



Political Director Job Announcement

Overview

Common Defense is looking for a strategic, driven, and values-aligned leader who would be energized by the opportunity to join our team and contribute their talents to building progressive power.

Common Defense is the country's largest veteran-led grassroots organization committed to engaging, organizing, training and mobilizing veterans to promote progressive values and elect accountable leaders. We are a working-class movement that seeks to elevate the leadership of veterans in service to building economic security, liberty, and justice for all Americans. Our membership, and the messengers whose voices we elevate, truly embody the multi-racial, multi-generational, LGBTQIA-inclusive working class, reflecting the democracy we want to build. We are in this together, working collaboratively to realize our vision for a peaceful and prosperous democracy across intersecting issue areas: Climate Change; Economic Justice; Foreign Policy; Health Care; Racial Justice; Gender Justice; and Voting Rights.

The Political Director leads the government affairs and partnerships efforts of Common Defense, with the overall goal of developing an evolving legislative and policy platform, overseeing the process of endorsing a strategic slate of candidates, and steering the organization through a dynamic political landscape in a way that maximizes Common Defense's impact and embodies our progressive values.

At Common Defense, we are dedicated to creating a workplace that is reflective of our values; our team is majority veterans and reflects the diversity of our movement. [Our team](#) is multi-talented, hyper-committed, nimble, and collaborative; working together, we have had major wins and share in a bold vision for what's possible through an intersectional approach. We have built an incredible [board of directors](#) and network of advisors, reflective of our diversity, and energized to serve as a source of real support, leadership, and expertise for our community. We have recently developed a new strategic plan for the next stage of our work and are excited to welcome a new Political Director who will bring their leadership and talents to our mission.

You can learn more about who we are and our work via this [short video](#) and on [our website](#).

About Our Work

The political director will bring their expertise to Common Defense to increase the opportunities for progressive veterans to get their voices heard, especially in the policy-making process. We are rapidly growing in strength and in numbers. With over 240,000 members and counting, and a growing cadre of more than 1,600 highly-engaged veteran volunteers, we work through three main strategies:

Changing the narrative

“The work you do is directly transforming our public imagination” Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

At Common Defense, we are committed to transforming perceptions of veterans that attempt to limit our potential as progressive leaders and deny the strength of our diversity. Our organizing work is carried out by a diverse group of volunteer leaders, whose visibility helps dispel the false narrative that veterans are predominantly conservative, white men. What we have accomplished with our members thus far is a testament to the power of progressive veteran leadership.

Advocating for just policies

“As a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, I have seen up close how incredibly impactful Common Defense has been [...] to create responsible policy that puts diplomacy and human rights first” Sen. Elizabeth Warren

We believe that those who are most directly impacted by U.S. foreign policy should have leadership in shaping it. We are working to build power with elected officials who honor the value that veterans bring to the political process. We are also holding those accountable who attempt to speak for us instead of with us. For far too long, conservative politicians have exploited veterans as political props, extolling values of service, while at the same time making policies that directly harm us, claiming patriotism as theirs alone, while disenfranchising those who have put their lives on the line for this country. We have a vision for authentic freedom that includes prosperity for all and are using it to shape a progressive policy agenda.

Developing leaders

“I think what’s more important is that veterans had experiences in the military that gave them a deep sense of ownership and citizenship, to then come home and fight for their own communities and make things better for the next generation,” Jose Vasquez, Executive Director, Common Defense

Our flagship program, the Veterans Organizing Institute, is a progressive training program and alumni network, with a mission to develop a generation of powerful veteran leaders. We hold multiple training retreats each year where we teach cohorts of 30-40

veterans from around the country the skills to be grassroots organizers within their community, helping them to understand the unique role of former service members in past and current social justice efforts.

Common Defense is proud of what we've accomplished and eager to expand our impact going forward. Here are some examples of areas where we're building momentum:

Ending the Forever Wars - Ending the "Forever War" in Afghanistan, through a [multi-year](#) inside-outside [strategic lobbying](#) and organizing campaign that reshaped the center of gravity in U.S. foreign policy, broke a bipartisan pro-war consensus in Congress and replaced it with a new "ending forever wars" consensus in the Democratic party. The policies and messaging advanced by Common Defense have become reflected in the [2020 Democratic Party platform](#), the campaigns of competitors for the role of chair of the Foreign Affairs committee in Congress, and one of the President of the United States' most significant decisions of his first year in office that will define his legacy on foreign policy. The incumbent Political Director was recognized as one of the "most influential people in Washington" on foreign policy by Washingtonian magazine as a result.

Voting Rights and Democracy - Veterans are effective and trusted messengers on many issues, but Common Defense members have particular credibility when advocating for the democratic rights we swore to uphold and risked our lives to defend. Additionally, the Republicans and moderate Democrats needed to win the passage of this bill are very responsive to the veteran voice. As we have seen with our advocacy and organizing efforts around [impeachment](#) and voting rights in Georgia, mobilizing veterans has an exponentially powerful effect when it matters most. Throughout 2021, we mobilized members in Georgia, North Carolina, Texas, Arizona, and Florida to fight back against the wave of state anti-voter bills. [Secure Democracy](#) recently credited Common Defense veterans for saving no-excuse absentee voting from being in Georgia, organizing work exemplified in this [Atlanta Journal-Constitution Op-Ed](#).

Climate Justice - Veteran organizers have unique potential to act as much-needed bridges between movements and organizations that too often exist in their own silos. As we have with other issue-based campaigns, Common Defense plans to recruit and train veteran leaders to draw on their leadership skills, strategic analysis capacity, and credibility of personal experience to make meaningful connections between the climate crisis and other issue spaces (like jobs and infrastructure, foreign policy, racial justice, and immigration). In addition to our independent advocacy work, we believe that building intentional and strategic relationships between our own organization and diverse movement spaces can build a stronger and more powerful alignment of progressive political forces. This "bridging" is key to our organizational theory of change, and we believe the climate crisis is the perfect issue to further operationalize this approach to movement-building.

While Common Defense has not yet launched a permanent climate-focused advocacy campaign, our members have made public calls for leaders to act on climate change. See [Recent Op-Ed by Common Defense member Jim Sandoe](#) and Common Defense member

[US Navy Vet Jon Nguyen's speech at the State of the Youth Address](#) calling for an end to the endless wars and supporting the establishment of a Civilian Climate Corps.

Political Director Position Details

The Political Director will be a member of the Common Defense's leadership team, working in close partnership with the Executive Director, to build upon the strength of our highly-engaged network and the caliber of our recent work which has positioned Common Defense to expand and deepen our impact.

The Political Director leads the government affairs and partnerships efforts of Common Defense, with the overall goal of developing an evolving legislative and policy platform, overseeing the process of endorsing a strategic slate of candidates, and steering the organization through a dynamic political landscape in a way that maximizes Common Defense's impact and embodies our progressive values.

The Political Director will collaborate closely with the Organizing Director and Communications Director to develop and implement strategic campaigns and build sustainable, independent political power for our membership.

The Political Director will be responsible for cultivating existing and establishing new relationships with elected officials and their staffs, labor union political directors, other organization's leadership and key policymakers.

A strong candidate will have experience managing staff, briefing stakeholders, working with coalitions of ally organizations and candidates for office. They will have extensive knowledge of the federal legislative process, electoral campaigns, military and veterans' affairs, and levers for influencing the executive branch.

Supervision and team members:

- Reports to the Executive Director.
- Serves on the Leadership Team of senior level Directors for the purpose of advising the Executive Director on organizational management.
- Collaborates closely with the Organizing Director and Communications Director on campaigns.
- Collaborates closely with the Development Director to build partnerships with grantmakers and major donors, attending donor meetings and briefings when needed.
- Supervises and manages all Political Department staff, consultants, and contractors.
- Takes a project-based leadership role, supporting staff and members in the context of lobbying and advocacy events (e.g. DC lobby trips), or other specific time-limited events as directed by the Executive Director.

Primary Duties:

Political Leadership

The Political Director holds the primary responsibility advocating for Common Defense's issue priorities with elected officials and the leadership of other organizations and external stakeholders. Within the scope of issue priorities determined by the board, staff, and membership of Common Defense, the Political Director will flesh out a concrete policy platform for the organization on an ongoing basis, encompassing:

- Deciding to organizationally support or oppose specific legislative or policy initiatives related to Common Defense's issue priorities.
- Crafting positions on current events to inform public statements crafted by the Communications Director and disseminated by Common Defense spokespeople.
- Determining whether to join multi-organizational letters or coalitions, and when to lead such initiatives ourselves.
- Provide guidance and direction to the member-led Common Defense electoral committee, stewarding them through a strategic candidate endorsement process, including making recommendations to the membership in line with Common Defense's overall strategy, partnerships, and issue priorities.
- Support member political education in collaboration with the Organizing Director and Training Director.

Partnerships

The Political Director holds the primary responsibility for building, sustaining, prioritizing, and tracking political partnerships with aligned organizations, policy experts, and elected officials, encompassing:

- Identifying organizations, individuals, and policymakers who represent the most important potential allies for achieving success in Common Defense campaigns. Assisted by the Government Affairs Coordinator, and other staff as needed, intentionally building and sustaining mutually beneficial relationships of trust and respect between Common Defense and these allies.
- Identifying key targets for pressure, including elected officials, and seeking to establish and sustain relationships of accountability grounded in Common Defense's core principle of building "power, not patronage" between them and the organization.
- Ensuring that partnerships held across the team are being prioritized according to the campaign strategy, information is being shared, critical relationships are being intentionally tracked and sustained, and labor is divided in an equitable and efficient fashion.
- Seek opportunities to connect with veterans within aligned progressive organizations and build a broader progressive veterans' movement that "bridges" across issue silos and builds connective tissue between aligned organizations.

Advocacy & Government Affairs

- In parallel with the Political Director determining specific organizational legislation and policy stances, the Organizing Director is responsible for deciding upon, crafting, and prioritizing organizing campaigns based on that platform to give Common Defense members opportunities to win progressive change.
- Work closely with the Organizing Director to support and advise them on the development and prioritization of organizing campaigns on an ongoing basis.
- Lead direct lobbying activity by Common Defense as part of those campaigns, supervise the scheduling of meetings with elected officials and their staff, and organize lobbying opportunities for Common Defense members to engage with their own representatives.

Fundraising

- Contribute to fundraising efforts by participating in meetings with major donors to speak about Common Defense's work, as requested by the Development Director.
- Contribute to institutional fundraising efforts by providing narrative components, data and strategy summaries for grant proposals, reports or partnership pitches, and attending meetings with funders to speak about Common Defense's work.
- In consultation with the Development Director, oversee digital small-donor fundraising via email, SMS, and digital ads conducted by Common Defense's digital consulting firm.
- Supervise staff in developing concepts for, editing, and approving emails, ad copy, petitions, and other content to engage grassroots supporters, ensuring that messaging aligns with Common Defense issue priorities and policy stances.
- Decide on causes and legislation to mobilize Common Defense supporters to contact their representatives about using mass mobilization tools.

Required Qualifications:

- Shares the progressive values of Common Defense and a commitment to building a multi-racial, multi-generational, working class progressive movement independent from the political establishment.
- Demonstrated ability to effectively build and sustain durable relationships with a wide variety of allies and stakeholders and navigate the complex political ecosystem.
- A strategic mindset that identifies short-term and long-term opportunities, and an ability to balance conducting rapid-response with pursuing long-term objectives simultaneously.
- Five years of relevant experience in legislative policy-making, advocacy, coalition-building, and/or electoral campaigns.
- Past experience in a leadership role in another progressive organization.
- Experience managing high-level relationships with political and organizational partners.
- Two years of direct management/supervisory experience in a professional workplace setting.

- Fluency in the US military and veteran experience, including knowledge of military and veteran culture, idioms, institutions, organizations, ranks, operations, major policies, and recent history.
- Knowledge of the structure, function, and operations of Congress, the Executive Branch, and the legislative process.
- Effective communicator of policy, with the ability to translate complex issues into everyday language and compelling calls to action.
- Strong project management, time management, and planning skills, with a demonstrated ability to take initiative and drive projects forward independently.
- Fluency with Google suite, including Docs, Sheets, Calendar, Slides, and Drive.
- Excellent communications skills.
- A personal and professional commitment to ongoing development as an anti-racist leader and enthusiasm for participating in Common Defense's ongoing work to develop an anti-oppression organizational culture.

Desirable Qualifications (preferred but not required):

- Past experience in staff or elected leadership within organized labor.
- Past experience working with constituencies that have experienced significant trauma.
- Familiarity with data and metrics for analyzing political engagement, voting patterns, demographics, and the impact of civic engagement campaigns
- Existing policy knowledge and/or a professional network of relationships in any of the following issue areas: Climate Change; Economic Justice; Foreign policy; Military/Veterans policy; Racial Justice; Voting rights
- Experience with any of the following platforms is a plus, though not required (training will be provided): ActionKit; CQ Knowledge; EveryAction; Hustle; New/Mode; Phone2Action; Slack; VAN; Wordpress

Start Date, Workplace, Compensation & Benefits:

This position is fully remote aside from travel to mandatory staff gatherings, such as board meetings or strategic planning sessions or in person lobbying events. Location in Washington D.C., New York City, or a swing state (e.g. Georgia, Arizona, etc) is a plus, but not required. (Regardless of location, occasional travel will be required.) The person in this position may elect to work from our NYC office but otherwise, the position is fully remote.

We offer a technology stipend in support of home office expenses.

The annual salary for this position is \$75,000. This is a full-time, exempt position based on a 35-40 hour workweek. The majority of our work takes place during the hours of 10:00am-6:00pm EST, but there may be instances where evening or weekend hours are needed in support of events or urgent initiatives.

Common Defense is eager to fill this important role. We will work with the final candidate to select a mutually agreeable start date.

We understand that staff have personal, family, and community obligations and have a flexible workplace to support these needs.

We offer an unlimited PTO policy to support employee well-being. It gives employees the ability to work or take time off as they see fit, as long as they keep fulfilling their duties. At minimum, staff are required to take at least 2 weeks off each year.

Because the majority of our staff are veterans who prefer to receive medical care via VA services, Common Defense provides a health and wellness stipend instead of a traditional employer-provided health plan. Each employee receives a taxable stipend of \$600/month to curtail the cost of medical insurance or other health and wellness-related expenses. In certain cases, an additional \$200/month stipend is available per dependent and/or domestic partner who is not insured through their own employer.

At Common Defense, we are committed to modeling as an organization the values that we believe in; as a team, we are creating a workplace culture that is designed to support our unique needs as a majority veteran and broadly diverse team. Achieving that goal is a task that we know demands continuous effort and attention. It is made more difficult because veterans often carry with them significant trauma from military service – whether from combat, moral injury, sexual harassment and/or assault, living under discriminatory policies (DADT or the Trans Ban), or other forms of oppression – which can be activated within veteran spaces and creates an understandable reluctance to join veteran organizations. For all these reasons, at Common Defense we know it is absolutely necessary that we proactively work to counter inequity within our organization. We are proud of the way in which our team engages with the ongoing practice of creating a healthy and productive workplace where every member of our staff can bring their whole self and thrive.

To apply: Nonprofit talent agency People Power is the search partner for this hire. To apply, please send a resume and a cover letter addressing your qualifications and interests in this position along with a work sample of any kind or length. We also welcome applicants to also include additional relevant, short samples of their previous work—written reports, links to web-based publications, policy briefs, grant proposals, event invitations, podcasts, pitch letters, press releases, videos, and any other materials demonstrating communication skills or subject matter expertise are welcome. To apply, send an email with the subject line [Your Name] Common Defense Political Director to: jobs@commondefense.us

We will review applications and continue with this process until the position is filled.

Common Defense is structured as “Common Defense Civic Engagement” a 501(c)(4), the “Veterans Organizing Institute” a fiscally sponsored 501(c)(3) program, and “Common Defense Action Fund” a 527 Political Action Committee (PAC).

Common Defense is an equal opportunity employer, committed to building a diverse and inclusive workforce. All qualified applicants will be considered for employment without regard to race, color, creed, national origin, sex, age, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, military status, prior record of arrest or conviction, citizenship status, current employment status, or caregiver status.

Hiring process: We appreciate your time and interest in contributing your talents to Common Defenses’ mission. Thank you! You will receive an email auto-reply to your application. We wish we could respond personally to all applicants, but only those chosen to interview will be contacted. Please do not contact Common Defense directly to inquire about the status of your application.

Selected applicants will be invited to an initial brief screening interview via phone or video. Selected candidates will then be invited to 2-3 longer-form interviews via video with the Executive Director and other members of the executive team and staff. You may also be asked for additional writing samples and/or to meet informally with additional team members.

We welcome your interest and feedback. If you would like to make a confidential inquiry and/or have questions regarding your qualifications for this position, compensation or benefits, our process or internal timeline for hiring, or suggestions for how to improve this announcement or the opportunity itself, please email Kate Brumage at People Power: kate@peoplepowerproject.org

People Power is a nonprofit social enterprise with a mission to create a new equity-centered model for identifying and developing talent to power the movement for social justice. People Power is a fiscally sponsored project of Community Initiatives, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. To learn more about People Power, please visit their website: www.peoplepowerproject.org

