

The Carson Center for the Performing Arts

Executive Director

Organization

Founded in 2004, the Luther F. Carson Four Rivers Center (Carson Center) of Paducah, Kentucky, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Carson Center's mission is to serve the Four Rivers region by presenting exceptional live performances and cultural experiences that entertain, educate, and enrich the community. The idea for Carson Center emerged in the 1990s as part of a broader vision to revitalize downtown Paducah and provide a venue capable of hosting large-scale productions for the region. Construction began in 2001, and the facility opened to the public in 2004 with a gala celebration and inaugural performance season.

Carson Center's main theatre seats 1,806 guests, with the farthest seat just 112 feet from the stage, ensuring an intimate audience experience. The facility spans approximately 97,750 square feet and features a 10-story stage tower equipped with 63 line sets for scenery, lighting, and curtains. The Paxton Family Foundation Lobby welcomes visitors with terrazzo floors, sweeping staircases, and a hand-painted mural of the Four Rivers region set against a quilt motif, reflecting Paducah's identity as Quilt City, USA. Additional spaces include the Myre River Room and Williams Family Terrace, both offering scenic views for receptions and performances, and the Ingram Founder's Room for private gatherings.



Today, the Carson Center hosts approximately 150 events annually, drawing audiences from across the region and beyond. From its earliest seasons, the Carson Center has presented a diverse range of programming, including Broadway tours, concerts, plays, dance, comedy, family entertainment, community events, conferences, civic celebrations, private events, and the Paducah Symphony Orchestra's larger concerts. Educational outreach quickly became a cornerstone of its mission, offering student matinees, workshops, masterclasses, and other learning opportunities that reach thousands of young people from Kentucky, Illinois, Missouri, and Tennessee each year. Carson Center's educational programs remain robust, offering opportunities for schools and community groups across a four-state region. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Carson Center adapted with outdoor events such as Movies by Moonlight and virtual programming to continue serving the community.



The Carson Center is governed by a 23-member board of directors led by Chair David Culbertson and 12 full-time professional staff members. For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, the Carson Center had total revenues of approximately \$4.7 million, with 66% from program services and 34% from contributions, investment income, and grants.

Community

Paducah, Kentucky, located in the Upland South region, has a population of approximately 26,750; McCracken County has a population of nearly 70,000, and is the central hub for a regional population of approximately 200,000. Recognized for its rich artistic heritage, Paducah was named a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Creative City of Crafts and Folk Art in 2013, one of only a few cities in the world to receive this honor. Paducah's Market House District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is the heart of a revitalized downtown where 19th century architecture frames antique shops, galleries, and locally owned restaurants, including a James Beard Foundation Award Nominee-owned restaurant, and award-winning culinary institutions. The National Quilt Museum anchors this creative landscape, drawing visitors from around the globe with award-winning quilts and rotating exhibitions.

Paducah's cultural calendar is as vibrant as its streetscapes. The Lowertown Arts and Music Festival, each May, transforms the city into a celebration of visual art, live music, and regional cuisine. In September, Barbecue on the River fills downtown with the aroma of slow-smoked specialties while raising funds for local charities. Visitors can explore public art at the Paducah Waterfront and Floodwall Murals, take in performances at the Carson Center and the Market House Community Theater, or discover history at the Lloyd Tilghman House & Civil War Museum, the Yeiser Art Center, the River Discovery Center, and the Paducah School of Art & Design.

Situated at the confluence of the Ohio and Tennessee Rivers, Paducah is a regional hub that offers extensive lifestyle amenities of shopping, dining, and healthcare similar to a major city, while retaining a small town feel. The compact footprint of the City means that your time can be spent enjoying amenities, not commuting, and the cost of living and housing are well below the national average.

Paducah also offers abundant opportunities for outdoor recreation. Boating, fishing, and hiking are popular pastimes, and nearby Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area features miles of walking, horseback riding, and mountainbiking trails, wildlife viewing, and water activities. Within the city, Noble Park and Lone Oak Park are local favorites for picnics, sports, and family gatherings. Paducah's economy is diverse, spanning manufacturing, healthcare, retail, transportation, and logistics, and its location makes it a key shipping hub with river, rail, and highway connections. Interstate 24 links the city to Nashville, Memphis, and St. Louis. Paducah's Regional Airport (PAH) offers flights for convenient national and international travel. Currently flying to Charlotte, it will change in December 2025 when flights will be offered to Chicago (ORD) and Houston (IAH).

Sources: census.gov; paducahky.gov; paducahmainstreet.org

Position Summary

The Executive Director of the Carson Center will provide vision, leadership, and strategic direction to advance the mission and ensure artistic vitality, financial stability, and community impact. Reporting to the Board of Directors, the Executive Director will oversee all programs, fundraising, operations, and administration while fostering collaboration among staff, board, and volunteers. As the Carson Center's principal ambassador, the Executive Director will be a visible presence in the community and beyond, cultivating partnerships, engaging supporters, and strengthening the Carson Center's profile as a cultural cornerstone for the region.

Roles and Responsibilities

Financial and Programmatic Leadership

- Enhance the creative direction of the Carson Center through year-round presenting of local organizations, Broadway tours, national artists, and special events that attract multi-generational audiences.
- Serve as the chief creative leader, responsible for defining and implementing the organization's artistic vision and direction by selecting season programming and events, and cultivating relationships with artists, managers, agents, and creative teams.
- Oversee the preparation and submission for board approval of the annual operating budget, working closely with the finance committee and staff, and provide monthly monitoring reports to the board.
- Monitor and authorize expenditures, receivables, and payables in accordance with approved budgets and cash flow projections.
- Ensure accurate financial reporting, records, and annual audits in collaboration with the Director of Finance and outside auditors.

- Support rental activities, including Broadway technical tryouts, weddings, conferences, and community events, as part of the Carson Center's programmatic and earned-revenue portfolio.
- Embrace other financial and programmatic leadership duties as needed.

Board Governance

- Advise and support the Board of Directors in advancing the mission, ensuring strong communication and organizational transparency.
- Serve as an ex officio member of all board committees, attending and preparing reports for quarterly board and executive committee meetings.
- Facilitate recruitment, orientation, and ongoing education of board members in collaboration with the governance committee.
- Set agendas and engage members in strategic planning, policy development, and fundraising, in partnership with the Board Chair.
- Embrace other board governance duties as needed.

Revenue Generation and Marketing

- Act as the Carson Center's chief fundraiser, cultivating relationships with donors, corporations, foundations, and public agencies to meet or exceed contributed income goals.
- Guide board-led fundraising efforts and partner with staff on membership, sponsorships, campaigns, special events, and planned giving.
- Oversee the creation and implementation of marketing plans for presented seasons, rentals, and education programs, in collaboration with the Director of Marketing.
- Build strong media and public relations networks to elevate the Carson Center's visibility and brand locally, regionally, and nationally.
- Maximize rental revenues by positioning the Carson Center as a premier venue for weddings, meetings, and community gatherings.
- Embrace other revenue generation and marketing duties as needed.

Community Engagement and External Relations

- Serve as the Carson Center's public face and principal ambassador, strengthening its profile as a cultural cornerstone for the region.
- Cultivate partnerships with schools, civic groups, service organizations, and other cultural institutions to expand access and education.
- Advocate for public support and resources with local, state, and federal officials, and monitor legislative activity affecting the arts.
- Attend and represent the Carson Center at performances, residencies, community events, and industry convenings.
- Embrace other community engagement and external relations duties as needed.

Organizational Leadership

- Recruit, supervise, and evaluate staff, fostering a collaborative and empowering workplace that values accountability, inclusion, and professional growth.
- Ensure compliance with employment law, organizational policies, and best practices in human resources and operations.
- Maintain facilities, equipment, and insurance to ensure safety, efficiency, and a welcoming environment for artists, patrons, staff, and volunteers.
- Guide long-range planning and sustainability, aligning administrative and personnel structures with strategic goals.
- Embrace other organizational leadership duties, as needed.

Traits and Characteristics

The Executive Director of the Carson Center will be a dynamic and self-motivated leader who can bring staff, board, and community together around a shared vision for the Carson Center's artistic and cultural impact. They will

approach the role with energy, integrity, and adaptability, managing multiple priorities across programming, operations, and community engagement. Outgoing and approachable, the Executive Director will cultivate strong relationships with staff, board members, donors, and the wider community while modeling accountability and clear communication at all levels.

Other key competencies include:

- **Personal Accountability** – The facility to take ownership of decisions and actions, demonstrating integrity, reliability, and high standards of performance.
- **Teamwork and Diplomacy** – The acumen to build trust, foster collaboration, and navigate complex relationships with sensitivity, ensuring effective communication and consensus-building among staff, board, and community partners.
- **Time and Priority Management and Project Management** – The capacity to complete tasks and supervise complex projects, delivering desired outcomes within allotted time frames.
- **Customer Focus** – The ability to consider, anticipate, meet, and/or exceed customer needs, wants, and expectations.

Qualifications

Seven to 10 years of demonstrated leadership experience and proven success in arts programming, presenting, and nonprofit management are required. Financial and operational acumen, including past success in fundraising and earned revenue enhancement, are essential. A track record of deep community engagement and experience in leading a strong and dedicated team are crucial. Past visibility as a primary spokesperson representing an organization to diverse groups of constituents is very helpful. If you do not meet all the qualifications but possess transferable or equivalent skills, experience, or education, we encourage you to apply and highlight those areas.

Compensation and Benefits

The Carson Center provides a competitive and equitable compensation package in the range of \$150,000 to \$170,000, based on experience and qualifications, with benefits that include paid time off and holidays, health insurance, and a 401(k) retirement plan with 3% employer match.

Applications and Inquiries

To submit a cover letter and resume with a summary of demonstrable accomplishments, please click [here](#) or visit ArtsConsulting.com/OpenSearches. For questions or general inquiries about this job opportunity, please contact:

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