



Executive Director

The Boston Debate League's mission is to integrate argumentation and competitive debate into public schools in Boston to develop critical thinkers ready for college, career, and engagement with the world around them.

The Search

In a fractious world that can make almost any subject contestable, the Boston Debate League (BDL) uses the power of argumentation to create transformative learning environments shaped by student leadership, collaboration, and critical discourse. The BDL supports active learning and rigorous research through professional development for K-12 teachers and after school debate programs for middle and high school students. As they debate, students learn to study multiple sides of contentious issues, hone cogent arguments backed by evidence, and present their cases persuasively even while attending closely to opposing views. The BDL tailors its programs to engage young people who have been denied rigorous educational opportunities due to persistent racial and social inequities. Teachers and debaters regularly proclaim that debating with peers transforms students, as they learn fast, connect their studies with everyday experience, develop their voices fluently and forcefully, believe in their own agency, and take the lead as advocates in their communities.

For 16 years, this small non-profit organization has annually engaged hundreds of middle and high school students in after school competitive debate programs and thousands of K-12 students through sustained coaching for their teachers and school leaders. The BDL has become ever more broadly influential, an ally of school systems as it works to bring debate-inspired learning into classrooms across all curricular areas. Through its professional development activities for teachers and school leaders along with its support for rigorous after school debate teams and competitions, the Boston Debate League provides coherent, sustained programs that promote the power of young people, analytic discourse, racial and social equity, and joy in life-long learning.

The Boston Debate League seeks an Executive Director who has both the wisdom to sustain this successful non-profit organization, and the strategic leadership skills to extend its reach, impact and visibility. BDL innovates, analyzes, and grows. As part of BDL's current strategic plan, it is conducting collaborative research to codify the successful components of its programs and to develop rigorous assessments of their impacts. Fueled by a superb staff and a collaborative board, BDL has thrived during the past tumultuous year. It pursued its goals to prioritize equity both internally and externally, succeeded financially, and adapted its educational programs to online

learning for students, teachers, and school leaders. With the right leadership, BDL will enhance the impact of its effective programs, serve more students and educators, and become more widely recognized as an essential contributor to analytic discourse and equity in Boston's proactive community of learners.

Opportunities and Challenges

Define and steer toward the north star of the Boston Debate League

Successful organizations are clear about the large purpose they aim to serve and continually adapt their activities to steer toward that beacon. The BDL regularly innovates its strong programs to meet the evolving needs of students and educators amid the turbulence of shifting priorities and opportunities in school systems and the larger society. A perennial challenge is to steer toward the overarching goal by balancing retention of practices that work with change for the better.

The new director will begin at an inflection point as educators and the larger world struggle to heal from the COVID-19 pandemic, reconsider their guiding purposes, and refine their work accordingly. The BDL is beginning the final year of a 3-year strategic plan developed by staff and board after careful redefinition of the organization's mission, vision, values, and commitments. Working closely with board and staff, the ED must assure that BDL completes the ambitious goals in its current strategic plan, seriously evaluates lessons from that work, and then collaboratively develops, refines, and implements a new plan for expanding BDL's impact.

Maintain and develop relationships that grow financial resources and sustained commitment from multiple stakeholders and raise BDL's visibility

The new ED will be the chief fundraiser for the organization (likely requiring 50-60% of the ED's time) and will lead efforts to sustain, expand, and develop complex partnerships that are essential to BDL's impact and growth. For example, the BDL depends upon district and school leaders to champion and support programs both financially and politically over years despite the systemic turmoil and competing priorities that beset educational systems. The ED must be able to attract and maintain the commitment of educational leaders in order for students and teachers to realize the full benefits of BDL programs. The organization's success also depends upon the ED's leadership in assuring consistent financial support from corporate and individual donors, foundations, and public funds.

The new director will also guide development of innovative collaborations with individuals and organizations to leverage the impact of BDL's programs. One example is a successful dual-enrollment program mediated by BDL that allows Boston high school students to earn college credit in Suffolk University courses. BDL also enjoys mutually beneficial alliances with corporations and foundations that generate crucial

financial support while enriching BDL programs. Partnerships with current debaters and their families, as well as BDL alumni and volunteers, are perhaps the most important relationships for BDL's success. The next ED must bring passionate commitment, deep understanding, and contagious enthusiasm to conversations with all these constituencies in order to sustain and grow BDL's networks of support.

Key to building effective relationships is publicizing a resounding case for the transformative impact of BDL on students and educators. BDL is highly esteemed by its participants, but many of them say it is one of Boston's best kept secrets. The new ED will play a leading role as the external face of the BDL, promoting its visibility, and building diverse, collaborative relationships that lead to sustained impact.

Promote diversity, equity, and inclusion internally and externally

BDL has been committed to educational equity since its founding. The staff and board members have worked deliberately for the past three years to combat racism along with other long-standing inequities and the systems that sustain them. The new director will be at the center of the organization's efforts to continue to refine norms, practices, and structures in ways that promote racial and social equity within BDL as an organization and in the communities that it serves.

One recent focus is recruitment and retention of debaters in BDL's After School Debate League. Currently, only about one third of after-school debaters continue beyond one year, while those who make debate a big part of their lives reap large benefits. The retention challenge is most apparent with young men of color. BDL is experimenting with a new approach that introduces debate as a toolkit for addressing problems that young people identify as important in their lives. The ED will promote efforts like this one to test the organization's current thinking and bring in new ideas that motivate sustained engagement in BDL programs and incorporate high-impact changes to advance educational equity.

Preserve collaborative leadership while pushing to improve BDL's impact

BDL's current staff is accustomed to pursuing ambitious goals with intense commitment and will welcome a leader who preserves the culture of open debate and effective collegiality. They will also welcome a visionary leader who guides them to hold one another accountable for continual improvement and documented impact. For example, with funding from a national foundation, BDL is currently collaborating with university professors on a multi-year evaluation of its school-based professional development programs called Debate Inspired Classrooms. One challenge is defining valid measures of impact on educators who participate directly in these programs and on the students they teach. Another is developing practical assessment processes that simultaneously help program participants guide ongoing improvement while also yielding credible evidence of impact. A leader who guides staff to meet these

challenges can accelerate BDL on an evidence-based path to adapt its programs and scale them up for much greater impact.

Qualifications and Experience

Although it is unlikely that any one individual will bring all of the experience and qualifications listed below, the successful candidate will have many of the following attributes:

- BA/BS required; advanced degree preferred
- Extensive experience with and commitment to the communities that BDL serves, including Boston public schools and students who have experienced educational inequities
- Capability and enthusiasm for building relationships that generate successful fundraising and collaborative partnerships across sectors
- Experience as a teacher and/or school leader is valued as is participation in competitive debate
- Ability to partner effectively with a board of directors, including collaborative development and implementation of strategic plans and budgets
- Experience enhancing the capacity of an organization, sharing senior management responsibilities, building collaborative teams, and promoting inclusion, equity, and continuous learning and improvement
- Experience in providing guidance and direction on financial matters, operations, and staff development
- A managerial style that is personable and collaborative yet decisively strategic and focused on accountability for achieving BDL's mission, coupled with the wisdom and courage to make difficult choices guided by the highest standards of honesty and integrity
- Excellent oral and written communication skills, including active listening, intellectual curiosity, openness to debate, incisive analysis, inspiration, and persuasion; ability to explain BDL's programs and success to diverse audiences
- Deep understanding of and commitment to the human endeavor of life-long learning both inside and outside of schools
- Heart-felt enjoyment of young people and confidence in their potential, especially those who have been marginalized by discrimination, and

demonstrated commitment to helping them develop academically and personally

Compensation

The salary range for this position is \$130,000 - \$145,000 annually plus competitive benefits, including health/dental insurance and generous paid time off. The highest pay will be offered to a finalist who most fully brings to BDL the experience and qualifications described above.

Applications and Nominations:

The Boston Debate League is committed to serving students of color and other students who have been denied educational opportunities. In all BDL's work, racial and social equity is a driving value. BDL knows that a diverse staff, including team members with lived experience in and commitment to the communities and students the organization serves is essential. As such, BDL encourages applications from BIPOC candidates, and candidates from traditionally marginalized and underrepresented groups.

To apply, please submit a current CV with a letter explaining why you are interested in becoming BDL's next Executive Director and how your experience prepares you to succeed in this role. Application materials should be submitted electronically to EDSearch@bostondebate.org

To ensure full consideration, please submit application materials as soon as possible. Review of applications, nominations, and expressions of interest will begin immediately and continue on a confidential basis until an appointment is made. For more information about the Boston Debate League, please visit: <http://www.bostondebate.org>.

*The Boston Debate League is an Equal Opportunity Employer.
The BDL values having a diverse staff that reflects the experiences and backgrounds of
the students and teachers it serves.*

Appendix:

The Boston Debate League Incorporated

The Organization

The Boston Debate League was founded in 2005 to offer Boston's students access to debate and the transformational skills it cultivates. Through its debate teams and classroom argumentation programs, BDL creates spaces for young people to harness their voices, conduct in-depth independent research, analyze complex materials, express their opinions using evidence, and be heard and respected by adults in the community. BDL's programming upholds research-driven principles of a strong education—authentic student voice and discussion, cognitive rigor, 21st century skills like critical thinking and communication, and high expectations for all students.

The BDL works with students, debate coaches, and teachers in public schools in Boston, Chelsea, and Somerville. The organization offers debate and argumentation programs for young people in Greater Boston, with a commitment to serving students of color and other students who have been denied these educational opportunities. BDL tailors its programs to address the educational inequities they experience and strives to create inclusive learning communities where all participants are welcome and supported in achieving the transformative, lifelong benefits of debate. BDL programs engage diverse elementary, middle, and high school students, including students of color, English Language Learners, students experiencing poverty, and students with special education needs. The BDL envisions a future where all young people are engaged in critical discourse, informed by evidence, and empowered to lead.

Programs and Participants

Through two anchor programs, After School Debate and Debate Inspired Classrooms, the BDL upholds high expectations of rigor and engagement, centers learning on students, and offers young people a platform where their voices are heard and valued. Since its inception, the BDL has grown from a grassroots organization serving 25 students at only three schools to a 501(c)3 non-profit that reached nearly 5,000 students, 350 teachers, 560 community volunteers, and 41 middle and high schools during the 2019-20 school year. After School Debate serves students who attend public middle and high schools in every neighborhood of Boston, as well as students from Chelsea and Somerville.

In mid-March 2020, in light of the COVID-19 public health crisis and following guidance from state and local officials, the BDL closed its office and switched to a work-from-home model. BDL also cancelled all in-person programming, including their final debate tournament of the season and the annual end-of-year awards

ceremony for its debaters. Throughout the unprecedented and ever-evolving crisis, the BDL staff was creative at finding ways to keep our work going, and to keep our team connected and supported while adapting programs to the changing circumstances in schools.

Organization—Staff and Board

The BDL has a staff of 11 full-time employees who have experience in education, philanthropy, youth development, operations, and debate. Led by its Executive Director, the BDL Senior Leadership Team also includes a Director of Operations, Director of Programs, Director of External Affairs, and Director of Culture and Engagement. The program team includes a Debate Inspired Classrooms Instructional Coach, two Assistant Directors of ASD, and one ASD Program Manager. The External Affairs team includes a Senior Volunteer Manager and a Senior Development Manager. BDL staff members are 64% White, 27% Black, and 9% Latinx. The Senior Leadership Team is 80% female; the overall BDL staff is 73% female. A cohort of BDL alumni also join our team part-time to support the debate tournament season from October-March.

A diverse 13-member Board of Directors oversees the BDL, bringing a wealth of expertise in fields including leaders in public education, law, marketing, higher education, business, and finance. The Board helps refine mission-focused strategies, raise funds, build relationships, and extend program impacts. The Board of Directors is 54% female and 46% male. Members of the Board are 54% White, 31% Black, and 15% Asian-American.

In 2019, the board and staff collaboratively developed a 3-year strategic plan. Its goals include evaluating current program models with practical yet rigorous assessments that guide potential improvements and document programmatic impacts, with a specific focus on serving BDL's diverse student population. The board and staff have also explicitly engaged in efforts to accelerate diversity, inclusion, and equity, both internally and externally, across all aspects of BDL's work.

Finances

The Boston Debate League's annual budget is about \$2 million. Approximately 30% of BDL's annual revenue comes from school partners and other program services revenue, 65% is supported by philanthropy from organizations, individuals, and foundation grants; the remainder consists of government support and income from a small endowment. BDL expects to end its 2021 fiscal year with a little more than six months cash on hand.