



**Search for the Chief Development Officer**  
**PolicyLink**  
**Oakland, California (or remote)**

*“This is equity: Just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. Unlocking the promise of the nation by unleashing the promise in us all.”*

– Excerpt from PolicyLink’s [Equity Manifesto](#)

Envision a nation that cherishes the humanity of all its people, where every individual can actively engage, flourish, and shape their own destiny. Despite the founding pledge of freedom, liberty, and justice for all Americans, this ideal remains unfulfilled, as the foundational systems and structures of society do not deliver on these core principles. Consequently, 100 million individuals in the United States, including 55 million people of color, are living in or near poverty. PolicyLink, a national institution dedicated to advancing racial and economic equity in the U.S., maintains that a nation designed to benefit everyone is still within reach. It is the diverse populace of this nation—families, neighbors, and communities—that has long embraced a vision beyond the status quo, edging us closer to the realization of democracy’s promise, and PolicyLink contends that this vibrant, multiracial democracy is one we must collectively forge.

Established in Oakland, California, in 1999, PolicyLink works to change systems and structures—and accelerates the work of other key actors—to transform our democracy, economy, and communities so that they truly serve all. Over the last quarter of a century, the organization has built a broad-based, national movement for equity, securing more than \$5 billion in major policy wins and practice changes across government entities and corporations, and PolicyLink has become recognized as a national treasure.

Today, PolicyLink is seeking an enterprising, dynamic, collaborative, and results-driven revenue-generator and institution-builder to join its leadership team as chief development officer (CDO).

Working closely with CEO and President, [Dr. Michael McAfee](#), the CDO will devise and implement development strategies to advance the organization’s compelling mission. In recent years, PolicyLink has achieved remarkable success with its agile and entrepreneurial approach to development, raising approximately \$50 million annually and currently spearheading a \$300 million capital campaign. In a landscape where few policy advocacy organizations led by people of color have achieved enduring impact, PolicyLink stands out as an exception. This rarity is largely attributed to the challenge of insufficient resources hindering scalability. However, PolicyLink is privileged to be in this advantageous position and is poised to continue to make significant strides toward creating a nation that works for all.

PolicyLink's incoming CDO will work to amplify the already formidable strengths of the organization's current development efforts and will expertly steer a talented team of development professionals towards ambitious objectives, establishing a robust infrastructure for PolicyLink's future initiatives. PolicyLink's fundraising team is committed to propelling development endeavors to unprecedented levels under the guidance of the CDO, and the fundraising team will work closely with other colleagues throughout the organization. Together, the PolicyLink team will ensure that the organization is endowed with resources befitting the stature of the nation's most influential policy institutions.

This successful CDO will embody a blend of intellectual curiosity, strong social acumen, a profound sense of accountability, and a bias toward action. They will demonstrate exceptional communication skills and seamlessly navigate interpersonal interactions with keen emotional intelligence. Additionally, the CDO will have a stellar track record in resource mobilization, personally securing significant seven-figure gifts while adeptly nurturing and expanding development teams and offering strategic counsel to senior leadership. They will also broaden and diversify funding sources, introduce new organizational systems and frameworks, refine performance metrics, and harness data-driven insights to inform strategic decision-making.

The incoming CDO will serve as a vital ambassador for PolicyLink, effectively conveying the organization's message, voice, and vision to diverse audiences. Equally crucial, they will demonstrate unwavering dedication to PolicyLink's mission and possess an understanding and appreciation of the organization's history, achievements, and future aspirations.

PolicyLink is headquartered in Oakland, California, and many of its remote staff are located across the country. The successful candidate for this position will have the flexibility to work remotely, with regular travel to Oakland.

PolicyLink has retained the national executive search firm Isaacson, Miller to assist in conducting this search. As indicated at the end of this document, all inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed to Isaacson, Miller, and will be held in the strictest of confidence.

## **ABOUT POLICYLINK**

Founded in 1999 under the leadership of [Angela Glover Blackwell](#), PolicyLink emerged with a mission to build sustainable communities by improving access to quality employment, affordable housing, exemplary educational institutions, robust transportation systems, and other fundamental components of vibrant neighborhoods.

Today, PolicyLink distinguishes itself as one of the rare national policy organizations intentionally positioned outside the traditional Beltway hub. Black-founded and Black-led, with a driving commitment to racial inclusion and equity for all, PolicyLink stands as a beacon of unique perspective and purpose.

Collaborating closely with local and national partners, PolicyLink initiates and guides a crucial nationwide dialogue on the economic imperative of equity.

As the demographic landscape of the United States undergoes rapid transformation towards a majority people-of-color nation, PolicyLink emphasizes the critical importance of enabling full participation and contribution from communities of color across all sectors—as workers, entrepreneurs, innovators, consumers, and leaders—to shape the nation's economic course. With a wealth of experience, PolicyLink possesses invaluable insights into the essential elements required to conceive, launch, implement, sustain, and scale successful racial equity policy initiatives.

### **Programs and Tools for Social Change**

PolicyLink's programmatic initiatives are organized around three interconnected and synergistic focus areas aimed at delivering a nation that works for all:

- **Multiracial Democracy:** A flourishing multiracial democracy fueled by governing standards that advance the power and well-being of all people in all places—governing for all.
- **Equitable Economy:** An equitable economy in which all people have good jobs, dignified and rising standards of living, and increased voice, power, and ownership.
- **Thriving Communities:** Thriving communities where all children and families prosper through equitable infrastructure, affordable housing, quality education, anti-racist human services delivery, healthy water and food, and community safety.

Additionally, PolicyLink succeeds in this work by seamlessly integrating the following shared strategies:

- ***Data and Research:*** Develop information and analytical tools that support federal, state, and local campaigns and enhance public support of model policies.
- ***Coalition Building:*** Expand the capabilities of public, private, grassroots, and movement organizations to advance equitable policies.
- ***Standard Setting:*** Develop a rational framework of rules, norms, values, and accepted measures of compliance around equity that is generally accepted.
- ***Model Policy:*** Develop policies, regulations, and interventions that promote equitable and expanded access to economic, social, legal, environmental, and spatial justice.
- ***Capital Deployment:*** Strengthen, empower, and increase capacity and impact of public, private, grassroots, and movement organizations through financial resources distribution.
- ***Impact Measurement:*** Utilize a structured approach to assess and quantify the social, environmental, and economic effects and outcomes of strategies.
- ***Communications and Narrative Strategy:*** Harness communications, narrative, and storytelling to shift public acceptance toward racially equitable policies, programs, and investments.
- ***Operational Excellence:*** Improve internal operations, enhancing efficiency, reducing waste, and delivering high-quality service.

## **A Nation that Works for All**

In 2022, PolicyLink launched its *A Nation that Works for All* campaign alongside a coalition of like-minded partners dedicated to bolstering this movement and transforming systems and institutions to achieve equity for the 100 million Americans living in or near poverty. This collaborative, cross-sector, nation-building initiative unites leaders from the social sector, government agencies, and corporate entities to re-envision and design a nation that works for all. The work centers on three areas—Democracy, Economy, and Communities—and is guided by four central strategies: fostering coalitions, advancing standards and practices, shaping narratives, and advocating for policies across these three spheres of action.

In his [Winning on Equity Essay](#) and [Corresponding Q&A](#), Michael McAfee expresses the critical importance of pivoting from charity to systems change, focusing on population-level results:

The nation needs charity and a strong safety-net infrastructure. But these are not enough, and our movement must not mistake such supports for social progress. To improve outcomes for the most vulnerable people, leaders must change systems and policy, master the rules of democratic power, and capture and hold the highest ground of American politics—law, fiscal policy, regulation, and the dominant narratives of public discourse—so the need for charity is diminished and opportunity is unleashed.

Michael McAfee also highlights that PolicyLink is driven by a commitment to addressing the needs expressed by the 100 million economically insecure individuals, prioritizing their voices over grant stipulations, internal demands, or constraints imposed by short-term funding cycles. As such, PolicyLink is in search of a chief development officer who will embrace and enhance the organization's innovative and adaptive approach, which has historically garnered robust and predominantly unrestricted backing.

Please see the Appendix for PolicyLink's contributions and sample policy wins.

## **Finances and Fundraising**

PolicyLink has a dedicated team of approximately 100 staff members, an operating budget of \$37.5 million, and assets totaling \$105 million. PolicyLink has achieved remarkable growth in its fundraising efforts in recent years. Formerly raising around \$12 to 15 million annually, the organization now secures an impressive \$50 million each year, and today, it has surpassed the halfway milestone of its ongoing \$300 million capital campaign. Notably, institutional sources contribute around 90% of the organization's funding, with approximately 70% of the raised funds being unrestricted.

This marks a pivotal moment for PolicyLink, primed to capitalize on its impressive track record of accomplishments and leverage opportunities to amplify its influence. At present, a talented team of four drives the fundraising efforts, under the leadership of Josh Kirschenbaum, who currently serves as chief advancement and special initiatives officer. As one of the original PolicyLink staff members, Josh has

worked across the programmatic, communications, operations, and development teams over the past 25 years; this experience allows him to bring comprehensive organizational knowledge to bear on supporting diverse alliances of internal and external teams to deliver on the promise of equity. His broad understanding of PolicyLink programs, funding, and partners has enabled him to design and launch new initiatives, drive organizational strategy, and play a key role in charting the future of PolicyLink. When the next chief development officer has been identified, Josh will work directly for the CEO on special projects, and will be an asset to the incoming CDO.

Recognizing that the magnitude of PolicyLink's aspirations necessitates a substantial increase in fundraising efforts beyond its current achievements, the CDO will have the opportunity to assess the existing framework and strategically invest in and recruit additional talent to enhance the development operation's capabilities.

### **Organizational Executive Leadership**

#### **Dr. Michael McAfee, President and Chief Executive Officer**

In 2018, Michael McAfee took on the role of CEO of PolicyLink, following seven years as the inaugural director of the Promise Neighborhoods Institute at the organization. His appointment marked a significant transition, succeeding Angela Glover Blackwell's 20-year tenure as the founder of PolicyLink. This shift signaled a pivotal moment in PolicyLink's ongoing evolution.

During his tenure at PolicyLink, Michael McAfee has played a leadership role in securing Promise Neighborhoods as a permanent federal program, improving outcomes for over 300,000 children and directing billions of dollars in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. He is also the catalyst for a new and growing body of work—**corporate racial equity**—and has developed the first comprehensive tool for private-sector companies to promote equity in every aspect of the company value chain.

Previously, Michael served as a senior representative at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), managing a \$450 million portfolio to create affordable housing, jobs, and social services for over 200,000 families. Earlier, he directed community leadership at The Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, raising a record-breaking \$121 million in individual donations.

#### **Ashleigh Gardere, Executive Vice President**

**Ashleigh Gardere** drives PolicyLink's programs, uniting diverse partners to shape a national equity agenda. Recognized by Living Cities among the Top 25 Disruptive Leaders closing racial wealth gaps, she pioneers inclusive economic growth, excelling in economic and workforce development, public policy, and large-scale systems transformation.

As EVP and COO of the New Orleans Business Alliance, Ashleigh transformed it into a leading economic development organization, prioritizing inclusive growth. She served as senior advisor to Mayor Mitch Landrieu, leading initiatives that notably reduced unemployment rates and increased disadvantaged business participation. Before that, as vice president of community relations at Chase Bank, Ashleigh spearheaded collaborative efforts for post-Katrina neighborhood revitalization.

## **ROLE OF THE CHIEF DEVELOPMENT OFFICER**

PolicyLink has played a crucial role in galvanizing a powerful, inclusive movement for equity by collaborating with diverse stakeholders across America's cities, suburbs, rural areas, and tribal lands. With full financing, scalability, and sustained commitment, PolicyLink's programs have the potential to positively impact the lives of millions. This CDO will orchestrate development efforts to mobilize the private, public, and social sectors, ensuring that all individuals, particularly the most vulnerable, can thrive—for themselves, their families, communities, and the nation's economic prosperity and well-being.

## **KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

### **Forge and Implement a Strategic Roadmap for the Development Operation:**

As the visionary architect shaping a unified, strategic, and meticulously orchestrated development operation, the CDO will conceive and execute a comprehensive development strategy to propel PolicyLink into the future, fostering sustainable growth and impactful outcomes on a significant scale. Building upon the organization's recent successes, the CDO will leverage existing philanthropic strengths and relationships and actively pursue new funding and engagement opportunities, aiming to position PolicyLink as a trailblazer in development excellence.

### **Lead and Manage the PolicyLink Development Team:**

The incoming CDO will inherit a top-tier development team and will play a pivotal role in optimizing their potential. This involves overseeing their professional growth and ensuring retention, evaluating current capabilities, and strategizing for additional recruitment to meet ambitious goals.

Clear roles and responsibilities will be defined, as well as fostering a culture of accountability and achievement. Every team member will understand their contribution to PolicyLink's mission and be deeply committed to its success.

In line with PolicyLink's commitment to equity, the CDO will also lead with fairness, openness, and empowerment and will foster an environment that values every staff member, encourages innovation and risk-taking, and promotes collaboration while fostering confidence and camaraderie in the team.

### **Collaborate with and Support Executive Leadership in Development Initiatives:**

The CDO will collaborate closely with the CEO and other key PolicyLink leaders to spearhead development efforts, especially around targeting new donors and aligning with emerging strategies. Additionally, the CDO will actively assist the CEO and executive team in advancing their philanthropic priorities, acting as a mentor, coach, and strategic partner. By cultivating impactful gifts, the CDO will elevate PolicyLink to new heights of distinction while advancing the organization's mission and vision.

### **QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS**

Candidates will possess many, if not most, of the following professional qualifications and leadership characteristics:

- Adept at cultivating, soliciting, and stewarding principal and transformational gifts, with a significant track record of revenue-generation success; depth of knowledge and best practices in all key areas of development.
- Expertise in collaborating closely with a CEO, senior leadership members, and colleagues across all organizational tiers to craft and execute development strategies and systems effectively.
- Proven track record of recruiting, cultivating, and leading high-performing, diverse, and motivated teams and adeptly navigating complex management frameworks.
- A strong lived commitment to advancing racial equity and anti-racism and an understanding of the dynamics of difference and privilege.
- A keen focus on operational efficiency, resource utilization, and strong financial acumen.
- An entrepreneurial mindset with an ability to pioneer innovative approaches and engagement strategies. This includes a knack for navigating shifting external landscapes while maintaining agility and seizing emerging opportunities.
- Proficiency in active listening and persuasive communication across a broad spectrum of stakeholders, and adept at aligning individuals' passions with organizational objectives.
- Exceptional written and verbal communication skills, and skilled at conveying complex information to diverse audiences with clarity and eloquence.
- A commitment to data-driven decision-making and the ability to communicate metrics effectively to a broad audience.
- Professionalism, diplomacy, and, importantly, a great sense of humor.

## COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

Compensation for this position will be competitive and commensurate with experience, with a salary range estimated at \$400,000. The organization also provides generous and comprehensive benefits. PolicyLink is based in Oakland, California; this role can be based remotely, with regular travel to Oakland.

## APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Inquiries, nominations, and applications (including resume and 2–3-page letter of interest responding to the opportunities/challenges outlined above) should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website for the search: <https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/policylink/chief-development-officer>.

Consultants conducting this recruitment include:

Rebecca Swartz, Partner; Kennedy Kearney-Fischer, Managing Associate; and Karson Freeman, Associate

*PolicyLink strongly values equity and believes in a just and fair society where all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. We work toward a more inclusive world, and as such, we are an equal opportunity employer and do not discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, skin color, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, age, marital status, military status, pregnancy, or parenthood. PolicyLink is committed to maintaining a diverse and multicultural working environment.*



## APPENDIX

### PolicyLink's Contributions and Sample Policy Wins

Collaborating with a diverse array of stakeholders, PolicyLink has played a pivotal role in cultivating a robust, inclusive movement for equity and in mobilizing hundreds of partners in urban areas, suburbs, rural communities, and tribal lands nationwide. Notable recent federal policy accomplishments include:

**American Rescue Plan Act Guidance:** At the request of the White House Domestic Policy Council (WH DPC) and local jurisdictions, PolicyLink produced “10 Priorities for Advancing Racial Equity Through the American Rescue Plan: A Guide for City and County Policymakers.” The influence of that guidance later shaped the Biden administration’s global guidance to federal agencies regarding the \$1 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), which includes at least eight of ten Priorities from PolicyLink’s guidance. PolicyLink also supported the state-level deployment of American Rescue Plan funding, influencing the \$650 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding for California.

**Business Standards for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leadership:** In partnership with FSG and JUST Capital, PolicyLink leads a national, cross-sector effort to influence equitable and anti-racist corporate practices. This initiative—*Advancing Racial Equity through Corporate Actions*—began with the release of the first **CEO Blueprint** in 2020, which was updated in 2021. These documents provide guidance for business leaders to take action at multiple levels: within their businesses, within their communities, and at the societal level. This “inside” game approach will only work if we build power and alignment among corporate leaders who are willing to champion and organize among their own. To serve this purpose, work is underway to build the **Corporate Racial Equity Alliance**, whose founding members include FSG and Just Capital, and has recently expanded to include B Lab, the World Economic Forum, and Virgin Unite.

**Bloomberg American Sustainable Cities:** PolicyLink, in partnership with **Bloomberg Philanthropies**, recently launched a three-year, \$200 million initiative to promote climate justice and advance racial wealth equity. Twenty-five selected cities across the nation will pursue transformative climate solutions, particularly in neighborhoods overburdened by pollution and most impacted by systemic underinvestment. Together, the 25 cities will be a powerful force of transformative change that ultimately creates thriving, climate-resilient neighborhoods, builds wealth inside their communities and makes an impact that improves lives. PolicyLink and a strategic network of world-class partners—the **Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins University**, **NRDC (Natural Resources Defense Council)**, **Delivery Associates**, and the Sustainable Cities Fund—will leverage their combined expertise to expand existing cross-sector partnerships, build new equitable and durable relationships with community stakeholders, and help local city leadership and residents create bold new solutions to fully maximize federal and philanthropic investments.

**Promise Neighborhoods:** PolicyLink supports Promise Neighborhoods in linking local resources to provide comprehensive education, health, and social support to children from infancy through their educational

and professional journeys and serving as a bridge to federal, public, and private investors. PolicyLink also provides Promise Neighborhoods communities with leadership and management coaching, communications strategies, and other resources to assist these communities in fostering healthy, opportunity-rich environments for children and families. Presently, 12 communities are implementing programs totaling over \$800 million to improve educational outcomes for 300,000 children.

**Healthy Food Financing:** In 2009, PolicyLink, Reinvestment Fund, and The Food Trust launched a national campaign to improve access to healthy food in communities of color and lower-income rural, small-town, and urban areas across the country. A viable, effective, and economically sustainable solution to the problem of limited access to healthy foods, the program aims to reduce health disparities, improve the health of families and children, create jobs, and stimulate local economic development. To date, the program has delivered over \$1 billion in resources to create access to healthy food in low-income communities.

**Sustainable Communities:** PolicyLink serves as the lead partner for this initiative, which has empowered 143 communities and regions nationwide to strategically consider equity in their policy planning and implementation processes, ensuring that marginalized communities and communities of color have a voice in and benefit from decisions shaping their development at the local, community, and regional levels. Supported by \$250 million from Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule promotes fair housing practices and cultivates communities of opportunity.

**National Equity Atlas:** This online Atlas, with easily searchable economic data analyzed by race, ethnicity, nativity, and gender, has become an indispensable tool for 30,000 users as they campaign for equity-focused policy change. Released in 2014 and continually updated, the Atlas contains unique data on demographic shifts and the economic benefits of equity for the nation's 150 largest regions, all 50 states, the 100 largest cities, and the United States as a whole. The Atlas is produced by PolicyLink and the USC Equity Research Institute.

**National Equity Summits:** Every three years, PolicyLink convenes a one-of-kind national summit drawing over 3,000 attendees, singularly dedicated to equity, thereby cultivating a rich repository of intellectual, strategic, and innovative ideas to fuel and fortify the equity movement. With the disruption caused by COVID-19, the most recent summit took place in 2018, but anticipation is high for the next summit, which is scheduled for August 2024.