

Executive Director

play:groundNYC

New York, NY

Salary: \$90,000

History

play:groundNYC was established in New York City by a group of advocates, educators and artists inspired by playwork and its philosophy of self-directed play for youth. Following a series of pop-ups across the city, the founding members centralized their activities around The Yard on Governors Island, New York City's only adventure playground. Incorporated as a non-profit organization in 2016, the organization is stewarded by a Board of Trustees.

Since its establishment, play:groundNYC has welcomed thousands of children across the city and at The Yard on Governors Island. Young people have filled the grounds with their energy, imagination, exploration, dreams and emotions; they have grown up alongside play:groundNYC. Its operations are supported by a non-profit organizational structure, stewarded by a Board of Trustees.

Programming

What is playwork?

Playwork is an approach to working with children that removes their barriers to play. Trained playworkers support all kinds of play through active engagement and awareness. They assess the benefits and risks involved in the play, on physical, social and emotional levels. They do not interrupt, offer unsolicited advice and suggestions, or break the flow of play. You can learn more about our approach to playwork [here](#).

What is an adventure playground? What is The Yard?

An adventure playground is a place dedicated to play, where young people have ownership over how the space is built, altered, and enhanced. It might look like a junkyard; it is filled with materials, usually removed from the waste stream, over which children have complete control. An adventure playground is a child-led zone, where young people can play, supported by trained playworkers.

play:groundNYC launched The Yard, its flagship location on Governors Island, and New York City's only adventure playground, in 2016. The first adventure playground opened outside Copenhagen in the early 1940s, and the concept eventually caught on in other countries, including the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, Canada, Australia, and the United States. New York City had several adventure playgrounds during the 1970s. The first adventure playground in the USA opened in Minneapolis in 1949, and inspired our location's name.

What programs do you offer?

The Yard is open every weekend, from April to November, for free. We support play during the week, by providing programs after school and welcoming field trips from schools based all around NYC. In the summer, and for most of the public school closures, we offer camp programs on Governors Island. Since its founding, The Yard has welcomed more than 50,000 young people.

play:groundNYC works in neighborhoods across NYC to bring adventure play to communities, public spaces and open streets by partnering with local organizations to facilitate play pop-up events. We provide professional development for educators and caregivers, both at The Yard and through our annual playwork training workshops. We develop school programming, play residencies and we are committed to training a new generation of playworkers.

The Position

play:groundNYC is seeking a visionary, community-oriented Executive Director who is deeply passionate about the power of play and its impact on child development and community well-being. This is a unique opportunity for a highly relational and collaborative leader who thrives in a flat organizational structure and values inclusivity and shared decision-making. The ideal candidate will be deeply committed to young people's play, and the role of play in community development and social justice, bringing experience in nonprofit management, fundraising, and program development.

The Executive Director will drive the organization's strategic vision, with a focus on fundraising to ensure financial sustainability and growth. They will be a hands-on and resourceful leader, providing fiscal oversight to a \$350K budget. With a collaborative leadership style, they will work closely with a team of 12-15 staff and the Board of Directors to uphold a supportive and inclusive environment where everyone's voices are heard and valued.

Fundraising & Strategic Vision

- Provide visionary leadership to guide play:groundNYC through its next phase of growth, with an emphasis on increasing funding support.
- Drive the implementation of the 5-year strategic plan, managing long-term planning and ensuring alignment with play:groundNYC's core mission and values.
- Actively seek, identify, and secure new funding opportunities to support play:groundNYC's programming and infrastructure. This includes grant writing and donor cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship.



Operational Leadership

- Maintain strategic oversight of daily operations, ensuring the organization functions efficiently year-round.
- Provide direct supervision to the Head Playworker and indirect supervision to 12-15 Playworkers, supporting their development and ensuring they have the resources needed to succeed in their roles.
- Provide fiscal oversight of the operating budget, balancing financial sustainability with programmatic goals.
- Implement systems and processes needed to maximize efficiency in programming, ensuring the organization has the necessary resources to run during peak and off-peak seasons.

Community Relations

- Build and maintain relationships with key stakeholders, including partner organizations, government agencies, and local businesses connected to play:groundNYC programming in order to foster support and collaboration.
- In partnership with the Board, support the expansion of play:groundNYC programming to be more accessible to communities in need; ensure that expansion efforts are aligned with local needs and are fully integrated and valued by the community.
- Serve as a passionate spokesperson and advocate of play:groundNYC, representing the organization at external events and elevating its profile and mission.

THE IDEAL CANDIDATE

The ideal candidate for the Executive Director position possesses the following key competencies:

Strategic Mindset	Financial Acumen	Drives Vision & Purpose
Seeing ahead to future possibilities and translating them into breakthrough strategies.	Interpreting and applying understanding of key financial indicators to make better decisions.	Painting a compelling picture of the vision and strategy that motivates others to action.
Ensures Accountability	Instills Trust	Communicates Effectively
Holding self and others accountable to meet commitments.	Gaining the confidence and trust of others through honesty, integrity, and authenticity.	Developing and delivering multi-mode communications that convey a clear understanding of the unique needs of different audiences.

Additional Qualifications

- Must have a genuine passion and interest in young people's play; relevant experience in child development, community development, sustainability, social justice, and/or arts & culture is preferred.
- Experience in nonprofit organization management is strongly desired.
- Demonstrated experience leading a fundraising strategy and comfort engaging with funders including, but not limited to, individual donors and foundations.
- Strong financial acumen and a track record of providing fiscal oversight for a program and/or organization; experience developing and managing budgets.
- The ability to think strategically and prioritize the organization's mission and objectives, integrating them into operational plans.
- Cultural competency and a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion: the ability to engage with and understand the unique needs and perspectives of different marginalized groups, ensuring inclusivity in all initiatives.
- Proven track record in overseeing organizational operations, including strategic planning, resource allocation, and process optimization, to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in achieving mission-driven goals.
- Proven ability to cultivate and sustain strong relationships with staff and board members, working effectively across all levels of the organization; a commitment to fostering a culture of transparency, integrity, open communication, and shared decision-making.
- Ability to make informed decisions in uncertain situations, demonstrating flexibility and resilience in navigating challenges and changing circumstances.

WHO WE ARE

Work Environment

The culture at play:groundNYC is one that encourages innovation in a resourceful and sustainable manner. The organization values an experiential approach to play, with a strong emphasis on providing young people with unstructured, creative play opportunities. The team operates with a high level of passion and dedication, fostering a supportive and enthusiastic environment. In addition, they wear many hats, having the opportunity to explore different roles and gain skill sets they might not otherwise gain if they were at a larger organization.

Work Schedule

This position offers a flexible schedule that is not confined to a standard 9-5 workday, with the understanding that hours may vary based on organizational needs and events.

Our Values

play:groundNYC is dedicated to producing spaces for young people to feel safe in taking emotional, physical, and social risks in their play. All young people, regardless of their race, gender, age, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, abilities or disabilities, deserve access to spaces where they can fully engage in play. As an organization we are committed to promoting an inclusive environment, where everyone - young people and staff alike - can thrive and be their most authentic selves.

COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

Salary

\$90,000

Benefits

- Medical
- Three weeks PTO (*negotiable as needed)
- Ten days sick leave
- Professional Development

TIMELINE AND NEXT STEPS

If you are interested in this position, [please click here](#). All applicants will receive an email confirming receipt of their application.

We encourage candidates of all backgrounds to apply even if you do not meet all of the qualifications outlined above. If you are selected to move forward for an initial screening call, we expect you to hear from us by Late October.

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[Submit an application](#)