diverse stakeholders including Council, members, staff, and regional and global partners
- Outstanding communication and negotiation skills

- Ability to develop effective strategies within a complex environment
- Proven ability to hire, manage, develop, and inspire a staff, ideally in a hybrid work environment
- Cultural competence and emotional intelligence to work with constituents in a global environment
- Knowledge of copyright and licensing agreements
- Ability to effectively represent and promote the Society through public and media relations and social media platforms
- Experience working with, or within, non-profit associations
- Awareness of own strengths and ability to recognize and elevate the strengths of others
- Genuine enthusiasm for SBL's strategic vision, core values, and mission and the ability to move the Society forward
- A doctoral degree in biblical studies or the humanities is preferred.

Applications, Inquiries, and Nominations

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

Jacqueline Mildner, Partner
Rachel Brown, Senior Associate
Pamela Carty, Senior Search Coordinator
<https://www.imsearch.com/search-detail/S8-818>

SBL is committed to equal employment opportunity. We will not discriminate against employees or applicants for employment on any legally recognized basis (protected class), including but not limited to: veteran status, uniform service member status, race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, age, physical or mental disability, genetic information, or any other protected class under federal, state, or local law.