

International Storytelling Center – A better world through the power of storytelling.

Executive Director

Location: Jonesborough, TN – in-person

Compensation: Starting Salary of \$85,000, commensurate with experience, and a comprehensive benefits package that includes employer-paid health, life, and disability insurance, a 3% retirement match, and optional dental coverage.

Timeline: Applications will be reviewed beginning June 1, 2026, and candidates are encouraged to apply by this date for full consideration. The position will remain open until filled.

Position

International Storytelling Center (ISC) seeks an Executive Director who will bring visionary leadership to the organization that both sustains our 50+ year history while simultaneously guiding us into the future with growth and international positioning. The ideal candidate will be an advocate for the art of storytelling in its many iterations and have a grasp on the contemporary working presentations of and interactions with art. They will be a relationship-builder and strategic thinker with demonstrated experience that shows an ability to translate the ISC's vision and mission into action.

Organization

Based in Jonesborough, Tennessee, the International Storytelling Center (ISC) is the flagship American institution for storytelling promotion and presentation. Our mission is to inspire and empower people to tell their stories, listen to and honor the stories of others, and use storytelling to produce positive change. As a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation, the ISC presents two significant storytelling events: The National Storytelling Festival and Storytelling Live Teller-in-Residence series. Our work falls broadly into three categories: performance, preservation, and practice.

Founded in 1973, the annual National Storytelling Festival helped to coalesce aspects of the folk-arts revival movement with traditional practices and emergent modes of art, performance, and history. Today our festival boasts an average of 10,000 attendees. The event features over 25 storytellers across five stages housed in circus-style tents scattered across historic Jonesborough and two additional theater venues. The festival is an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution and supported by a swath of sponsors, both local and national. The 20-week Storytelling Live series starts in May and culminates the week of the National Storytelling Festival in October. Each performer in Storytelling Live comes to Jonesborough to give daily in-person performances and provide educational and outreach opportunities in the surrounding community. Both programs offer a virtual viewing option for our audiences worldwide.

Not only does the ISC set a standard for storytelling artistry—including traditional, historical, personal, and contemporary stories—we also serve as an international consultant for storytelling program development and are a sought-after collaborator for storytelling-related activities. In recent years, ISC has expanded its onsite events to include the Kids Institute, a dynamic educational

program that engages students, educators, and families through performances, workshops, and school partnerships, as well as the development of a learning library designed to better accommodate the needs and schedules of anyone interested in how storytelling can make a difference in their communities. Using grant funding, we have produced the *I Have a Story*, *Stories for Change*, and *Freedom Stories* initiatives. As part of our commitment to the preservation of storytelling, ISC maintains an archival relationship with the American Folklife Center. Through the promotion of the finest caliber of domestic and international storytelling—both on stage and around the kitchen table—we believe that stories can serve as the building blocks of strong communities, more effective workplaces, and vibrant schools.

OPPORTUNITY

The Executive Director (ED) will serve as the ISC's chief executive, responsible for overall organizational leadership including strategy implementation, fundraising, financial oversight, staff leadership, programming, and external relations. They will work with and direct the ISC staff of 15 and 400 volunteers, answer responsibly to the Board of Directors, and serve as a public face for the Storytelling Center.

Our new ED will help to advance strategic priorities, strengthen organizational performance, and uphold community trust. Candidates will understand the existing value of the organization and seek to expand audiences, resources, and impact through thoughtful innovation. The ED will act as a fundraiser to meet the programming needs, goals, and vision of the ISC, as well as develop and maintain relationships with individual, group, organizational, and corporate donors/funders. The Executive Director will work alongside the Board of Directors to develop and execute a clear and sustainable strategic plan that helps translate mission into meaningful outcomes, ensuring that ISC remains artistically vibrant, fiscally sound, and organizationally resilient. Success in this role will be measured by meaningful growth in revenue, organizational impact, and international visibility.

This is a full-time, in-person position that requires onsite presence. The Executive Director is expected to be an active, visible presence in the organization and the surrounding community.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT AND STRATEGIC FOCUS

ISC is focused on strengthening its institutional capacity and expanding its reach and relevance. A strong candidate will work to first understand existing organizational assets and then map out action plans to implement the following goals:

- Strengthening and expanding core programs, including the National Storytelling Festival and Storytelling Live – with an emphasis on valuing existing audiences and traditions
- Diversifying platforms, formats, and audiences for storytelling – including anticipating and preparing for shifting trends in audience demographics and means of art interaction
- Ensuring consistent financial health and long-term sustainability
- Building leadership capacity, systems, and infrastructure to support growth

The next Executive Director will step into a period of opportunity that requires both steady operational leadership and thoughtful, forward-looking change – balancing strong day-to-day management with well-planned, strategic evolution.

POSITION AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Strategic Leadership and Execution

- Partner with the Board of Directors to shape and advance strategic priorities
 - Translate organizational mission into clear, measurable goals and outcomes
 - Ensure initiatives are thoughtfully planned, appropriately resourced, and aligned with mission and strategy
 - Serve as a visible advocate for storytelling as an art form and a tool for connection and cultural understanding
 - Foster a culture where inclusion, accessibility, and respect for diverse perspectives are reflected across programs and operations
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Fundraising and Revenue Generation

- Lead and be accountable for all fundraising efforts across individual giving, major gifts, grants, sponsorships, planned giving, and long-term institutional support
 - Maintain an active and visible role in donor cultivation and major gift relationships
 - Oversee grant strategy, writing, and reporting in alignment with organizational priorities
 - Engage and support the Board in fundraising efforts and relationship development
 - Explore and develop new revenue opportunities to support long-term sustainability
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Financial and Operational Leadership

- Oversee budgeting, financial planning, reporting, and compliance to support fiscal health and transparency
 - Lead and support staff through clear expectations, professional development, and ongoing feedback
 - Evaluate and strengthen organizational systems, structures, and workflows as needed
 - Align staffing, infrastructure, and resources with strategic priorities
 - Support Board recruitment, onboarding, and engagement, particularly in governance, fundraising, and advocacy
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Programming and Artistic Leadership

- Provide strategic oversight of all programming to ensure alignment with ISC's mission and organizational goals
 - Establish and monitor program goals, outcomes, and evaluation approaches to understand impact
 - Ensure consistency, quality, and relevance across all program areas
 - Identify opportunities to expand programming to connect with new and diverse audiences on a local, national, and global scale
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Community Engagement and External Relations

- Serve as ISC's primary spokesperson and ambassador, helping to expand visibility regionally, nationally, and internationally
 - Build and sustain strong, authentic relationships with artists, donors, civic leaders, partners, and community stakeholders
 - Cultivate and sustain relationships with the diverse community of storytellers who provide the artistic and educational content the ISC produces, as well as storytelling festivals, conferences, and membership organizations
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QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Required

- Senior leadership experience (typically 5+ years) in nonprofit, arts, cultural, or mission-driven organizations
- Demonstrated success in fundraising, especially major gifts and grant development
- Strong financial and operational management experience
- Experience working effectively with boards of directors
- Excellent communication, relationship-building, and consensus-building skills
- A genuine appreciation for storytelling and understanding of the organization's significant roots in the Appalachian region

Preferred

- Advanced degree in nonprofit management, arts administration, or a related field
 - Experience leading organizations through growth, transition, and increased complexity
 - National or field-level visibility within arts, culture, or related sectors
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EQUAL OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT

The International Storytelling Center is an Equal Opportunity Employer and does not discriminate based on age, color, national origin, ethnic origin, citizenship status, disability, race, religion, creed, gender, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression, marital status, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by federal, state, or local law.

HOW TO APPLY

Interested candidates should submit:

- Résumé
- Cover letter (no more than 1½ pages)
- Three professional references

Applications should be emailed to: **position@storytellingcenter.net**