

## Position and Candidate Specification



# Chief Executive Officer

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# About the Organization

PEN America operates at the vital intersection of literature and human rights, with a steadfast commitment to upholding free expression in the United States and around the globe. The organization advocates for the freedom to write, recognizing the profound influence that words wield in shaping society. Its mission is to unite writers and their supporters in celebrating creative expression while defending the freedoms that enable such expression. PEN America is a nonpartisan organization that encourages a range of perspectives, viewpoints, and ideas, guided by the 1948 [PEN Charter](#) that stands for the “unhampered transmission of thought,” to “oppose any form of suppression of freedom of expression.”

Founded in 1922, PEN America is the largest among over 100 centers that comprise the PEN International network. The organization's initiatives are dedicated to ensuring that individuals everywhere can freely create literature, share their ideas, and engage with a diverse range of perspectives and writings. Its strength is derived from a vibrant membership of more than 4,500 writers—including novelists, journalists, poets, essayists, screenwriters, playwrights, translators, and young adult authors—as well as dedicated readers and supporters who collaboratively advance PEN America’s mission.

PEN America’s programs actively defend writers, artists, and journalists while promoting free expression on a global scale. This includes conducting research and publishing statements, reports, and white papers on pertinent issues, advocating for free expression, leading campaigns on policy matters and for individual writers facing threats, and hosting a variety of festivals and events throughout the year. The organization also offers the U.S.’s largest literary awards to recognize exceptional talent.

Notable initiatives include the World Voices Festival, which gathers writers from around the world in public readings and discussions of important issues, the Campus Free Speech program, which works to ensure campuses are open to all ideas and people by producing resources and facilitating workshops for faculty, staff, and students. Other critical initiatives include tracking book bans in public schools and libraries across the country; support and advocacy for imprisoned and besieged writers around the world; and fellowships, workshops, and trainings for writers and activists.

PEN America further enhances its impact by providing training for professionals on critical topics such as academic freedom and defending against online abuse. Additionally, the Prison and Justice Writing Program amplifies the voices of incarcerated writers, offering resources and opportunities to connect with the broader literary community while advocating against censorship and raising awareness of the societal impacts of mass incarceration.

As a nonprofit literary advocacy organization, PEN America is headquartered in New York, NY, with additional offices in Washington, DC, Los Angeles, and Florida. The organization employs a dedicated team of approximately 82 staff members. In 2022, PEN America reported overall revenues of approximately \$20 million, with an operating budget of \$16 million. The organization is governed by an influential Board of Trustees, led by President Jennifer Finney Boylan. For more information, please visit: <https://pen.org/>.

# Position Summary

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of PEN America will play a critical role in supporting writers and safeguarding free expression in an era increasingly characterized by censorship and disinformation. Building on the significant growth PEN America has experienced, the new CEO will be tasked with organizational management, leading fundraising, ensuring mission alignment, and fostering a positive internal culture. This position offers the opportunity to strengthen relationships with writers and expand literary programming through creative initiatives that engage diverse voices. The CEO will also lead the development of a comprehensive strategic plan, focus on sustainable fundraising to secure PEN's financial future, and serve as a compelling public spokesperson, positioning PEN America as a leader in national discussions on free speech and literature. With proven leadership in advocacy, a visionary approach to organizational growth, and exceptional communication skills, the CEO will be instrumental in leading PEN America forward through this pivotal moment.

The CEO position is based in New York City.

## KEY RELATIONSHIPS

<b>Reports to</b>	PEN America Board of Trustees
<b>Direct reports</b>	Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Programs and Legal Chief Operating Officer Chief Communications Officer Chief Development Officer Chief Program Officer, Free Expression Chief Program Officer, Literary Programming Managing Director, Los Angeles
<b>Other key relationships</b>	Key external stakeholders include writers, journalists, donors, partner organizations in the fields of literature, human rights, and media, and PEN organizations worldwide.

## KEY PRIORITY AREAS

- **Strategic Plan:** Develop a comprehensive strategic plan to guide the organization forward and continue its critically important work on free expression and its crucial support of writers and literature.
- **Fundraising:** Engage and cultivate relationships with major donors and stakeholders to ensure continued support. Develop a sustainable fundraising strategy that emphasizes diverse revenue streams.
- **Mission Alignment:** Reaffirm PEN America's commitment to both free expression and literary advocacy and coalesce stakeholders around the organization's mission, especially with regard to engagement in political matters and its connection with international PEN organizations.

- **Literary Programming:** Enhance PEN America's literary programming by actively engaging diverse and emerging writers through creative initiatives and partnerships; revitalize the organization's literary identity and foster a community committed to writers and free expression.
- **Culture-Building and Trust:** Revitalize a positive organizational culture, strengthen staff morale, and enhance collaboration across program areas. Build a sense of community among writers and stakeholders, fostering enthusiasm and commitment to PEN's mission.
- **Organization and Operation:** Examine internal structures and processes to ensure effective operations.
- **External Presence:** In partnership with PEN's President, serve as a visible champion for PEN America's mission, engaging with media, literary groups, and public forums to raise awareness and position the organization as an ally and leader in national discussions on free speech and literature.

## IDEAL EXPERIENCE

### Senior executive leadership experience

Has led significant, complex organizations or teams, with experience developing and executing comprehensive strategic plans, managing organizational operations and growth, and fostering a positive internal culture.

### Fundraising experience

Significant experience generating resources on behalf of an organization or cause.

### Advocacy experience in a related area

A leader who brings a connection to the literary community to bear in their advocacy experience in either free expression issues or adjacent fields, with strong persuasive skills and the ability to articulate complex issues to a range of stakeholders.

### Public presence

A strong track record as a public spokesperson, ideally with existing credibility and respect within the literary community.

### Experience working with a board

Experience working directly with a board of directors and cultivating relationships with its members.

## CRITICAL LEADERSHIP CAPABILITIES

### Visionary, Strategic Leadership

- Develops a compelling, clear, and unifying vision for PEN America's future that enables both short-term success and long-term transformation.
- Proposes changes to the organization's strategy while considering broader implications, internally and externally.
- Brings new and innovative thinking that appropriately challenges assumptions and conventional wisdom.
- Looks beyond a three-year horizon to understand external trends and prepare PEN America for the future.

### Collaborating and Influencing

- Serves as a powerful spokesperson who inspires enthusiasm and engagement among the board, staff, donors, writers, and the broader literary community.
- Fosters inclusive, open dialogue and promotes collaboration and partnership among a range of stakeholders, internally and externally; works well with creative professionals and with international partners.
- Adept at navigating complex stakeholder dynamics to drive alignment around strategic and organizational priorities for sustainable, long-term growth.
- Builds and leverages a network of relationships that are impactful for the organization and its stakeholders.

## Leading People

- Inspires and motivates the team through a compelling organizational vision that is linked to specific roles, responsibilities, and contributions.
- Collaborates with the leadership team and empowers them to navigate uncertainty and deliver results, while ensuring alignment across the organization.
- Attracts, retains, and develops the best talent.
- Builds a culture of respect and responsibility and an inclusive workplace environment.

## COMPENSATION

- The estimated base salary range for this position is \$375,000-\$400,000.
- Actual compensation will be dependent on the individual's skills, experience, and qualifications.

## APPLICATIONS AND NOMINATIONS

If you would like to submit applications materials or nominate someone to serve as the next Chief Executive Officer of PEN America, please email [PENCEO@spencerstuart.com](mailto:PENCEO@spencerstuart.com).