Executive Director

Seattle, Olympia, Kennewick, Wenatchee, or Yakima, WA –
Regular statewide and occasional national travel required
Full-time, Exempt

Columbia Legal Services (CLS) is a nonprofit civil legal aid organization that has advocated for laws that advance social, economic, and racial equity since 1967. We are committed to advancing racial equity by addressing systemic barriers within immigration, incarceration, and labor systems that disproportionately harm Black, Indigenous, immigrant, and other communities of color. We seek systemic solutions by bringing class action lawsuits, using cutting edge legal theories, engaging in policy advocacy, and supporting communities in building their own power.

Reporting to the Board of Directors, the Executive Director (ED) is CLS's chief executive, responsible for the organization's vision, strategic direction, and effective functioning. The ED promotes and protects CLS's mission and values, leads a senior management team responsible for the day-to-day operation of a nonprofit law firm, and ensures CLS's advocacy capacity and role as counsel to the community-based movements it serves. As CLS's primary spokesperson, the ED represents the organization to funders, government partners, coalitions, and the public at the local, state, and national levels.

In close partnership with the Board, senior management team, and CLS staff, the ED advances a shared commitment to equity, antiracism, and belonging and ensures these values are reflected across CLS's external advocacy and internal culture. The ED fosters a culture in which staff, leadership, and the Board all take responsibility for advancing CLS's mission and values and help create an environment where all perspectives are welcomed and heard.

The ED models leadership grounded in humility, integrity, transparency, collaboration, and accountability, and demonstrates a commitment to meaningful staff engagement, generative disagreement, continuous learning, and equitable decision-making. The ED is accountable to the Board for organizational performance, fiscal stewardship, employee well-being, and measurable progress on CLS's commitments to community, race equity, and justice.

This position is hybrid and may be based in any of CLS offices in Seattle, Olympia, Kennewick, Yakima, or Wenatchee. If not based in Seattle, the successful applicant must be able to travel to Seattle at least 3-4 times per month. The role also requires periodic statewide travel to CLS offices and communities and occasional national travel.

Position Responsibilities

The Executive Director, working in close partnership with the Board of Directors and senior management team, is responsible for:

Organizational Leadership, Strategy & Vision

- Advancing, communicating, refining, and protecting CLS's vision, mission, and core values of community, race equity, and justice through leadership, oversight, and guidance across all aspects of CLS management and operations.
- Coordinating, leading, and supporting a management team responsible for the operational success of the organization, prioritizing cross-department collaboration and sound, transparent, and inclusive decision-making, while serving as the final point of accountability for decisions when necessary.

- Providing ongoing thought partnership and leadership to drive advocacy, fundraising, and operational strategy forward, including leading the development and execution of multi-year strategic planning processes that incorporate rigorous, and systematic program evaluation across departments to ensure ongoing programmatic excellence.
- Providing steady, transparent leadership through crises and periods of change that affect staff, clients, or operations.
- Bringing strong, adaptive leadership skills to navigate and address emerging threats to the well-being of communities most harmed by poverty, racism, and other forms of systemic oppression and demonstrating the courage to try new approaches in service of CLS's mission.
- Building and sustaining authentic, reciprocal relationships with the communities most impacted by poverty, racism, and systemic injustice, ensuring their perspectives, priorities, and lived experiences can meaningfully inform CLS's strategic direction, advocacy priorities, and organizational decision-making.
- In collaboration with CLS's internal equity leadership, advancing and institutionalizing equity and antiracism throughout organizational policies, practices, decision-making, and culture, including establishing measurable equity goals, addressing identified disparities, and ensuring accountability for achieving those goals.

People, Culture, & Equity Leadership

- Providing strategic leadership and guidance to the senior management team to support strategic decision-making and cross-department collaboration.
- Recruiting, hiring, supervising, evaluating, and developing a strong senior management team, including setting performance expectations, providing regular feedback, and building leadership capacity and succession plans for key roles.
- Fostering an organizational culture grounded in trust, transparency, psychological safety, mutual accountability, and respect, where employees feel empowered to provide constructive feedback and participate meaningfully in decisions affecting their work.
- In collaboration with the People & Culture Director, establishing and maintaining accessible and effective processes for addressing workplace concerns and resolving conflicts and ensuring matters are resolved appropriately and fairly.
- Demonstrating a commitment to constructive labor-management relations and working collaboratively and in good faith with Washington Legal Workers, our in-house labor union, to foster an equitable and supportive workplace.

Board Governance & Relations

- Partnering with the Board of Directors to support effective governance, strategic and fiscal oversight, organizational accountability, and clearly defined roles and responsibilities, while maintaining transparent and timely communication regarding organizational performance, challenges, and emerging risks.
- Operating as the primary liaison between Board and CLS Staff, ensuring the Board has the information and tools it needs to fulfill its governance role.
- Collaborating with the Board to establish clear and measurable organizational goals, regularly evaluating and reporting progress toward those goals, and identifying opportunities for improvement, including with respect to CLS's equity commitments.
- Supporting the Board on recruitment of new Board members and ongoing Board development and training.

Fiscal and Operational Oversight, Risk, & Compliance

- Holding accountability for the organization's financial health, sustainability, and budget oversight, in partnership with the Finance Director and the Board of Directors.
- Owning risk management and operations support across the organization, including reviewing and signing contracts, grant agreements, and other legal instruments; ensuring federal, state, and local compliance; and partnering with the People & Culture Director and Program Support Department to advance operational goals.
- Working with Advocacy Team leadership to ensure that the organization and its staff understand and uphold their ethical and professional responsibilities.

External Relations, Partnerships, Public Ambassadorship, & Fundraising

- Serving as a key public spokesperson for CLS, articulating and championing its mission, vision, and impact to media, the public, and current and potential external partners.
- Providing leadership-level capacity and support to the Development & Communications team, with a focus on the cultivation and retention of major donors and institutional funders and including direct engagement in grant writing and fundraising appeals.
- Sustaining and expanding strategic partnerships and networks with legal aid organizations, the private bar, law firms, and community-based groups.
- In collaboration with the Advocacy Team, representing CLS before policymakers, government agencies, and other partners on matters of systemic importance to client communities.
- Promoting and strengthening CLS's role within the Alliance for Equal Justice and the broader equity and justice community at local, regional, and national levels.

This job description is not designed to contain a comprehensive listing of activities, duties, or responsibilities required of the employee; other responsibilities may be assigned.

Qualifications

At CLS we seek a team that reflects our organizational values of community, race equity, and justice. This includes hiring staff with connections to the communities we serve whenever possible, and a commitment to strive for justice and equity in our hiring practices and in our staff culture. CLS recognizes that leadership experience and expertise can be developed through a variety of professional and lived experiences. Equivalent experience, including leadership in community-based organizations, advocacy movements, coalitions, and other settings, will be considered when evaluating qualifications.

- A visionary, values-driven leader with impeccable integrity, committed to carrying forward CLS's legacy and mission, advocacy capacity, and unique role as counsel to the community-based movements of our time.
- Juris Doctor (J.D.) degree and active membership in good standing with at least one U.S. state bar.
- Direct experience in civil legal aid, poverty law, or related public interest practice.
- Seven or more years of progressive leadership experience, including but not limited to experience managing complex organizations, programs, or initiatives; overseeing budgets and diverse funding streams; and ensuring compliance with grant and contract requirements.
- Demonstrated ability to achieve long-term goals through supervision, mentoring, teambuilding and empowering a highly talented and diverse staff, including at least two years of experience managing other supervisors.

- Demonstrated experience integrating equity and antiracism into organizational culture, policy, and practice, with the ability to model courage and creativity in advancing that work despite resistance or pushback.
- Proven experience working effectively with a nonprofit Board of Directors on governance, strategic direction, and fiscal/operational oversight.
- Demonstrated experience developing and sustaining external partnerships, coalitions, and funder relationships, with a track record of successful fundraising and/or grant writing.
- Demonstrated experience building authentic, accountable relationships with communities most impacted by systemic injustice, including the ability to incorporate community perspectives into organizational priorities and decision-making.
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills and demonstrated ability to serve as a public spokesperson and trusted representative of an organization or initiative.
- The ability to work across differences, bring together and respect diverse perspectives and inspire and motivate engagement and action.
- Demonstrated capacity for strategic and systems thinking.
- Demonstrated emotional intelligence, humility, and self-awareness, with the ability to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics, address conflict constructively, foster trust across differences, and model accountability and continuous learning.

Preferred, but not required

- Admission to the Washington State Bar, or willingness to apply for admission.
- Multilingual proficiency, particularly Spanish.
- Experience working effectively in and supporting a unionized workplace, including familiarity with collective bargaining agreements.
- Familiarity with Washington State's civil legal aid delivery system and funding structure (e.g., the Office of Civil Legal Aid, the Legal Services Corporation, and the Legal Foundation of Washington).

Compensation and Benefits

This full-time, exempt, and hybrid (in-person and virtual) position is a confidential role and is not eligible for representation by Washington Legal Workers, our in-house labor union. CLS has a 32-hour workweek, though temporary deviations from the normal work schedule occur from time to time. The ED may be based at any CLS office (Seattle, Kennewick, Olympia, Wenatchee, or Yakima) but preferably will be based in Seattle or must be able to travel to Seattle at least 3-4 times per month. The ED will also occasionally travel statewide to meet with staff, partners, and the Board as needed, including representing CLS at national conferences or events 2-3 times per year.

Columbia Legal Services is committed to providing an equitable work environment, including a commitment to pay equity. As part of this commitment, all employees' pay is based on years of experience in their role or in previous roles doing substantially similar work and set on a standard pay scale for their position, rather than on negotiations, which have been shown to contribute to pay disparities. For 7 – 25 years of experience, the salary range for the Executive Director is $158,000 – $185,000.

We also offer a comprehensive compensation package including the following:

- 15 paid holidays annually

- A 2-week Winter Break office closure between Christmas and New Year's
- A 1-week Summer Break office closure around the July 4th Holiday
- 12 sick days annually
- 15-21 paid vacation days annually (based on years of experience)
- 3-5 personal days annually (based on years of experience)
- Paid parental and family medical leave benefits
- Paid sabbatical every 7 years
- Student Loan Repayment Assistance Program (for employees with less than 10 years' experience)

Additionally, we pay 100% of employee premiums for excellent health, vision, and dental benefits, 80% for child(ren) dependents, and 70% for spouses and domestic partners. We also offer a 403(b) retirement benefit with employer contribution and a match, disability and life insurance, a subsidized transit pass, and an employee wellness program.

To Apply

To apply, please submit an application with a cover letter and resume in PDF format through our application portal in BambooHR.