



Director of Advocacy and Policy

Location: Remote/Home Office in Mississippi

ABOUT MELA

The Mississippi Early Learning Alliance (MELA) envisions a future where all children in Mississippi have equitable access to high quality early education opportunities, and where the early care and education system works better for everyone: families, employers, early childhood professionals, and, most importantly, our children. MELA exists to build and leverage a powerful coalition of Mississippi professionals, advocates, and community members to achieve common goals. This coalition is called Forum for the Future. Together, we work to clear a path for collaborative policy design, shared advocacy, and innovative programs to create an early care and education system that centers equity, affordability, and quality.

Through Forum for the Future, MELA brings leaders and community influencers together to share knowledge, develop action plans, and advocate for Mississippi's children. We believe the most impactful change can happen when decision-makers engage with communities, understand the complexities that affect children's lives, and work together to create solutions. No single group of people, programs, or collection of programs working in isolation can tackle the barriers that prevent children from meeting readiness benchmarks as they enter school. MELA is committed to engaging with partners across education, healthcare, government, community groups, and families. MELA stands prepared to act to inform decisions that will impact Mississippi's children.

The Role

Reporting to the Executive Director, the Director of Policy and Advocacy will play a pivotal role in the Forum for the Future coalition's work over the next 3 to 7 years. The coalition is made up of over 50 members and is working toward a state-of-the-art Mississippi childcare system by 2030. The Director will help transform coalition recommendations into tangible policy proposals. They will also ensure that our work is rooted in the experiences of children, families, and early care and education providers in Mississippi, and will support and engage Mississippians in grassroots advocacy efforts in support of young children.

Grassroots Community Advocacy Efforts (40%)

- Coordinate biannual or annual childcare and family fact-finding focus groups;
- Coordinate and execute annual Capitol Day events;
- Plan and execute advocacy campaigns that motivate Mississippi citizens to speak to elected officials about important early care and education issues;
- Ensure MELA initiatives and policies are aligned to grassroots experiences, data, and community experience through research and field-testing;
- Develop, recruit, and support a volunteer advocacy network to engage in state advocacy to advance the coalition's policy goals;
- Collaborate with MELA team to provide workshops, trainings, and information sessions;

- Attend relevant community meetings;
- Inform and educate opinion leaders about childcare issues and opportunities aligned to Forum for the Future's work.

Public Affairs and Policy (40%)

- Research and educate the team and coalition on policies aligned to organizational goals;
- Build relationships with Mississippi elected officials, share information, and answer questions about important early care and education issues;
- Track data, legislation, and regulation changes aligned with policy priorities and outcomes;
- Identify policy issues and needs through meetings with childcare and early childhood community members and Forum for the Future working groups;
- Advocate for data-informed decisions to impact change;
- Develop and write policy priorities and strategy along with other staff and coalition members;
- Design and engage partners to launch awareness campaigns aligned to organizational outcomes.

Other Responsibilities (20%)

- Participate in team and coalition meetings.
- Work as a team player and close collaborator with other MELA members.
- Implement MELA's core values and enhance MELA's efforts to become a more equitable and inclusive organization/community partner.
- Develop own professional development plan and attend trainings, meetings, and conferences aligned to plan.
- Other related duties as assigned by ED.
- Support the execution of coalition meetings.

Core Skills/Competencies:

- **Be a passionate relationship builder.** You thrive when you are engaging people and learning about their lives and experiences. You seek out opportunities to foster trust, connections and opportunities to work together between partners. People feel comfortable with you and share openly about their experiences or ideas.
- **Be an outstanding communicator.** You are an excellent writer with a clear and compelling voice, a knack for finding simplicity in complexity, and good instincts for using stories to amplify ideas. You think critically about the experiences of the range of people involved in our work—from families and educators to policymakers and system decision-makers—and have ideas for how to reach those people.
- **Be a strong strategic thinker.** You are a natural problem-solver who can efficiently assess the big picture, analyze the root causes, and define new ways forward. You are intellectually curious and thrive on listening to partners and members of the community to gain insight and develop grassroots solutions and policy ideas. You are able to develop innovative solutions within a larger strategic vision.
- **Be dedicated to equity.** You think about and are attuned to the perspectives and concerns of your audiences. You are dedicated to creating and promoting equity-centered recommendations and find ways to lift the voices and experiences of the communities in which we work to the forefront of conversations.

- **Model cross-cultural agility.** Authentic self-reflection, self-awareness, and high emotional intelligence are central to who you are, and you utilize these skills to shape a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion. You have an adept cultural understanding of yourself and use your understanding of yourself and others to build trusting relationships colleagues and external contacts.
- **Love data and doing research.** You enjoy analyzing data to drive policy solutions and decision-making. You can present findings and recommendations in a clear, actionable way to a variety of audiences.
- **Ability to create and follow clear, realistic project plans and timelines.** This position requires strong project management and organizational skills, helping you manage multiple workstreams with attention to detail.

Preferred Qualifications and Experience

- Political or issue advocacy or community organizing campaign experience and/or degree in law, public policy, political science, public health, public affairs, educational leadership, social science or related field;
- Current contacts within the state legislature and/or with potential partners and collaborators in Mississippi;
- Understanding of the legislative, regulatory, and budget processes in Mississippi;
- Knowledge of early childhood development/education and specifically, an passion for Mississippi Early Learning Alliance focus areas.

Work Expectations

The Director is expected to work 40 hours per week every week, Monday through Friday, with the exception of holidays. Office hours are typically 8-5, but the Director may set hours outside of this schedule with the approval of the Executive Director. Standard work hours (a regular schedule each week) are required.

This position requires frequent statewide travel (30-40%) and during the legislative session will be expected to spend a great deal of time in Jackson. As such, a valid driver's license is necessary and proximity to the state capitol is preferred. This position requires a virtual office in any Mississippi location set by the Director. The Director is expected to work from the assigned office location during all scheduled work hours unless the Director is required to travel or the Executive Director has granted permission to work elsewhere.

Salary

Starting salary for this position will range from \$70,000 - \$78,000 commensurate with candidate experience and credentials.

Benefits

The Director will be eligible for health insurance and retirement benefits. Travel reimbursement for work-related travel is offered to all employees, but home-to-work travel is not reimbursed.

Paid Time Off

MELA offers all employees office holidays (approximately 11 days per year) as well as paid time off based on the number of years an employee has worked for MELA. New employees are entitled to 120 hours per year in accordance with the adopted paid time off policy.

To apply for this position, send a short email including your resume and why you are interested in the role to hr@msearlylearning.org