



ACLS Leading Edge Fellowship 2025

Position Title	Public Memory and Participatory Design Specialist
Organization	Highlander Research and Education Center
Location	South Cumberland Plateau Region, TN
Stipend	\$72,000 in the first year, \$74,000 in the second year
Benefits	Access to employer health insurance. Professional development funds and relocation funds provided by ACLS.
Start Date	September 2025

ORGANIZATION DESCRIPTION

For over 90 years, [Highlander Research and Education Center](#) has centered the experiences of directly-impacted people in our region, knowing that together, we have the solutions to address the challenges we face in our communities and to build more just, equitable, and sustainable systems and structures. Highlander's work catalyzes some of the deepest victories for social change in the US, particularly impacting the South and Appalachia. Our network-building and organizing efforts have advanced the labor movements of the 1930s and 40s, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s, and environmental, economic, and racial justice organizing across decades. The South is home to some of the nation's most substantial movements and interconnected leaders, and Highlander serves as a regional catalyst, movement school, and home for those most threatened by inequities and oppression. Our ongoing work in cultural preservation, public memory, and participatory design continues to uplift Appalachian and Southern histories, making these legacies accessible and relevant to current and future social justice efforts.

POSITION DESCRIPTION

The Public Memory and Participatory Design Specialist will collaborate with Highlander's Land and Place team on a variety of public memory, movement history, and community informed design projects focused on reclaiming and revitalizing Highlander's historic sites. Using participatory design techniques and popular education methods, the Specialist will engage local residents, Labor and Civil Rights Movement Elders, movement historians and artists to ensure their authentic voices, vision and wisdom shape the development of Highlander's reclaimed original site in the South Cumberland Plateau region of Eastern Tennessee. Working with stakeholders and experts across multiple fields and in partnership with [MASS Design](#), the Specialist will shape and support a design process to ensure Highlander's reclaimed campus addresses local community needs and honors Highlander's history and legacy in social justice movements.

The Specialist will develop practical skills in outreach, historic interpretation and public memory, museum planning and curating, community led participatory research, economic development, and community design, particularly related to Black/African-American Studies and the region. This role is ideal for someone passionate about participatory design, social movement history, community based leadership development, and advancing social justice through the intersection of history and community-led innovation. While much of the relationship building, research and curriculum design can be done remotely, the Design Specialist will need to travel for frequent site visits (approximately 8-10/quarter) and coordinate in person focus group meetings approximately twice per quarter. The fellowship tenure is 24 consecutive months, with an expected time commitment of approximately 37.5 hours per week.

Responsibilities and tasks:

- Provide programmatic, facilitation and research support in a multifaceted participatory design process for our newly acquired Grundy Campus in partnership with [MASS Design](#). [25%]
- Engage, convene, develop popular education curriculum for and co-facilitate visioning sessions for approximately two of the following stakeholder groups: local grassroots community members,

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movement historians, civil rights and labor elders, seasoned organizers, narrative strategists, arts, music and culture experts, Highlander staff and board. [25%]

- Identify stories, historical context and themes pertinent to Highlander's legacy and gather supporting research and documentation. [10%]
- Identify and/or develop educational materials on topics such as Highlander's role in the Civil Rights, Black Freedom, and Labor Movements, the use of music and culture to fortify movements in the region, community-led campaigns and participatory democracy principles. [10%]
- Gather best practices research in community driven economic development and sustainable tourism models. [10%]
- Collaborate with the Land and Place team to explore and document sustainable land use strategies and community-driven land ownership models. [5%]
- Engage with local communities and additional stakeholder groups (in person) through workshops, feedback sessions, and outreach to strengthen community ties. [15%]

Qualifications:

- PhD in any field of the humanities or interpretive social sciences. Read more about eligible fields [here](#).
- Demonstrated experience or strong interest in public memory work, particularly in documenting or preserving community-based histories and cultural heritage.
- Experience in or a deep desire to learn grassroots and transformative organizing methods.
- Ability to create accessible educational materials, including curriculum and storytelling content that resonates with diverse audiences.
- Project management skills, including experience organizing and tracking project progress, collaborating with partners, and meeting deadlines.
- Strong written and verbal communication skills, especially the ability to translate complex ideas into clear, impactful narratives.
- Valid driver's license and use of personal vehicle for frequent site visits (8-10 visits per quarter) across the South Cumberland Plateau region. Mileage/travel expenses will be reimbursed.

Preferred:

- Background in nonprofit, political, or community organizations.
- Teaching and/or facilitation experience (ideally virtually and in-person).
- Lived experience or familiarity with Appalachian or Southern history, organizing traditions, and/or rural community dynamics.
- Experience with participatory design or community-centered approaches to project development.

APPLICATIONS

- Information on the Leading Edge Fellowship Program: <https://www.acls.org/Competitions-and-Deadlines/Leading-Edge-Fellowships>
- All applications must be submitted through the ACLS Online Fellowship Application System (ofa.acls.org)
- Application deadline: 9 PM EDT, March 12, 2025.

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