Driven by the vision that no child goes to bed hungry, no family is without a home and that all low-income Californians live healthy, safe and secure lives.

For over 50 years, Western Center on Law and Poverty has led the fight in California to end poverty and secure housing, health care, a strong safety net, racial justice, and financial security for all low-income Californians. Western Center works on behalf of nearly seven million individuals — including immigrants, women and girls, seniors, people with disabilities, veterans and low-income working families — to remedy the structural failure that is poverty, and to address the racial injustices that oppress people of color.

To achieve its mission, Western Center brings about system-wide and structural change through impact litigation, legislative, policy, and administrative advocacy at the state and federal level, and support for legal services and community-based organizations. Headquartered in Los Angeles with offices in Sacramento and Oakland, Western Center’s talented and dedicated staff of 32 are a truly statewide presence and the “go-to” team to amplify marginalized voices of low-income Californians across a range of issues and contexts. The Center has an annual budget of $4.7 million and is supported by an endowment of approximately $3.7 million, which has been conservatively managed and provides a strong base of support. The current strategic plan contemplates significant future growth, and Western Center is increasingly seen as a national model for addressing poverty.

Following the successful tenure of retiring Executive Director Paul Tepper, Western Center invites applications and nominations for a new Executive Director to build on the strong existing foundation and sound strategic plan, inspire new partnerships and champions, and help lift the organization to a new level of impact in the coming decade.

MISSION OVERVIEW

The passionate group of attorneys and scholars from California law schools that founded Western Center in 1967 sought to create a unique organization, guided by the belief that all Californians deserve the finest possible legal representation before the public and private institutions that touch their lives.

Western Center views issues of racial and economic justice, food security and public benefits, health and mental health, housing and homelessness, and income and wealth inequality as inextricably linked, and recognizes that low-income individuals and families may be experiencing several challenges and barriers at the same time. Western Center seeks solutions across issues, using the law to deliver critical resources to Californians, streamline disparate legal systems, and create efficiencies within public programs.
Today, Western Center’s work is driven by advocates and attorneys focusing on three critical challenges impacting the poor of the state—affordable housing and homelessness, health care, and economic security. We work on behalf of poor communities, disproportionately communities of color, who are burdened by the inequality that exists within the institutions that shape their lives.

By applying a coordinated concert of tools including legislative and policy advocacy, high impact litigation, administrative advocacy, and technical assistance and education for legal services and community-based organizations to each of our priority areas, Western Center ensures that low-income Californians receive the support they are entitled to, and fights for them to keep the precious assets they do have.

**PROGRAM FOCUS AREAS**

**HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS.** Western Center ensures that Californians have access to healthy, sustainable and affordable housing in neighborhoods of their choosing, and advocates for strong, clear, and enforceable anti-displacement protections. The work seeks to address California’s housing crisis and its disproportionate effects on the most vulnerable Californians and unhoused individuals by:

- Protecting tenants from eviction and landlord abuse.
- Preserving the existing housing stock and tenants’ access to housing.
- Promoting equitable planning and development.

**HEALTHCARE.** Western Center believes access to health care is a human right. California led the way in implementing the Affordable Care Act, but many Californians still do not have care, and even more are paying too much for the care they receive. To preserve and expand access to health care for all Californians regardless of immigration status, age, or health condition, Western Center:

- Worked to expand Medi-Cal to cover all Californians who need it and ensure that Medi-Cal plans and providers deliver equitable, quality care.
- Advocates for improvements to health programs that serve low-income Californians.
- Enforces health consumer rights and protections.

**PUBLIC BENEFITS AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE.** Western Center provides a roadmap to financial security for the people who need it most by fighting to expand access to jobs and income, acting to compel state and local governments to provide nutrition assistance and other public benefits to which its clients are entitled, and litigating and advocating to end unjust court-ordered debt, fines and fees, as well as ending financial services charges that strip poor Californians of their precious assets. Priorities include:

- Increasing enrollment and retention, and where applicable, benefit levels across all safety net programs that serve low-income Californians such as CalWORKS, CalFresh and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).
- Expanding access to jobs, take home income, and opportunity for Californians experiencing poverty.
- Fighting to end the high costs of poverty by reducing or eliminating high fees, fines and costs associated with the criminal justice system, traffic courts, parking tickets and towing of cars.
- Ending predatory financial services and laws that allow debt-collector-take-all practices.

**ACCESS TO JUSTICE.** Western Center works to expand access to justice by ensuring that Californians with low incomes are treated fairly when engaged with criminal or civil courts by:
• Advocating for processes and procedures that ensure low-income Californians their day in court.
• Advocating for increased funding for legal services so low-income clients have representation when faced with eviction and when they have trouble obtaining medical care or access to public benefits.
• Supporting local legal services programs in their efforts to obtain attorneys’ fee awards to ensure adequate and fair funding for their work.

Western Center’s key tools for impact include:

**LEGISLATIVE, POLICY, AND ADMINISTRATIVE ADVOCACY.** In 2019, Western Center sponsored and supported 44 bills related to health care, hunger, affordable housing, economic empowerment, criminal justice and public benefits. Western Center also opposes legislation that could harm the poor of California and educates policymakers and other stakeholders on behalf of those living in poverty to establish new policies, improve existing policies, and challenge the development of policies that diminish resources and opportunities for vulnerable Californians.

**IMPACT LITIGATION.** Western Center leads local legal aid program partners and pro bono co-counsel in class action and other high-impact cases that protect basic rights for all low-income Californians. The 2019 docket of 35 cases addressed issues such as discrimination against tenants, barriers to getting and keeping General Relief for persons with mental disabilities, and medically fragile children denied Medi-Cal skilled nursing care to which they are entitled.

**SUPPORT CENTER FOR LEGAL SERVICES AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS - TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND EDUCATION.** In 2019, Western Center attorneys and advocates provided help to hundreds of legal services attorneys and advocates throughout California by hosting and participating in nearly 80 trainings, developing publications on topics of interest to those who serve California’s low-income populations, and providing hundreds of one-to-one technical assistance sessions.

**THE ROLE: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

Reporting to the Board of Directors, the Executive Director serves as the President of the Western Center on Law & Poverty Board and that of its support organization, the WCLP Endowment Foundation. At a time of unprecedented opportunity for impact, and with the support of an outstanding staff, strong and diversified financial resources, and excellent statewide relationships and reputation, the new Executive Director will be poised to implement a vision for growth and continued leadership on the critical and persistent challenges driving Western Center’s work. Specifically, s/he/they will engage with the following opportunities and challenges:

**Vision & Leadership**

• Collaboratively formulate and advance a clear organizational vision for transformative, system-wide public policy solutions to help millions of low-income Californians.
• Bring bold, new ideas, approaches, networks, and strategies to the continued work of raising Western Center’s profile - both in the field and in the broader public consciousness - such that its reputation as a “go-to” partner to represent the interests and voices of low-income Californians continues to grow and develop.
• Ensure that principles, practices, and policies that reflect equity, diversity, inclusion, and awareness of power dynamics are integrated across the organization, implemented collaboratively and transparently, and reflected in its work.

**Development & Fundraising**

• Partner with the Development Department to design and execute a robust fundraising strategy that includes grants, major gifts, special events, and other development tools to enhance financial sustainability for the organization.
Collaborate with the Development Department and the Board to proactively cultivate relationships with new individual and institutional funders at the state and national level.

Continuously refine visual branding and written messaging and serve as a visible ambassador to effectively engage new audiences and demonstrate Western Center’s unique value and role in advancing justice for all Californians.

Team Management & Culture
- Inspire, lead, and manage a diverse and talented team of professionals who are connected across roles by a shared commitment to social justice. Invest in authentic relationships and dialogue across individuals and teams to build trust, cohesion, safe space, and opportunities for team members to do their best work individually and collectively.
- Embody Western Center’s long-held values of integrity, transparency, and respect for all voices and perspectives.

Partnerships & Networks
- Build and expand partnerships, relationships and strategic alliances with other legal services programs, community-based organizations, private lawyers, and other stakeholders and interested parties.
- Provide thought leadership to the legal services field and broader legal and social justice communities on critical approaches to anti-poverty work.
- Elevate Western Center’s voice in relevant state and national public dialogues as a powerful force for justice.

Stewardship of Organizational Resources & Infrastructure
- Lead the dedicated Endowment Board to ensure that Western Center’s financial base remains secure and wisely managed.
- In close collaboration with the Director team, ensure that organizational structures, processes, and support systems across finance, technology, HR, and other core functions are adequately resourced and continuously well-aligned to strategy and vision.
- Sophisticated understanding and commitment to staff development.

Board Engagement
- Support the engagement, recruitment, and onboarding of board members as thought and fundraising partners and key advisors, effectively leveraging their diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences to inform the strategic direction and growth of Western Center and its continued financial strength.
- Support effective governance practices and mechanisms and seek opportunities to marshal the board’s collective capacity to champion and advance Western Center’s mission.

QUALIFICATIONS OF THE IDEAL CANDIDATE

While no one candidate will embody all the qualifications enumerated below, the Executive Director of Western Center will possess many of the following professional and personal abilities, attributes and experiences:

- Demonstrated ability to shape and refine an organizational vision and drive it to execution through collaborative leadership. The savvy to discern opportunities to raise an organization’s profile, exercise thought leadership, find new avenues for impact and influence, and build lasting support.

- Experience and expertise in poverty law and knowledge of California and federal programs affecting low-income people is preferred; prior work at or experience with legal services or community-based organizations is a plus.
• Successful record of engaging new funders and partners including individuals, public entities, foundations, and corporations, to broaden and diversify a base of support; demonstrated ability to inspire and engender trusting, long-term relationships.

• Lived experiences that motivate and inform their personal and professional journey; meaningful connection and ability to reflect the experiences, backgrounds, and cultures of those impacted by poverty; and ability to use their personal understanding of and connection to the issues to serve impacted communities.

• Courageous leadership modeling integrity, conviction, and clarity; consistently demonstrating the courage externally to fight injustice and seek restorative action on behalf of impacted communities, and internally to hold space for and effectively address challenging differences, conflicts, and conversations typical in organizations that embrace equity, diversity, and inclusion.

• Demonstrated experience building and leading teams in dynamic environments, mentoring and helping team members navigate evolving goals and urgencies with agility, teamwork, shared accountability, and trust in one another.

• Experience stewarding an organization’s key assets through growth and change, with an eye toward fostering financial sustainability, talent development, communications and branding, and support systems.

• Ability to connect and communicate with a variety of stakeholders (e.g. staff, board, partners, funders, community members); in all interactions, listen well, reflect an understanding of others’ perspectives and needs, and clearly articulate shared understandings, decisions, and actions.

• Flexibility, adaptability, and resilience; possessing a high tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity and exhibit an entrepreneurial spirit that embraces continuous learning, adaptation, patience, and innovation in service of social justice.

• A J.D. and California bar membership are strongly preferred.

TO APPLY

Compensation is commensurate with experience with a target range of approximately $160-180K. We welcome open dialogue with all interested parties about the full compensation package and employment proposition.

Western Center is partnering with Allison Kupfer Poteet, Linh Nguyen, and Cara Pearsall of NPAG on this search. To apply, please send a cover letter describing your interest and qualifications, your resume (in Word format), and where you learned of the position to WCLP-ED@nonprofitprofessionals.com. In order to expedite the internal sorting and reviewing process, please type your name (Last, First) as the only contents in the subject line of your e-mail.

To promote social justice and achieve our mission, Western Center is committed to maintaining a diverse staff, creating an inclusive and respectful workplace, and addressing race-based inequities in our work. In your cover letter, please include how you think your personal and/or professional experience or background has prepared you to contribute to these efforts with a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion.

*Western Center strives for a diverse and inclusive workforce and is proud to be an equal opportunity employer. Western Center strongly encourages applications from persons of color, women, LGBTQ individuals, persons with disabilities, and persons from other underrepresented groups whose background may contribute to effectively representing low-income people and underserved communities.*