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- 📍 Denver, Colorado – Hybrid Potential
- 🏢 American Civil Liberties Union of Colorado
- 💰 \$225,000 to \$275,000
- 💼 Managing Budget: \$4.8 million
- 👤 Reports to: Boards of Directors

Executive Director

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Jim Norfleet Social Impact Practice Leader and Senior Consultant

[Contact Consultant](#)

At this critical time in our nation and across Colorado, the [American Civil Liberties Union of Colorado](#) (ACLU-CO or the ACLU of Colorado) invites inquiries, nominations, and applications for the position of executive director. This position is based in Denver and may be eligible for a flexible or hybrid schedule. The executive director is expected to take office in early 2026.



defend Coloradans' civil liberties began in the 1930s. ACLU-CO is a dynamic, nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization that engages in litigation, lobbying, field organizing, public education, and multi-platform communications to protect and promote civil liberties, civil rights, and social justice throughout Colorado. ACLU-CO is headquartered in Denver, the state capital.

With over 40,000 members and a budget of \$4.8 million, ACLU-CO's work is conducted by 23 staff members, as well as volunteers, interns, and cooperating attorneys. The affiliate consists of two separate, nonprofit corporate entities: the ACLU of Colorado, a 501(c)(4) social welfare organization, and the ACLU Foundation of Colorado, Inc., a 501(c)(3) charity. Both entities are tax-exempt, have the same overall mission, and share office space and employees. Each is governed by a board of directors to whom the executive director reports. With a total of 17 members, the governing boards set policy and provide fiduciary, strategic, and legal oversight of the organization.

The ACLU has served as the nation's preeminent defender of civil liberties and civil rights since 1920. Today, the ACLU has affiliates in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico. While each affiliate enjoys significant autonomy in determining programs and priorities appropriate to its regional needs, the ACLU has increasingly operated as one nationwide organization rather than a federation of loosely affiliated local organizations. Building on its legacy of court-based work, today's ACLU combines litigation with robust policy, communications, and organizing efforts in an integrated advocacy approach.

ACLU-CO collaborates with staff members from the ACLU national office and other affiliates on range of issues and projects. Consistent with its theory of change, ACLU-CO works with directly affected individuals, communities, and organizations to build durable relationships based on mutual respect and to pursue shared goals.

The executive director will partner with staff to address issues at the forefront of the ACLU of Colorado, including but not limited to:

- [Criminal Legal Reform](#)
- [Privacy and Technology](#)
- [LGBTQ+ Equality](#)
- [Freedom of Expression & Religion](#)
- [Immigrant Justice](#)
- [Racial Justice](#)
- [Reproductive Freedom](#)
- [Student and Youth Rights](#)
- [Women's Rights](#)

For more information on the ACLU of Colorado, please visit their [website](#).



POSITION

Deborah J. Richardson served as executive director of ACLU-CO from March 2021 until she retired in June 2025, concluding a long and distinguished career in social justice and nonprofit leadership. Peter Simsonson currently serves as interim executive director while the boards of directors jointly conduct a nationwide search for a permanent leader. He led the ACLU of New Mexico for 24 years as its executive director until his retirement last year.

Role of the Executive Director

As chief executive officer of the ACLU of Colorado, the executive director provides strategic leadership and ensures the organization is fiscally sound and operates effectively to achieve its mission and goals. This person directs and develops a diverse and talented staff, shapes the internal culture, and fosters an environment of continuous improvement. The executive director also ensures the organization's litigation, policy, advocacy, fundraising, and communications programs meet the current and emergent needs of its constituents. This role involves reporting on organizational performance and partnering closely with the boards of directors to enhance their governance and strategic oversight capabilities.

Above all, the executive director embodies a people-centric leader, attuned to the pressing issues of the day and driven by a passion that centers the well-being and development of the organization and the communities it serves. As ACLU-CO's primary ambassador and spokesperson, they serve as the public face of the organization and as a thought leader on emerging issues, amplifying the work of the staff and community partners. The executive director champions the affiliate's fundraising efforts, engaging donors and making the case for philanthropic support. Overseeing multi-issue campaigns at the local, state, and national levels requires the executive director to draw on their expertise, leadership experience, and evolving best practices in intersectional work and movements.

The executive director reports to the boards of directors of ACLU-CO's two corporate entities and leads, guides, directs, and evaluates a senior management team. This team is currently composed of a deputy director, legal director, philanthropy director, policy director, advocacy director, communications director, and an executive assistant and board manager.



Key Opportunities and Challenges

The ACLU of Colorado seeks a visionary executive director who will guide the organization into its next era of growth and impact. This pivotal role requires a dynamic leader who can blend strategic vision with operational excellence to refine the long-term strategy, ensure fiscal sustainability, and expand the organization's influence across Colorado's civil rights landscape. The executive director will work closely with senior managers and the philanthropy team to strengthen donor engagement, build lasting partnerships, and cultivate broad coalitions that amplify the voices of communities most affected by injustice.

The executive director will engage diverse audiences, advocate on pressing civil liberties issues, and foster dialogue through both traditional and digital platforms. They will inspire and lead a talented staff, cultivate a collaborative and inclusive organizational culture, and partner with the boards to advance governance and strategic priorities. This executive position requires proven leadership, fundraising abilities, and the capacity to unite diverse stakeholders around the shared values of justice, equality, and the protection of constitutional rights.

The next executive director of ACLU-CO will focus on the following priorities:



The previous executive director, in collaboration with the staff and boards, conducted a statewide listening tour in 2021–2022, which served to identify priority needs and build rapport with community leaders. From this effort came [The Road Ahead: 2023–2026 Strategic Framework](#), which prioritized three core campaigns: the Campaign for Smart Justice, the Systemic Equality Agenda, and the Privacy and Liberty Project. The plan sought to drive systemic change through an integrated approach combining litigation, legislative and policy advocacy, community organizing, and public education, all with the goal of creating a more just and equitable Colorado.

While parts of the ambitious plan have been executed, other elements have stalled due to staff turnover and financial constraints. The team is in place and ready to move forward, but the strategy requires recalibration to address the escalating assault on civil rights and freedoms. This presents the future executive director with an exceptional opportunity to collaborate with the boards, staff, and community partners. Together, they will redefine the organization's strategic priorities, focusing on new tactics and execution to create a bold, actionable plan with clear performance indicators for tracking progress.

Lead ACLU-CO's fiscal sustainability efforts, which include shoring up the budget and developing and maintaining a business model that maximizes mission fulfillment and long-term financial strength.

To advance its mission, ACLU-CO must effectively manage its finances and increase revenue through proactive fundraising. Supported by attorney fees, grants, major donations, and membership dues, the affiliate does not accept government funding. During the first Trump administration, ACLU-CO's budget surged by nearly 130%, reaching \$4.3 million between 2015–16 and 2021–22. After the initial "Trump bump" subsided, ACLU-CO and many other nonprofit social justice organizations faced budget shortfalls and operating deficits. Staff turnover in the philanthropy department exacerbated the financial downturn. As a result, the affiliate drew on its ample reserves to cover expenses and mitigate staff reductions. ACLU-CO is now focused on achieving sustainable growth to address ongoing threats to civil rights and civil liberties.

Working closely with the boards of directors and a deputy director who functions as controller and leads fiscal planning and management, the new executive director will be responsible for developing the organization's financial strategy, overseeing all fiscal operations, creating a new business model, and ensuring financial accountability.

Drive fundraising efforts in partnership with the director of philanthropy and board members, cultivate relationships with potential donors, funders, and supporters, and make the case for philanthropic support.

Fundraising is one of the most important aspects of the executive director's role, as it is critical to ACLU-CO's financial health and mission-driven impact. The organization is strategically strengthening its



The ACLU's national fundraising and revenue-sharing model adds complexity to local fundraising efforts. ACLU-CO focuses on cultivating and soliciting major gifts from high-impact donors. The ideal executive director will bring direct experience in donor engagement and major gift solicitation, serving as a key partner to the philanthropy department, which will continue to lead day-to-day fundraising. An equally critical task will be more directly engaging the boards in fundraising. While a few current board members have this expertise, the boards are largely an untapped resource that, with strong leadership, can become a meaningful contributor to the organization's financial health.

Foster an inclusive and high-performing organizational culture where everyone belongs, feels respected, and collaborates to drive innovation and impact.

ACLU-CO is seeking an executive director to bring a unifying presence, as the affiliate has experienced some internal instability and is currently undergoing a unionization process. They will champion a purpose-driven culture, empowering a talented and diverse staff by building trust, delegating responsibility, and nurturing an environment where all employees can thrive. The executive director will prioritize mentoring, conduct annual performance reviews focused on professional growth, and communicate openly with both staff and the boards, especially during conflict.

The ideal candidate is an emotionally intelligent leader who fosters a positive and inclusive culture. As a compassionate change agent, they will drive strategic alignment, mediate conflict, and model accountability. A core responsibility is implementing best practices for belonging, inclusion, diversity, and equity—fostering a climate where diverse perspectives and robust discourse are welcomed as strengths. This leader will view this work as a journey, not a destination.

Build an even more powerful force for civil rights and civil liberties in Colorado by deepening community relations, enhancing and broadening coalitions, forging strong partnerships, and leveraging ACLU-CO's platform to elevate the voices of those working for social justice.

The new executive director will deepen and expand the affiliate's outreach strategy, which balances the ACLU's power with the voices of the communities it serves and supports. The role involves deepening connections with civil rights groups and community organizations throughout Colorado, including the Front Range and smaller communities, and rebuilding partnerships impacted by leadership transitions.

The successful candidate will inherit a communications operation that has significantly heightened ACLU-CO's visibility in recent years through multiple channels, such as op-eds and media appearances. The executive director will continue and expand this high-impact work. They will serve as a compelling public voice for civil rights and civil liberties and will draw on the team's expertise to increase the organization's reach and influence.



ACLU-CO's boards of directors have been significantly refreshed recently, with new leadership and new members—half of whom joined this summer. The boards consist of dedicated individuals with strong civil rights backgrounds and diverse professional networks. Members are looking for guidance on how to become more effective contributors, valuable thought partners, and allies to the executive director and staff. With the new executive director's tenure beginning, there is a prime opportunity to build a strong partnership with the boards, one grounded in open communication and trust. Success will depend on several interconnected factors, including board cohesion and effective governance, strong executive management, and a collaborative approach to addressing challenges and setting future direction.

The executive director supports the boards' financial oversight by providing transparent reports and involving members in the budgeting process. The executive director also implements the boards' policies, programs, goals, and objectives. As the primary liaison between the boards and staff, the executive director promotes effective communication, constructive engagement, and mutual trust by ensuring both groups understand and embrace their distinct roles and responsibilities.

Qualifications and Characteristics

The next executive director must possess the experience and traits needed to propel Colorado's most established civil rights organization to greater influence and impact. Strong candidates for the role are expected to have many of the following qualifications and characteristics:

- Profound commitment to advancing social justice and defending and expanding civil rights and civil liberties; familiarity with the ACLU and the current landscape in the state of Colorado is a plus.
- Successful experience as a strategic leader of a complex organization with multiple stakeholders.
- Track record of successful fundraising and experience securing donations from individuals; the search committee will consider candidates with the personal attributes and commitment necessary for successful fundraising.
- Significant management experience, including staff supervision and performance improvement; experience in a unionized environment is desirable.
- Capacity for holding an entire organization accountable for delivering measurable results consistent with established strategic and financial goals.
- Keen understanding of systemic racism and white supremacy and a history of actively promoting anti-racism, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.
- Strong communication skills, including active listening and effective public speaking and writing.
- Exceptional interpersonal and relationship-building skills, including a high degree of emotional intelligence, authenticity, and approachability.

responsibility and accomplishment.

- Bachelor's degree; an advanced degree is preferred.

Compensation and Benefits

The anticipated hiring range is \$225,000 to \$275,000. While starting salaries typically fall within the minimum and midpoint of the hiring range, the salary offered will be determined by a variety of factors, including the knowledge, skills, and experience of the individual selected.

ACLU-CO offers excellent benefits, including medical, vision, and dental insurance, life and long-term disability insurance, 401(k) contribution, generous paid vacation, and holidays.



Application



consideration. To apply for this position please click on the Apply button, complete the brief application process, and upload your resume and position-specific cover letter.

Applicants needing reasonable accommodation to participate in the application process should contact Spelman Johnson by phone at 413-529-2895 or email at info@spelmanjohnson.com.

This search will be fully confidential, with no announcement of finalist names. References will be contacted only after the initial round of interviews and only with the candidate's prior knowledge and approval.

Confidential inquiries and nominations should be directed to:

Jim Norfleet

Social Impact Practice Leader and Senior Consultant

Email: jmn@spelmanjohnson.com

Direct: 609-577-3051

Apply

Visit the ACLU of Colorado website at www.aclu-co.org/

The ACLU of Colorado is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. We value a diverse workforce and an inclusive culture. It is our policy to employ qualified people without regard to: race; color; religion; sex; national origin; age; ancestry; disability; sexual orientation; veteran's status; marital status; civil union status; arrest or court record; citizenship; credit history; genetic information; gender identity or expression; status as a victim of domestic violence, sexual violence, or stalking; or any other characteristic protected under federal or state law.

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