



**Executive Director
The Penn Center
St. Helena Island, SC.**

THE OPPORTUNITY

The Penn Center (Penn Center) is seeking a visionary and strategic Executive Director. Penn Center is a multi-service 501c3 nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting and preserving Penn Center’s true history and culture through its commitment to education, community development, and social justice. The ideal ED candidate will have strong knowledge of African American history and a demonstrated ability to advance and elevate Penn Center’s mission to preserve, curate, and share Reconstruction era history, Gullah-Geechee history and culture, and African American contributions throughout the region, the country, and the world.



The ED will be responsible for overseeing management of Penn Center’s historic 160 - year-old campus – 50 acres of land and property that includes: a welcome center, museum, meeting and lodging facilities; community-based programs like Land Use, and Environmental Education (LUEE), the Program for Academic and Cultural Enrichment (PACE), and the Early

Childhood At-Risk Family Initiative; the Heirs property project; research- based partnerships with colleges and universities; and the Heritage Days Celebration, which draws thousands of visitors annually. In addition to the historic campus, Penn Center also owns and leases multiple acreages throughout St Helena and Lady's Island, SC.



The Benezet House was named after Anthony Benezet – a Frenchman - who stood for freedom in the mid - late 1870's. The Benezet House was built in 1905 and housed female teachers and boarding students. Penn School's mandatory nightly chapel service, held on the 1st floor, was open to both male and female students. Benezet House currently accommodates up to 30 guests in contemporary interior living accommodations.

Like National Heritage sites throughout the US, Penn Center plans to continue to serve as a historic, cultural, and artistic resource for current and future generations of Sea Island descendants as well as for those worldwide who have heard - and are called to - its powerful story. Toward that end, Penn Center is seeking an experienced leader to guide it for the 21st century and beyond. This includes: overseeing management of current initiatives and expanding alliances with museums and cultural partners throughout the US and the globe; cultivating new donors; marketing and telling the Penn Center story; building the Penn Center membership base; leveraging Heritage Days and signature events like the 1862 Circle Gala, and museum and art exhibitions; conceptualizing innovative creative events and research-based offerings on campus; increasing staff; and overseeing management of 23 historic buildings and structures on campus.

Penn Center is financially healthy and has the support of several major funders, most recently receiving a significant unrestricted funding award from philanthropist Mackenzie Scott. The new ED will be tasked with deepening and increasing funder relationships. In recent years, Penn Center's inter-generational, geographically diverse Board of Trustees has initiated and completed external land and financial assessments, a strategic plan, and an opportunities assessment. The ED will be expected to operationalize these and lead Penn Center utilizing best practices.



The Hampton House was built in 1904 and named after Hampton Institute an industrial school for black students in Hampton, Virginia. It was built with space for two teachers and two rooms for trustees or other visitors. Rosa Cooley and Grace House - Penn School principals - lived here and entertained many notables of the day. A visit to Penn School was a major excursion that usually entailed at least an overnight stay. Hampton House currently accommodates up to 10 guests in contemporary housing.

AN UNMATCHED LEGACY

Penn Center possesses an unmatched legacy in the United States. Established in 1861 by Quaker teacher-missionaries from Philadelphia, Penn Center exists among the vanguard of continuously-owned and -operated historically Black institutions in the United States, serving as a thorough-line for generations of communities, leaders, and movements. Originally established as a school for newly-emancipated, previously-enslaved sea islanders, Penn Center has evolved its mission over its 160-year history to meet and serve multiple needs, becoming a community within a community on remote St. Helena Island.



Charlotte Forten, an African American woman, was among the founding teachers at Penn School.

Penn Center has been at the epicenter of the unique culture of descendants of formerly enslaved West and Central Africans living in the Sea Islands, known as the Gullah Geechee people. In 1861, white plantation owners on St. Helena heard the canons of the Union army

approaching, and abandoned their plantations, leaving behind hundreds of African American families. These Gullah families – many indigenous born Africans, bonded in community by a common language and customs – were the first to integrate into US society as free people.

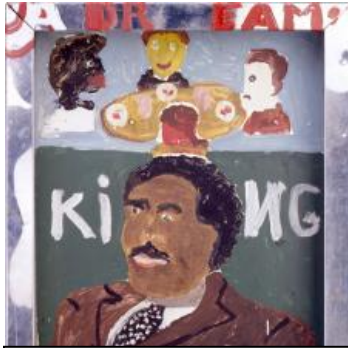
"In and around Beaufort County during Reconstruction, the first African Americans enlisted as soldiers, the first African American schools were founded, early efforts to distribute land to former slaves took place, and many of the Reconstruction Era's most significant African American politicians came to prominence. African American political influence and land ownership endured there long after setbacks in other regions. In short, events and people from Beaufort County illustrate the most important challenges of Reconstruction -- crucial questions related to land, labor, education, and politics after the destruction of slavery -- and some early hopeful efforts to address them."¹

The construction of Penn School began on 50 acres of property donated by Hastings Gantt, a formerly-enslaved African American landowner. Management of the Penn School was transferred to Gullah residents relatively early. Classes included agriculture, home economics, reading, writing, mathematics, and more. The school weathered the Great Depression and ran continuously until 1953. In the 1950s, with a new name, Penn Center expanded its partnerships and adopted a health and education focus. In the 1960s, it became a regular retreat center for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Rev. Jesse Jackson, and the SCLC and a secluded site for justice conferences. In the 1970s, Penn Center served as a training locale for the Peace Corps and a center for cultural history. In the 1990s, Penn Center shifted its focus to promoting and preserving Gullah cultural assets. A cultural treasure of invaluable measure, Penn Center was designated a National Historic Landmark District in 1974 and in 2017 a National Reconstruction



¹ Reconstruction Era Monument, South Carolina General Assembly, 122nd Session, 2017-2018, Bill 554.

Monument Site by President Barack Obama. The Penn Center National Historic Landmark District is a pillar of the Reconstruction Era National Monument.



Sam Doyle's "A Dream." Doyle was raised on St. Helena Island. His art is currently featured in the National Portrait Gallery. Doyle's work will be exhibited at the Penn Center York Bailey museum in 2023.

Penn Center is the premier cultural institution committed to preserving the oft-overlooked and under-told story of Reconstruction, Civil Rights, and African American life in the sea islands of South Carolina. This history includes the legacies of the Penn School and the Port Royal experiment; the extraordinary lives of U.S. Senator Robert Smalls and philanthropist Hastings Gantt; and the original contributions Penn Center and the Gullah residents of St. Helena Island have made to US politics, economics, civil rights, and social life from the era of US Reconstruction til now. Today, Penn Center is a portal to the lived histories of the Gullah people on the coastal sea islands of SC and a blueprint for African American liberative policies, programs, and practices. It is also a resource for researchers – novice and senior – seeking inclusive accounts of the social and cultural development of the US.

KEY PRIORITIES

1) ***The ED must articulate a 21st century vision for the Penn Center.*** This vision will connect its history with the present needs and desires of new generations of visitors, researchers, artists, and learners. Establishing a clear and consistent communications strategy with staff, Board of Trustees, funders, and external audiences will be pivotal to articulating this vision.



Penn Center Heritage Days celebration on St. Helena Island.

2) ***Fund development and external partnerships.***

The ED will be adept at fundraising, resource development, and relationship management. They

will serve as the central spokesperson for the Penn Center, and will have previous experience with a wide spectrum of donors.

3) *Operationalize the strategic plan, opportunities assessment, real estate plan, and initiate a programs assessment of existing Penn Center offerings.* In 2022, the Penn Center Board of Trustees initiated an opportunities assessment plan for the York Bailey Museum and the historic campus buildings, respectively. The ED will bring knowledge to bear and will implement key elements of the assessments as a priority.

4) *Review and assess critical staffing needs.* The Penn Center Board of Trustees has earmarked funding for a Director of Exhibits and Interpretation and an onsite property and maintenance manager. The ED will be responsible for assessing the existing organizational structure, identifying additional full-time talent needed to support Penn Center's articulated vision and implementation plans.

LEADERSHIP ASSETS

- The ideal candidate will have deep experience in African American culture, education, community development, and social justice,
- Experience overseeing management of complex, matrixed organizations,
- A history of successful fundraising,
- A deeply relational leadership style, adept at partnering with multiple stakeholders in Beaufort County and beyond,
- A creative bent and a visionary mindset coupled with practicality and execution.

LOCATION



Penn Center is located in the heart of Gullah Geechee land on beautiful St. Helena Island, Beaufort County, SC. St. Helena Island is a picturesque community surrounded by glimmering marshes, nestled beneath the silvery moss-draped limbs of massive live oaks, within a short drive to state-protected Hunting Island Beach. The historic cities of Beaufort and Bluffton are also a short drive away, as well as Hilton Head Island which is a popular coastal get-a-way. Historic Savannah, GA is less than an hour drive away and Historic Charleston, SC is also nearby.

CONTACT

Anise Search is conducting the search for ED of Penn Center. Ayanna Grady-Hunt will lead recruiting for this search. For more information, to submit a resume and cover letter, or to suggest a candidate, contact Ayanna at ayanna@aniseearch.com or Coya White at kacoya@aniseearch.com.

