



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF RELIGION

**Search for the Executive Director
American Academy of Religion
Atlanta, Georgia**

THE SEARCH

The American Academy of Religion (AAR) invites applications and nominations for the position of Executive Director (ED). This is an exceptional opportunity for an innovative and dynamic leader to advance the world's largest organization dedicated to preserving and promoting the academic study of religion. The AAR is at a pivotal moment as the academic study of religion, and the higher education landscape, continue to shift, creating unmatched opportunities for transformation. The next ED will be poised to build on the AAR's rich history, core strengths, and lead the organization into its next chapter.

The AAR serves more than 8,000 religion scholars around the globe, a membership that continues to grow in influence and diversity. The AAR seeks to advance and disseminate exceptional scholarship and teaching, providing numerous grants and awards, pedagogical materials, employment services, a robust publication program, and an Annual Meeting that offers unrivaled networking and professional development opportunities. To connect scholars with the broader public, the AAR membership has created programs and resources for intermediary sectors—such as K-12 teachers, law enforcement, policymakers, prison chaplains, museum curators, and journalists. The AAR is not a faith-based organization. The expertise of its membership spans most religions, and the AAR neither endorses nor condemns any religious belief or practice.

Reporting to the 12-member Board of Directors, the ED has broad responsibility for the association, leads a staff of 15 experienced employees, and oversees an annual budget of approximately \$3.25 million. Working with the Board, key stakeholders, and enterprising staff, the next ED will create a compelling vision and strategy for the future of the AAR. In particular, the ED will champion diversity, equity, and inclusion within the organization and across the field, expand and deepen engagement with members and partners, diversify revenue sources, and provide staff and operational leadership to further the AAR mission.

This is an exhilarating opportunity for an inclusive, experienced, and forward-looking leader to shepherd the AAR into its next chapter amid a changing and complex landscape. The next ED will be passionate about the study of religion in all its plurality, an engaged member of the AAR, an exceptional

communicator and leader with a track record of success leading diverse, multifaceted teams, and a demonstrable commitment to embedding diversity, equity, and inclusion into all professional efforts. An experienced and strategic administrator with solid business acumen, fundraising skills, and entrepreneurial spirit. A doctorate in religion or humanities is preferred.

The American Academy of Religion 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 AMERICAN ACADEMY OF RELIGION

The AAR was established in 1909 by Professor Ismar J. Peritz of Syracuse University, along with colleagues from Smith College, Columbia University, and Mount Holyoke College, to stimulate scholarship and teaching in religion. The group met under the original name, the Association of Biblical Instructors in American Colleges, and Secondary Schools, until 1922, when members voted to change the name to the National Association of Biblical Instructors, NABI ("prophet" in Hebrew). By 1963, the association, sparked by dramatic changes in the study of religion, was ready for another transformation and became the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and was incorporated under this name in 1964. To learn more about the rich history of the AAR, please visit: <https://aarweb.org/AARMBR/Who-We-Are-/History.aspx>

Registered as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, the AAR is incorporated in the State of Georgia. AAR executive offices are in the Luce Center, a beautiful 35,000-square-foot building located on the Emory University campus in Atlanta. AAR co-owns the Luce Center with the Society of Biblical Literature and leases space to the Emory University Emeritus College, the Institute for the Study of Modern Israel, and the Letters of Samuel Beckett Project.

The AAR's mission, to foster excellence in the academic study of religion and enhance the public understanding of religion, is the foundation that provides opportunities for expanding and enhancing members' scholarship, teaching, professional development, advocacy, and public engagement.

Supporting its mission, the AAR is guided by its values:

- Respect and Transparency
- Academic Excellence and Professional Responsibility
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Free Inquiry and Critical Examination

Governance

The AAR is governed by a twelve-member board of directors and the Executive Director, as ex officio. Directors include President, President-Elect, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary (who form the Executive Committee), Regions Director, Status Committee Director, Contingent Faculty Director,

Program Committee Director, Student Director, and two At-Large Directors. In addition to the Board of Directors, the AAR has five Committees of the Board and numerous Working Groups, including standing committees, juries, and task forces. The AAR also has ten regions that hold their own annual meetings.

Institutional Collaborations

The AAR is affiliated with numerous organizations and institutions to further advance its mission and organizational effectiveness. The AAR's most important collaboration is with Emory University. When the AAR moved from California to Atlanta in the early 1990s, the AAR accepted Emory's invitation to become an affiliate of the university. All AAR staff are members of the Emory University staff and, as such, receive all the benefits and privileges that come with that status, along with the intellectual connections with Emory faculty, with whom the AAR works closely.

The AAR also has a longstanding collaboration with the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL). The AAR and SBL are distinct corporate entities with separate endowments, financial structures, governance bodies, staff, program emphases, and missions. However, the two societies work together based on formal and informal agreements crafted over many years. On a 50-50 basis, the AAR and SBL hold a concurrent Annual Meeting, own and operate the Luce Center, and run an Employment Services Center.

The AAR is affiliated with several other organizations and institutions, including the American Council of Learned Societies, the National Humanities Alliance, and the International Association for the History of Religions. The AAR welcomes opportunities to cooperate with organizations that have similar missions to their own. A complete list of current RSOs is available here:

<https://www.aarweb.org/AARMBR/Who-We-Are-/Partnerships/Related-Scholarly-Organizations.aspx>

Enhancing the Public Understanding of Religion

AAR members participate not only in the scholarly activities of the AAR but also as citizens of their local communities and as denizens of a larger world—where religion often plays a role in causing or resolving social strife. As religion scholars, many AAR members have expertise useful for public policymakers, law enforcement officials, journalists, K-12 educators, museum curators, and prison chaplains. Please follow this link for more information about the AAR Public Engagement Programs:

<https://aarweb.org/AARMBR/Who-We-Are-/Public-Engagement-Programs.aspx>

Resources and Programs

The AAR provides a wealth of resources and programs to foster excellence in the academic study of religion. Some of the most visible programs and resources include the Annual Meeting, Publishing Programs, and Employment Listings, in addition to research tools, best practice documents, guides, webinars, and podcasts, to name a few. A complete listing is available here:

<https://aarweb.org/AARMBR/AARMBR/Resources.aspx?hkey=6184ade7-b1ac-4f52-9173-d2eb23da6735>

Staff Leadership and Operations

The current AAR Executive Director, Alice Hunt, will step down on July 7, 2023, having led the AAR for the last five years. The ED leads an experienced team of 15 full-time staff who work efficiently and effectively to support the membership through resources, programs, and services. The ED has five direct reports: the CFO/COO, Director of Program and Meetings, Director of Membership/Vision, Senior Program Coordinator, and Governance Specialist. The staff has been working remotely since the pandemic, most of them based in Atlanta. The ED will lead the future vision of staff work schedules (remote, hybrid, etc.), taking into consideration best practices. The AAR will continue to be based out of its offices in Atlanta, GA; however, the most appropriate path forward for the next ED will be determined in light of the needs of the organization and the transition considerations of the ED. The staff has recently been restructured to align the team better to further advance the AAR mission. As an affiliate of Emory University, the AAR uses Emory HR services, it is also on the Emory main IT backbone, and the AAR regularly hires Emory students, including Emory College, Candler School of Theology, and Laney Graduate School.

ROLE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Executive Director is the AAR's Chief Executive Officer and serves as chief staff officer to the Board while reporting to the Board President. The ED is responsible for supporting the Board, managing the programs and operations of the organization; leading, supervising, and managing staff resources and the budget; driving the strategic direction of the AAR; and coordinating professional relations.

The ED is also responsible for building AAR's visibility and enhancing external partnerships with allied individuals and organizations. The ED is expected to serve as a subject matter expert and trusted thought partner to these stakeholders and the broader AAR membership. The AAR seeks an astute administrator with a passion for and understanding of the complexities of the field. 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 and a role with several key leadership expectations that provide the opportunity to deepen and broaden AAR's impact on the field and the world. As AAR looks to the future, the next Executive Director will be expected to embrace the following:

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Collaboratively develop and lead the implementation of a compelling vision and strategy for the future of the AAR.

Working closely with the Board, the Futures Taskforce and incorporating perspectives from the staff and the broader membership, the ED will develop a compelling vision for the AAR. The next ED has the opportunity to reimagine the AAR and the future of the field - to be innovative and forward-looking and chart the course through current and future challenges, such as the consolidation and downsizing of schools, departments, and the exponential growth of contingent faculty positions. It is a moment ripe for transformation. Given the breadth and depth of the AAR, it is uniquely situated to shape the future of the field.

Champion diversity, equity, and inclusion across the AAR and the field.

The AAR puts diversity, equity, and inclusion at the core of its work and values, recognizing the importance of diversity in teaching, research, and service, as well as the scholarly representation of different cultures, social locations, perspectives, disability experiences, professional standings, and other intersectional identities. The AAR is committed to creating a welcoming and inclusive environment that values and respects the contributions of all its members and challenges practices that have intentionally or unintentionally excluded underrepresented scholars and scholarly perspectives. The next ED will understand differences that cut across the vectors of identity and will be a champion for individuals underrepresented in the AAR and field, leveraging the AAR to redouble efforts to provide greater access, support, and development opportunities. Additionally, the ED will lead the AAR to advance understanding of issues related to social justice, white privilege, and orientation beyond the western perspective to break down barriers and build scaffolding for all individuals, further strengthening the organization.

Expand memberships and partnerships.

The AAR Executive Director must be a powerful public voice that articulates the AAR value to various stakeholders and be a persuasive advocate for its membership, especially in light of future trends. As in many learned societies, the membership in AAR is shifting - tenured-faculty membership is declining, and membership of students, contingent faculty, and independent scholars continues to grow. These shifts allow the next ED to think about membership in new ways and explore avenues to expand the AAR to related fields in the humanities, interdisciplinary studies, high schools, community leaders, and government and corporate partners. Further, it is a pivotal moment to consider how members come together. There are unique opportunities to expand regional meetings, virtual meetings, and novel offerings such as the new Inclusive Pedagogy Certificate Program. This is an unrivaled opportunity for the next ED to create and implement a forward-looking AAR digital and programming strategy for the 21st Century that increases access for members and the organization's impact on the field.

Diversify revenue streams.

Like many membership organizations, most of the AAR revenues come from membership and conference fees. The AAR has long been responsive to the financial constraints of members, providing a sliding scale for membership fees and scholarships/grants for conferences. Even with that support, many new

members lack access to research or travel budgets and cannot afford to attend conferences. To ensure the AAR remains in a solid financial position, the next ED must work with the Board and membership to identify opportunities to diversify revenue streams such as new or expanded grant funding, individual and institutional fundraising, strategic partnerships, and more. The next ED has the opportunity to further energize the organization through new fiscal endeavors.

Provide leadership for AAR staff and operations.

The dynamic AAR staff of 15 provides outstanding programs, services, and support to the membership. It has provided stability during times of transition in the field, especially in response to the unforeseen changes and challenges caused by the COVID pandemic. Recognizing team and individual strengths, the ED will create a shared vision that supports individual professional development and team effectiveness in support of the AAR mission and future vision, especially as it relates to expanded memberships, partnerships, programming, and its digital strategy.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The AAR seeks an experienced and visionary leader and an effective, collaborative administrator to serve as its next Executive Director.

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

- Active engagement with the AAR, a passion for its mission, and an understanding of the nature of a learned society.
- A track record of success leading diverse, multifaceted teams and/or organizations; a significant record of success as an administrator whose credibility, communication skills, and collaborative management style can energize a dynamic, complex organization.
- A deep, demonstrable commitment to and track record of embedding and advancing a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion into all professional efforts and advocating for systemic change throughout AAR and the broader ecosystem of related institutions.
- Strong business acumen and experience in strategic planning, fiscal planning, budget, staff, and resource management. Proven ability to find and attract new sources of revenue, specifically related to fundraising and development.
- Excellent interpersonal and communication skills with a collaborative, transparent, and creative leadership style with the capacity to work effectively with the Board, staff, members, and the external community. Experience building consensus and defusing conflict among highly diverse constituents.

- Demonstrated understanding of the academic enterprise and shifting nature of the field in general and specifically as it relates to the academic study of religion.
- A track record of innovation; an entrepreneurial spirit and creativity to envision the future. Ability to be strategic and see connections while working at a detailed operational level when needed. Experience managing growth and change.
- Experience supporting and leading a high-performing team and building a culture of trust through availability, adaptability, approachability, and accountability.
- Exceptional writing skills, public speaking skills, and social media savvy, with an ability to relate well to a broad range of constituencies.
- Experience recruiting, managing, and inspiring volunteers or members in a non-profit association.
- A doctoral degree in religion or the humanities (strongly preferred).
- Ability to travel as required to support the needs of the AAR.

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 the search. Electronic submission of materials is strongly encouraged.

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

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The American Academy of Religion respects the rights, dignity and worth of all people. It unequivocally rejects all forms of harassment and unethical discrimination, including discrimination and harassment based on race, ancestry, place of origin, color, ethnicity, citizenship, sex, gender expression or identification, sexual orientation, disability, religion, culture, political convictions, socioeconomic status, age, health conditions or marital, domestic, or parental status, or any other applicable basis proscribed by law. All activities taking place under the aegis of the AAR (including the annual meeting, regional

meetings and academy-sponsored committees, publications, and sessions) are bound by this anti-discrimination policy.