

**Executive Director**

Atlanta, Ga

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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The Southeastern African American Farmers Organics Network (SAAFON), a leading organization committed to supporting, training, and convening Black farmers in the US South, is seeking nominations and applications for a new Executive Director.

In 2006, Founder Cynthia Hayes saw the capacity and potential of 20 Black farmers who were empowered to develop and sell organic produce, maintain ownership of their own land, and contribute to systems change on behalf of all Black farmers. Together with Owusu Bandele, she founded SAAFON. Today SAAFON serves over 65 member farmers (those who produce fruits and vegetables, livestock, agricultural tourist attractions, timber, and nonprofit farms) and organizations across the Southeast United States. The new Executive Director will honor Cynthia Hayes' vision while leading SAAFON into a new chapter of impact and connection.

In partnership with the board, the Executive Director will spearhead and execute a new strategic plan that balances SAAFON's commitment to engaging and empowering Black farmers with the ongoing need to drive systems change for the health, prosperity and liberation of all Black Americans. The ED will lead a talented regional staff of organizers, oversee all business operations in the Atlanta-based office, deepen and maintain SAAFON's relationships with farmers across the Southeast, nurture existing and new funding relationships, and curate an internal culture that honors ancestral traditions and intergenerational leadership, while charting SAAFON's path forward as a farmer-led, farmer centric organization.

Success in this role depends upon the new Executive Director's ability to operationalize SAAFON's values through structure, systems, and processes while also connecting with and empowering SAAFON's membership. The role calls for a servant leader who understands the unique context, demands, and workflow of agrarian lifestyles and businesses. As the senior leader, the ED will need to be responsive, eager to cultivate new relationships, inspired to empower staff to test new ideas, and able to mentor and coach them on mastering work at the intersection of movement building and exemplary fiscal, operational, and performance management.

The ideal candidate will be a humble servant leader who is, first and foremost, committed and passionate about Black culture, history and farming. The ED may have some farming experience, but will certainly have networks that includes farmers, landowners, activists, and agricultural organizers across the US South. This means that the ideal candidate will be fluent in the operations and management of a nonprofit as well as the operations and management of agrarian

organizations. They will be responsive to the needs, schedules and cultures of agrarian business owners and organizers, and able to capture those needs to inform the programming for SAAFON. The new ED will have significant agricultural policy expertise, and experience managing the business operations of small to medium-sized nonprofit organizations.

The ideal candidate will have experience working in an environment that honors African and Black American cultural traditions, and empowering a team through collaboration, unity, kindness, and humor. They will be a strong interpersonal communicator who is also strategic, flexible, innovative, and emotionally intelligent, with experience successfully growing an organization, and the proven ability to manage a virtual and/or regional team.

This search is being conducted in partnership with the national search firm, [NPAG](#). Application instructions can be found at the end of this document.

## **SAAFON OVERVIEW**

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SAAFON's Founder Cynthia Hayes learned of her family's 80-year history of tobacco farming during summer excursions to New Liberty, Kentucky. There she worked alongside her grandmother in the family garden, eating tomatoes off the vine, riding a tractor and learning the processes and labor involved in a successful tobacco crop. She carried that love and respect for farmers into her founding and leadership of SAAFON in 2006.

SAAFON's mission is to further the liberation and empowerment of Black communities through farming, food, and land strategies. They advance this mission by working to ensure the economic viability and prosperity of Black farmers who are committed to ecologically sustainable production practices; advocating for an equitable and just food and farm system; and promoting the links among Black farming, Black culture, and Black history.

Their 3-tiered approach is farmer-led and farmer centric:

**Work with farmers** to understand their individual needs and empower them to take leadership in a collaborative process of identifying and defining solutions to enhance their work.

**Activate Connections** among farmers in the network in order to build collective power and address issues that affect groups of farmers, while supporting the creation of group-led initiatives.

**Drive Systems Change & Movement Building** by doing work at the food system level and partnering with other organizations to create impact.

For more information on the SAAFON's initiatives, please visit: [www.SAAFON.org](http://www.SAAFON.org).

## OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FACING THE NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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The next Executive Director joins SAAFON during a time of financial growth and well-developed regional recognition and awareness. Joining a talented and passionate team, the new ED can expect to engage in the following opportunities and challenges:

**Spearhead and execute a new strategic plan.** SAAFON is poised to enter a new chapter that will require a leader to institute structure, routine and systems that ensure operational stability while also deepening relationships with its growing membership. In partnership with the Board, the new ED will design a strategy that balances both priorities. Development of a new strategic plan will require close collaboration with the board and staff, and ongoing interaction and learning from the membership, policymakers and partners. The plan will include building fundraising relationships with regional partners, integrating innovative ideas and leading policy initiatives, and refining communication channels and strategies to better connect with farmers across the Southeast. The new ED will also be responsible for evaluating SAAFON's current status with its fiscal sponsor, as well as analyzing the pros and cons of transitioning to independent 501©3 status.

**Oversee operations of a flexible, regional work environment.** The Executive Director will manage the operational staff in Atlanta and the regional staff in Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Mississippi. Leading with trust, respect and collaboration, the new ED will need to build rapport with each staff member, learn their areas of expertise, understand the priorities of each role, and empower them to take ownership of the challenges and opportunities they face. While recognizing unique talents, backgrounds and expertise of each team member, they will need to designate systems to ensure accountability, open communication and consistent, reliable workflow across the region. These systems may include, but are not limited to, innovative ways to engage partners and membership virtually and in person, myriad internal communication channels, regular meeting schedules, one-on-one check ins, regional meetings, staff retreats and more.

**Cultivate new and existing relationships with SAAFON's membership.** Working in close partnership with State Coordinators, the ED will articulate and operationalize a vision for deepening SAAFON's relationship with its existing membership, defining the norms and standards of membership, and building the membership beyond Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Mississippi to include states across the Southeast. This will require the ED to travel across the US South and partner with the State Coordinators as they engage with farmers and organizers directly, listening to their needs and ideas, critically analyzing trends and barriers to success.

**Cultivate SAAFON's internal culture.** As SAAFON embarks on the next chapter in its development the new Executive Director will need to be a healing agent who understands how to lead a team and organization that has experienced significant leadership transitions. In order to build a strong working rapport with the board, State Coordinators, membership and staff the ED must establish a culture of trust, transparency, unity and collaborative leadership. More specifically, the new ED will need to model interpersonal communication that invites staff members to share their expertise as well as their ideas about programming and membership engagement. The ED will also have to embody management practices that rely on the regional structure of SAAFON, the unique expertise

of the staff and the need for stable, effective business practices. The new ED should be an active, respectful listener and coach who can model the collection, synthesis and application of diverse ideas into the SAAFON programming.

**Support ongoing Board development and governance.** The new ED should proactively engage with current and prospective board members, leveraging an experienced set of advisors to promote the SAAFON's programmatic efforts. Collaborate with the Board Chair on board development, role development and planning. The ED will need to manage board logistics and facilitate practices that promote effective governance principles and sustainable functioning.

## **QUALIFICATIONS OF THE IDEAL CANDIDATE**

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While no one candidate will embody all the qualifications enumerated below, the ideal candidate will possess many of the following professional and personal abilities, attributes, and experiences:

- At least 5 years of leadership and management experience of community-based activist and/or organizing teams, and a track record of effectively leading regional and/or national nonprofit organizations;
- Demonstrated experience as a strategic leader who can translate vision into action and drive enthusiasm for new ideas, innovative partnerships and increased impact;
- Demonstrated experience in fiscal management. Experience working collaboratively to refine and enhance budgeting practices, drive financial planning, and manage institutional financial changes;
- Experience partnering with the board, development directors and/or staff as they seek out and cultivate funding relationships. This will include significant expertise proposing grant relationships that promote community partnerships, regional programming, and cross sector alignment;
- Deep, nuanced and technical understanding of farming, agrarian lifestyles, agricultural policy, organic production policies and certifications, deep south production trends, and the challenges facing Black organic farmers, Black landowners and experienced and novice farmers across the US South;
- A leadership and management style that reflects African and African American values including but not limited to: respect, transparency, strong interpersonal communication, unity, and accountability; and supports a regional staff with diverse backgrounds;
- Excellence in organizational management with the ability to coach staff, manage, and develop collaborative, high-performing teams, and set and achieve strategic objectives;
- Past success working with an active Board of Directors and the ability to grow and cultivate board member relationships while reallocating board functions to senior leadership;
- Excellence in authentic written and verbal storytelling skills; a persuasive and passionate communicator with excellent interpersonal and multidisciplinary project skills;

- Flexible, compassionate and humble, with an ability to share credit and spotlight others' contributions.

## **SALARY AND COMPENSATION**

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Salary will be commensurate with experience and benchmarked to the scale of the organization.

## **TO APPLY**

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SAAFON is conducting this search with assistance from Tamar Datan and Erica Nicole Griffin of the national search firm, [NPAG](#). Questions, applications including your resume (in Word format) and a cover letter describing your interest, qualifications, and where you learned of the position should be sent to: [SAAFON-ED@nonprofitprofessionals.com](mailto:SAAFON-ED@nonprofitprofessionals.com) In order to expedite the internal sorting and reviewing process, please type your name (Last, First) as the only contents in the subject line of your e-mail.

**SAAFON is an equal opportunity employer and proudly values diversity.**