



MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. FREEDOM CENTER

Executive Director



Martin Luther King Jr.
— FREEDOM CENTER —

Top: Freedom Center youth with Ahousaht Nation elder at Tribal Canoe Journeys, Quinault Indian Nation

Left: Advocating at California Legislature, delegation draws wisdom from Bobby Seale, founder of the Black Panther Party.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Leadership Profile & Position Description

The Martin Luther King Jr. Freedom Center invites a values-driven, mission-centered leader to serve as its next Executive Director. This profile describes the organization, the community it serves, and the philosophy that animates its work, and then sets out the role, context, and responsibilities of the Executive Director position. It is intended to give prospective candidates a full and honest picture of what this leadership opportunity asks for and what it offers.



Nonviolence Civic Engagement training at Institute for Community Leadership, Washington

THE ORGANIZATION & ITS PHILOSOPHY OF LEADERSHIP

The Martin Luther King Jr. Freedom Center (the “Freedom Center”) is an Oakland-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit that promotes the principles of nonviolence and human and civil rights to uplift the voices of marginalized youth and families and to strengthen their capacity for change-making. It does this work through two interwoven means: personal transformation and direct civic action. Grounded in the life, teachings, and methodology of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the Center advances civic engagement, ethical leadership, and economic and educational equity in the most vulnerable, high-poverty communities of the East Bay region and Northern California.

History & Origins

The Freedom Center was founded by Oakland community organizers under the leadership of longtime activist and Oakland resident Ira Jenkins, who together produced what became the first and

largest Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. March & Rally on the West Coast. By the mid-1990s, after years of organizing region-wide commemorations of Dr. King’s life and work, these leaders concluded that a permanent organization dedicated to his principles could provide vital uplift in the difficult work of navigating race divides, poverty, and violence in schools and neighborhoods.

For the founders, “Martin Luther King Jr.” was never only a name. It was chosen as an identifier of the organization’s work and purpose — a structure that would use Dr. King’s theories and actions to arouse, educate, organize, and prepare individuals to become active, lifelong creators of community and democracy. Among their first acts was a successful campaign to have the East Bay Regional Park District rename the shoreline park on Doolittle Drive the Martin Luther King Jr. Shoreline Park, where the founders planted a grove of trees at Doolittle and Swansen that today stands more than forty feet tall, offering visitors a measure of Dr. King’s wisdom.

To establish the organization itself, activists organized busloads of East Bay residents to travel to Sacramento and testify for a bill — written by then-State Assemblymember Barbara Lee and supported by then-Governor Pete Wilson — creating a state-sanctioned center dedicated to Dr. King’s legacy, civic engagement, youth, and nonviolence. A subsequent Memorandum of Understanding articulated the Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation and was

signed by the City of Oakland, the East Bay Regional Park District, the Port of Oakland, the California State Coastal Conservancy, the March and Rally Committee, and various city and state officials. The Freedom Center was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) in 2001 and maintains a longstanding partnership with the Peralta Community College District, where it is housed at Merritt College.

MISSION & THE COMMUNITY SERVED

“The Freedom Center promotes principles of nonviolence and human and civil rights to uplift marginalized youth and families’ voices and strengthen capacity for change-making, through personal transformation and direct civic action.”

— MISSION OF THE FREEDOM
CENTER

The Center’s community comprises primarily African American, Latino/a, and immigrant constituents residing in economically challenged neighborhoods burdened by violence, blight, safety concerns, housing and food insecurity, under-resourced schools, and limited access to mental health and healthcare. Despite these pressures, community members share a resilient spirit and a deep sense of shared identity. The Center’s most pressing aims are to help create safe environments, improve education, and address disparities in access to resources — advancing the power that comes from having community voices heard in the work of ending systemic racial and socio-economic divides.

Over decades of work in California’s East Bay, the Center has helped thousands of underrepresented young adults and community members ground themselves in the self-confidence and power that come from using their voices to struggle against inequity and advocate for change. The constituency it serves is reflected below.



Civil and Human Rights Class
with Dr. Clayborne Carson,
Stanford University

Constituency	Share
African American	36%
Latino/a	29%
Asian	14%
Caucasian	12%
Other / BIPOC	9%
Low-income	86%
Immigrant	15%

Constituents reside in Alameda and Yolo Counties (CA), King and Pierce Counties (WA), and Selma and Montgomery (AL).

CORE ACTIVITIES & PROGRAMS

Historically, the Freedom Center’s programming has combined immersive, residential learning experiences with year-round classes, public education, civic action, and a growing body of published curriculum and media. Its signature programs have included the following:

- **Youth Leadership Classes** — Weekly, year-round classes drawing on Dr. King’s work and on history and current events, training students (consistently 92–94% Black and Latino) to think dialectically and speak publicly, and growing them into confident, analytical leaders through study, civic action, and peer coaching.
- **The Dr. Clayborne Carson Class** — A weekly human and civil rights class taught by Dr. Clayborne Carson — Stanford Professor Emeritus, entrusted by Coretta Scott King with Dr. King’s papers and the world’s foremost King scholar — recorded and produced into online video resources.
- **Barbara Lee Lecture Series** — A free public lecture series advancing mass civil and human rights education with broad interracial and intergenerational participation.
- **Resource Center & Curriculum** — A growing body of booklets, curriculum, and video — short public-service pieces, thematic segments, and condensed “learning topics” — for educators and organizations.
- **Residential Boot Camps** — Each year, traveling, residential boot camps have taken twelve to twenty-four students aged fourteen to twenty to study specific social struggles, meet government and community leaders, and visit sites of importance.
- **Days of Gratitude** — Over Thanksgiving weekend, staff and students have visited federally recognized tribal nations to learn about tribal sovereignty and democracy through cultural, economic, and political exchange; partner tribes span California, Oregon, and Washington.
- **Life and Legacy of Dr. King** — A week-long project (December 27–January 1) built on Dr. King’s six principles and six steps and the Center’s Leadership Poetry curriculum, engaging up to thirty students in study, service, and collective living.
- **Civic Engagement & Pilgrimage** — Civic action programs including a sixteen-year Official Congressional delegation to the Congressional Civil Rights Pilgrimage (Selma to Montgomery), year-round youth engagement in legislation and policy, GOTV, and a traveling Workshop on Wheels.

Yellow label: Currently active programming

Blue label: Inactive, but can be reinstated in the future

Green label: On hold, with the capacity to resume quickly (in standby mode)

Reach, Collaborations & Funding. The Center works through a deeply collaborative model: community stakeholders invite its representatives to speak, facilitate, and advocate, and over a previous three-year span the Center took part in 219 events reaching some 57,000 people. Since 2018 its collaborations have included 620 organizations statewide, with staff and youth traveling more than 22,000 miles to deliver over 1,100 classes and 261 leadership seminars. It has historically been sustained by a diversified funding base — foundations, government, corporations, individuals, labor, tribal partners, and earned revenue — with a 2025 operating goal of roughly \$760,000 in core programming revenue. The sunset of statewide funding in 2025 has made securing sustainable funding a primary priority for the incoming Executive Director.

Philosophy of Leadership. Leadership at the Freedom Center is inseparable from its mission. The organization was founded by African American activists and elected officials who, in the 1960s and 1970s, volunteered in civil rights organizations and community organizing — a lineage that continues in its governance today. Its Founding Chair, the Honorable Barbara Lee, served for decades as a Member of Congress. Board members bring leadership experience from city government, the District Attorney's office, universities, and the corporate sector.

Over the years, the Center's staff has been intentionally of the communities they serve: people of color, bilingual, LGBTQ, and individuals who have known poverty firsthand. Staff are expected to understand the struggles of their students, families, and neighborhoods — with several former staff members being themselves former students. These lived experiences, together with durable relationships and agreements with key partners, are the foundation of the organization's integrity, reliability, and trust with local communities, county offices of education, tribal governments, park and school districts, and schools.



*Door-to-door voter registration in
Central Valley of California*

Nonviolence Democracy Education. The Center's leadership philosophy rests on the tenets of Nonviolence Democracy Education: the sanctity of the individual; the humanist value of individual contribution to the common good; the responsibility to defend society from the forces of hate, greed, selfishness, and fear; and the conviction that the inner realm of life — essence, love, and belonging — is more significant than the external realm of job, salary, and consumption. Leadership is understood not as positional authority but as ethical practice modeled daily.

The Six Principles & Six Steps. All of the Center's work is anchored in Dr. King's Six Principles of nonviolence — that nonviolence is a courageous way of life; that it seeks reconciliation rather than humiliation; that it confronts injustice rather than persons; that it accepts suffering without retaliation; that it rejects internal violence of spirit through agape love; and that it trusts the universe is on the side of justice — and in his Six Steps of nonviolent action: information gathering, education, personal commitment, negotiation, direct action, and reconciliation. These are not abstractions at the Freedom Center; they are the operating method of the staff and the leader.

Recognition. The Center's leadership and impact have been widely honored, including the United Nations Association "Democracy, Peace and Law" Award (2024), multiple California Legislature and Alameda County commendations, the League of Women Voters' "Making Democracy Work" Award, recognition from the U.S. Census Bureau, and numerous congressional and municipal honors. The former Executive Director personally received two Lifetime Legacy Awards recognizing decades (55 years) of civil rights leadership.

THE ROLE: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Executive Director is the chief executive of the Martin Luther King Jr. Freedom Center, responsible for the leadership, management, integrity, and sustainability of the organization and for the faithful embodiment of its mission and methodology. The role carries the full scope of nonprofit executive leadership — strategy, programs, fund development, fiscal stewardship, governance, personnel, and external relations — while asking something more distinctive of the person who holds it.

A role rooted in practice, not only administration. Many of the responsibilities below are familiar

features of executive leadership. Others may appear unusual, because they are difficult to translate into practice without a working understanding of nonviolence and ethical leadership oriented toward the common good. These expectations are not incidental: they run throughout the publications and curriculum the Center uses to teach its young people, who practice the same conduct expected of the leader. Importantly, the next Executive Director need not arrive as a practitioner of nonviolence. What matters is a genuine willingness — even eagerness — to learn and apply Dr. King’s theories and action models for themselves, since those models are the basis of the youth’s own transformation.

Reporting Relationships & Scope

Title	Executive Director
Reports to	Board of Directors (through the Board Chair and Secretary/Treasurer)
Direct reports	Director of Government & External Relations / Fund Development; Administrative Specialist; Community Organizing staff; plus specialized contractors
Team	Two full-time and two part-time staff, supported by contractors including grant prospecting and development, professional third-party accounting (IRS reporting) and fiscal services
Location	Merritt College, Oakland, California

CORE RESPONSIBILITIES

The role spans the areas below, each exercised in the Center’s collaborative, horizontal style of leadership — favoring participation and shared decision-making over top-down direction.

Organizational & Management Leadership. Provide overall management of a creative educational nonprofit: supervise staff and conduct timely evaluations; delegate and evaluate work across all program areas; continually revise the organization’s narrative with staff; and maintain sound systems for reporting and archiving essential information.

Program & Curriculum Leadership. Safeguard the quality and integrity of the Center’s programs and curriculum, keeping classes and projects life-transforming experiences in service of the common good rather than an individualistic, competitive model. Conceptualize and write materials — booklets, essays, and curriculum.

Fund Development & Fiscal Oversight. Lead fundraising as a core, ongoing activity across foundations, government, corporate, individual, labor, and tribal sources, and exercise fiduciary oversight grounded in nonprofit accounting principles — overseeing fiscal protocols, supervising bookkeeping and accounting consultants, the annual IRS Form 990, and annual budgets for Board approval.

Governance & Board Relations. Cultivate the relationship with the Board of Directors; coordinate closely with the Board Chair and Secretary/Treasurer; and oversee communications and quarterly Board meetings, including the Annual Board Meeting each December.

Government & External Relations. Maintain active, working relationships with elected and administrative leaders across every jurisdiction in which the Center operates — city, county, state, national, and international — and represent the organization within its broad network of community, labor, faith, tribal, and educational partners.

Risk Management & Compliance. Manage organizational insurance; orchestrate legal counsel and advice; maintain and update the Personnel Handbook in line with federal and state law; and ensure full compliance with all 501(c)(3) regulations.

Distinctive Leadership Conduct

Beyond standard executive duties, the Center invites its leader to practice — or to be genuinely willing to learn — a particular ethical discipline:

- Grow proficient in (or commit to learning) Kingian nonviolence — the six principles and six steps — and come to teach them through one's own conduct and example.
- Lead as a “transformed nonconformist,” acting, thinking, and feeling from a position of independence from the racism, materialism, and violence of the dominant narrative.
- Practice rigorous self-examination and the gracious acceptance of criticism — studying how, where, and why one thinks and feels as one does — and coach teammates with that same care, calling forth their higher character.
- Know and act on the difference between mobilizing (short-term) and organizing (long-term, sustainable, disciplined work).
- Work in ways that help others “shine,” and give genuine time to the support and service workers who make any institution function — on the



Teacher Training seminar presented by MLKJFC Executive Director and Ambassador Andrew Young with Peralta Community College District

conviction that “on a nonviolence team, everyone is a quarterback.”

- Hold and continually refine a consistent worldview, applying consistent values and ethics.
- Model the disciplined rhythm the work demands — continuous learning and planning, long hours, and healthy regulation of one's own devices, as students are taught to practice.

THE IDEAL CANDIDATE

The ideal Executive Director pairs the management capability to run a creative educational nonprofit with a real affinity for Dr. King's theories and action models. The next leader need not arrive as a seasoned practitioner of nonviolence; what matters is that they enjoy learning and applying King's ideas for themselves, since those ideas are the foundation of the young people's transformation. Strong candi-

dates will bring demonstrated nonprofit leadership — staff supervision, fund development, fiscal stewardship, governance, and external relations — along with strong writing and communication skills, the ability to build relationships across diverse communities, and the credibility to lead by example before the young people, their families, organizational collaborators and community constituents the Center serves.

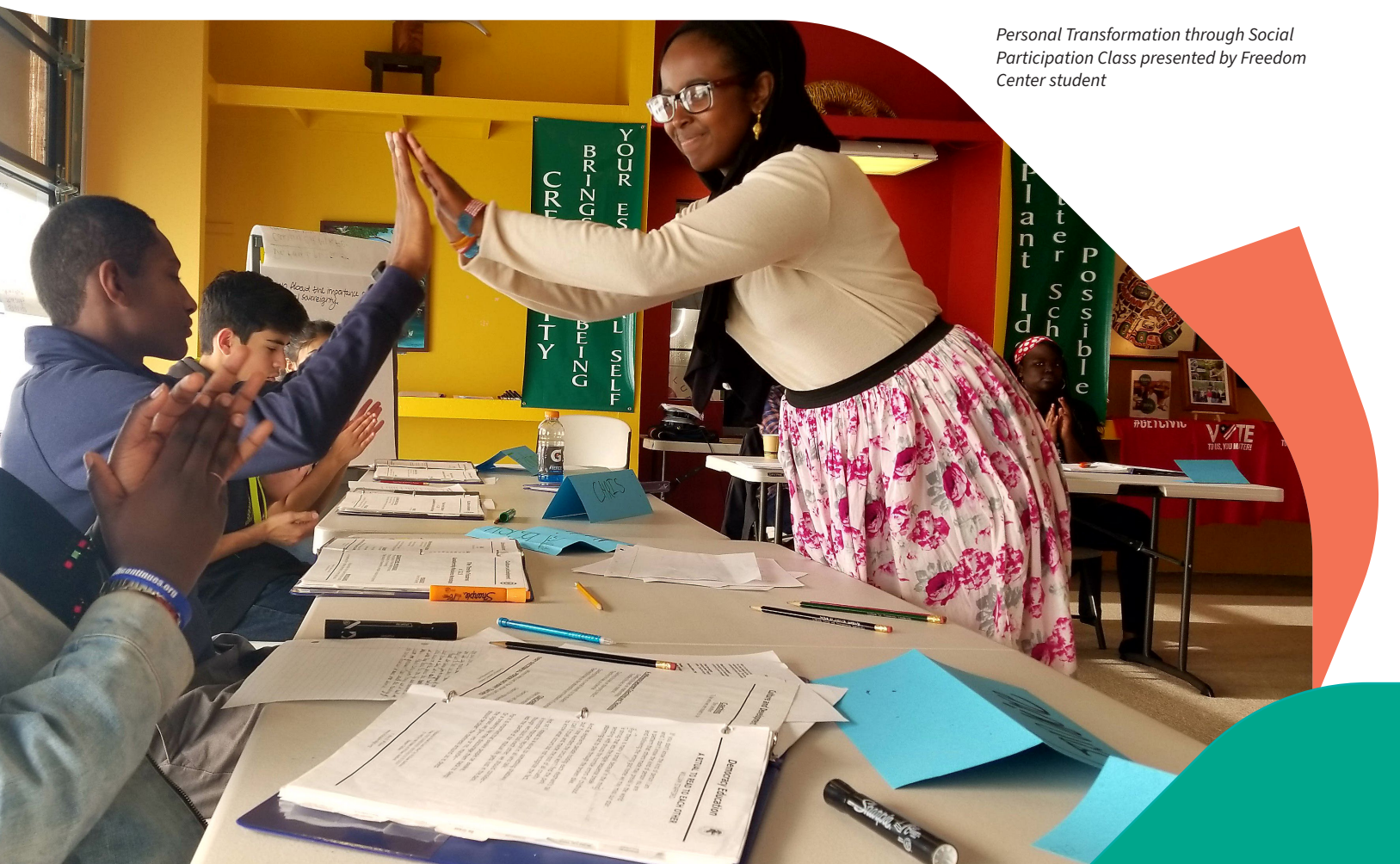
HOW TO APPLY

The Freedom Center is conducting this search with The Hawkins Company. Applications, nominations, and inquiries should be directed by email to mlkfc@thehawkinscompany.com, with a cover letter and current résumé by **September 10th, 2026**. The Freedom Center is an equal opportunity employer and encourages applicants who reflect the communities it serves.



THE HAWKINS COMPANY

8939 S. Sepulveda Blvd., #110-216
Los Angeles, CA 90045
www.thehawkinscompany.com



Personal Transformation through Social Participation Class presented by Freedom Center student