



Executive Director Opportunity Guide

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About Hotel Metropolitan



The Hotel Metropolitan, located in Paducah, Kentucky's historic Upper Town neighborhood, stands as a powerful symbol of African American resilience, culture, and community. Originally built in 1908 by Maggie Steed, an African American woman determined to offer safe lodging to Black travelers during the Jim Crow era, the hotel quickly became a haven during a time of widespread segregation and discrimination. It was featured in *The Negro Motorist Green Book* and became a key stop on the Chitlin' Circuit, welcoming renowned guests such as Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, Thurgood Marshall, Duke Ellington, the Harlem Globetrotters, and countless others.

More than a hotel, the Metropolitan served as a full-service gathering place where Black musicians, athletes, and civic leaders could rest, strategize, and celebrate during a time when few spaces were safe or welcoming. It was a vital outpost of dignity and hospitality when African Americans were often denied food, lodging, and basic rights while traveling. It created a sense of community that remains today. Though it closed as an operating hotel in 1996, the hotel's cultural legacy endured, thanks in large part to Betty Dobson, aka Ms. Betty, a passionate local historian who led the effort to save the property from demolition.

Ms. Betty's work, supported by the Upper Town Heritage Foundation and local advocates, launched a multi-decade preservation movement that brought the hotel back to life. Restoration began in 1999, uncovering original woodwork, lattice accents, and even a barber's chair, testament to its former role as a true community hub. Today, the Hotel Metropolitan operates as a museum dedicated to African American heritage. Visitors can experience *Ms. Maggie's Memories*, a powerful living history tour led by Ms. Betty herself, in character as founder Maggie Steed.

The museum has received national attention and support, including funding from the National Trust for Historic Preservation's African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund to restore the iconic Purple Room. In 2024, the City of Paducah secured a \$1.34 million grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation on behalf of the Upper Town Heritage Foundation to further invest in the hotel's future. This transformative initiative will expand staffing, enhance programming, and solidify the hotel's role as a cultural landmark and driver of local tourism and education.

The Hotel Metropolitan is poised for a new chapter of impact. As Ms. Betty has said, "The hotel touches people. If you like history, history is here. If you like music, music was here. Race aside, the hotel has an interest for everyone." Each room still echoes with the footsteps of giants, and the spirit of the community that saved it lives on.

Common goals and interests ~ a unique partnership



Through local relationships, leadership from the Hotel Metropolitan, the Upper Town Foundation, and the City of Paducah was invited to explore a funded partnership with The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. As a result of various meetings and co-sponsorship from the city, including an invitation to visit and present the revitalization project by Ms. Betty Dobson and Paducah Mayor George Bray, the project was awarded \$1.34 million from the Humanities in Place initiative. The grant will be used to renovate the Hotel, build capacity, and begin capital improvements. A three-year co-stewardship Agreement was approved in May 2025 to define the public-private partnership between the entities that will receive the pledge from the City for \$250,000 in the current fiscal year, which is also planned to continue through FY2027 at the same level. The funds committed to the upcoming three years total over \$2M, to be used as outlined in the grant and co-stewardship agreements.

The Opportunity: Executive Director



The Hotel Metropolitan seeks a start-up Executive Director as its first paid staff member to lead the organization into its next era. With foundational support from the Mellon Foundation and the City of Paducah, the Hotel is positioned for transformation from a beloved, volunteer-led institution into a professionally staffed and nationally recognized museum. The Executive Director will be uniquely positioned to lead the revitalization of this local cultural destination in partnership with the community and shape the future of one of Paducah's most iconic properties.

The Executive Director will be responsible for overseeing the planning, implementation, and management of all aspects of the revitalization initiative, ensuring that it serves as a sustainable, thriving asset for the community. You will be working closely with government officials, community stakeholders, historical preservation experts, and fundraising teams to breathe new life into this significant cultural asset.



This is a unique opportunity to preserve and enhance the legacy of Ms. Betty Dobson and generations of community leaders while creating new systems, programs, and partnerships. Reporting directly to the Upper Town Foundation Board of Directors, the Executive Director will lead revenue growth and grant strategies, formalize operational and staffing structures, expand public programming, and strengthen relationships with the community and the city. This role combines cultural preservation, nonprofit leadership, and community engagement, offering a unique opportunity for a leader with the insight and sensitivity to honor the past while forging a path forward.

Performance Objectives

Organizational Development

- Transition Hotel Metropolitan from a volunteer-led model to a professionally staffed nonprofit, including hiring, onboarding, and managing additional team members. Build faith and relationships across communities, especially within Paducah's African American and Southside neighborhoods, while sensitively navigating legacy, perception, and historic tensions.
- Operationalize the co-stewardship agreement between the City and Upper Town Heritage Foundation, ensuring clarity of roles and smooth execution of responsibilities.
- Guide the process for the Upper Town Foundation Board to develop and implement measurable objectives, strategies, budgets, funding strategies, and timelines, and determine where infrastructure can be built or contracted to achieve the goals of Hotel Metropolitan.
- Implementing an appropriate structure after initial groundwork is set. The current grant outlines the hiring of a Curator and Administrative Assistant.
- Maintain open communication and collaborative working relationships with the City of Paducah, honoring the public-private partnership and reporting expectations.
- Ensure consistent and accessible public hours and scheduling processes to accommodate tours, walk-ins, and group experiences, balancing volunteer availability and operational realities.
- Establish systems and tools (e.g., donor database/ CRM) to track and grow financial support, ensuring accurate records and strong donor stewardship practices.
- Build a pipeline of support for when Mellon funding sunsets, including the pursuit of new grant opportunities and donor relationships.
- Serve as the face of Hotel Metropolitan, actively engaging with a wide range of stakeholders, including community leaders, local government, donors, and partners in cultural tourism and preservation.
- Represent Hotel Metropolitan in local, regional, and national platforms to build visibility, partnerships, and shared programming opportunities.
- Collaborate with the Board and Ms. Betty, and others to preserve and expand the storytelling legacy of the Hotel, ensuring cultural sensitivity and honoring the lived history.

Financial Management & Stewardship

- Develop an annual operating budget and ensure that the organization operates within budget guidelines. Regularly monitor budgets and cash flow statements.
- Serve as the primary steward of the Mellon Foundation grant, ensuring alignment with the co-stewardship agreement and reporting requirements.
- Collaborate with the City of Paducah and funders to navigate capital improvements and leverage public/private partnerships for long-term facility preservation and financial health.
- Maintain consistent reporting on the organization's financial position and outlook and ensure fiscal responsibility.
- Ensure that programs are mission-driven, in line with strategic plan goals, and support the needs and purpose of the historical preservation and local tourism communities.

Board Development and Philanthropy

- Support and further develop a diverse, skilled, and engaged Board of Directors, in partnership with the Mayor and City, and provide strategic support for governance and development efforts.
- Plan and support the board in their efforts to diversify revenue, including grant writing (public/private/ foundation), donor cultivation, sponsorships, and earned income through programming and events.

Performance Objectives

The Hotel Metropolitan Executive Director must bring a deep appreciation for the Hotel's history and a passion for shaping its future. The ideal candidate is a mission-driven and collaborative leader with experience in nonprofit management, cultural preservation, and/or community development. They are eager to build sustainable systems from the ground up, balancing strategic vision with hands-on execution. Strong candidates will bring the ability to engage and energize a broad range of stakeholders, including funders, volunteers, civic leaders, and grassroots community members, while keeping a focus on fundraising, grant writing, and general operations, all with sound financial operations.

Cultural sensitivity, particularly to African American heritage and the legacy of the Hotel Metropolitan, is essential. The successful candidate will be a relationship builder who can navigate both deep-rooted community dynamics and formal public-private partnerships. They must be comfortable with minimal infrastructure and have the creativity, flexibility, and emotional intelligence to lead with respect, humility, and boldness. Experience in museum management, interpretive planning, or storytelling is a plus, but above all, the first-ever staff Executive Director must be flexible and eager to step into this iconic role, literally and figuratively. The Executive Director will report to the Upper Town Foundation Board of Directors.

Specific Requirements Include:

- A minimum of 3 years of progressive experience in leadership and management, preferably in a mission-inspired nonprofit organization focused on historic preservation, African American history, or community revitalization.
- Proven ability to build strong external relationships with a variety of volunteers, public leadership, partner organizations, and other stakeholders.
- Track record in financial management, developing strategies to successfully increase revenue (earned income, grants, and philanthropy/fundraising), and stewardship.
- Strong analytic and strategic-thinking skills, with a demonstrated ability to create, implement, and monitor complex plans and then translate those plans into goals and concrete strategies.
- Demonstrated passion for cultural preservation, African American history, and community engagement, with a deep appreciation for the legacy and mission of the Hotel Metropolitan.
- Career track record that shows stability with an organization and capacity to develop and nurture relationships culminating in overall success.
- Proven success in building a small and productive work team with an ability to work independently while maintaining close collaboration with stakeholders.

Don't check off every box in the requirements listed above? Please consider applying anyway! Studies have shown that underrepresented communities - such as women, people of color, LGBTQ, people with disabilities, and immigrants - are less likely to apply to jobs unless they meet every single qualification. Hotel Metropolitan is dedicated to building an inclusive, diverse, equitable, and accessible workplace that fosters a sense of belonging, so if you're excited about this role but your experience doesn't align perfectly with every qualification in the job description, we encourage you to still consider applying.



How To Apply



Salary is expected to hire around \$80,000 annually depending on experience. Employee benefits will be offered of covered based on candidate needs.

It is the policy of the City of Paducah to afford equal employment opportunity to all qualified persons regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, age, or sex.

APPLY NOW

To ensure confidential tracking of all applicants, no applications will be accepted via email. ALL INQUIRIES WILL BE HELD IN STRICT CONFIDENCE.

All candidate-submitted materials and credentials will be reviewed for consistency and accuracy. Candidates can expect that KEES will verify employment/academic/background information both in the screening process and for the finalist(s) in a formal background check. KEES utilizes a 4-step screening process, the first of which is the formal Candidate Application. Applications are reviewed by the KEES team and advanced through various stages of inquiry and confirmation. Applications with specific cover letters will be given priority consideration, on a rolling basis, by September 30, 2025. All applicants will be notified of the outcome of the search. Based on the timing of your specific application, you are welcome to reach out for information on the timeline.

This search is being managed by Heather Eddy, President & CEO, and Haley Becerril, Project Manager, of KEES. Questions may be addressed to hbecerril@kees2success.com.

About KEES

KEES (formerly Alford Executive Search) is a woman-owned nonprofit executive search firm dedicated to creating diverse teams with dynamic leadership in the nonprofit and public sectors. We offer a comprehensive range of services, including executive search, leadership development, compensation analysis, interim staffing, and HR support.

Launched in 2013, based on decades of prior work by the Founders, KEES is a leader and noted pioneer in DEI-focused executive search and culture building. KEES is noted for bringing dynamic and under-radar candidates to the table, regularly placing industry veterans and first-time leaders alike. With significant work in DuPage County, and team members residing in the county, KEES is recognized for its regional roots and national reach. Recognized for two years in a row on the Hunt Scanlon Nonprofit Top 65, KEES leaders are sought-after experts in search, leadership development, and often first-time roles. To learn more, visit us at [KEES](https://www.kees2success.com).

More About Paducah, KY



(info adapted from Paducah Convention & Visitor's Bureau, City of Paducah, and Partake in Paducah websites)

Nestled along the confluence of the Ohio and Tennessee Rivers in western Kentucky, Paducah is a vibrant small city of 25,000 residents with deep artistic roots, rich history, and a strong sense of community. Designated as a UNESCO Creative City of Crafts & Folk Art, Paducah offers world-class cultural experiences including the National Quilt Museum, the Carson Center for the Performing Arts, and the historic Market House Theatre. Its charming downtown is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is home to a growing food scene, public art, and a lively calendar of festivals like the Lower Town Arts & Music Festival and Barbecue on the River. From historic preservation to modern creativity, Paducah strikes a rare balance between tradition and innovation.

Unique to Paducah, August 8 is a date on which the community honors that most sacred American ideal: freedom. The annual **Eighth of August Emancipation Celebration** commemorates the Emancipation Proclamation and its guarantee of liberty to enslaved persons throughout the South. Though the reason for the date has been lost to history — whether it marks the date future U.S. President Andrew Johnson freed the enslaved population on his property, the date when enslaved people in Santo Domingo, Haiti, won their independence, or simply the date when news of the Emancipation Proclamation finally reached Kentucky and Tennessee — this annual jubilee draws visitors from across the Midwest and South to gather and enjoy

live entertainment, special events and family reunions. Paducah/McCracken County has the largest August 8th celebration in the country.

Paducah's lifestyle appeals to outdoor enthusiasts, artists, families, and entrepreneurs alike. The city boasts easy access to Kentucky Lake, Land Between the Lakes, and the scenic Greenway Trail. With 135-acre Noble Park, riverfront recreation, and well-maintained public spaces, it's no surprise that Paducah has been named a Tree City USA for over two decades. The cost of living is significantly below the national average, making it an attractive option for remote workers, young professionals, and retirees seeking a high quality of life without the hustle of a big city.

Residents describe Paducah as welcoming, safe, and full of Southern charm. Whether it's through the thriving arts scene, locally owned businesses, excellent schools, or a strong sense of neighborliness, Paducah cultivates a genuine community spirit. Its ideal location, situated between Nashville and St. Louis with air access via Barkley Regional Airport, adds convenience to its list of advantages. As one longtime resident put it, "Paducah has everything you could want and then some - plus the people who want what's best for the community."

To learn more about Paducah including things to do, history, and more, please visit the Paducah Convention and Visitors Bureau: <https://www.paducah.travel/>