



Executive Director

Brooklyn Defender Services

Brooklyn, New York

Salary: \$325,000-\$400,000

The Organization

Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS) is a highly respected public defense organization in New York City. Founded in 1996 by Executive Director Lisa Schreibersdorf, BDS has grown from a small Brooklyn-based defender into a full-service public defense institution now serving clients across Brooklyn and Queens. With a staff of more than 750 and a budget that has grown substantially over three decades, BDS has provided legal representation and holistic support to well over two million people who were unable to afford an attorney.

BDS' mission is to ensure that people facing the criminal, family, immigration, and civil legal systems are treated with dignity, humanity, and the full protection of their rights. As both advocates and guardians of justice, BDS stands alongside clients not only in moments of crisis, but in helping them return to their families, communities, schools, and workplaces.

The organization operates in an environment of significant complexity. BDS has a unionized staff, a diverse and expanding leadership team, a board in a period of intentional renewal, and an active portfolio that now includes a major new facility build-out and a significant upcoming RFP. BDS is at a pivotal moment: honoring a thirty-year legacy of principled, high-impact public defense work while building the leadership infrastructure for its next chapter.

From its founding, BDS has been defined by an entrepreneurial spirit: identifying unmet needs, challenging traditional models of representation, and building new solutions when existing systems fall short. That willingness to innovate has shaped BDS's growth, from expanding holistic defense practices, focusing on interdisciplinary and specialized practices and integrating new service areas. Brooklyn Defenders prides itself on responding quickly to the evolving needs of the communities it serves.

The Position

Following the planned retirement of the founder and current Executive Director, Brooklyn Defender Services is conducting a national search for its next Executive Director. This is a rare opportunity to lead one of the most respected public defense organizations in the country at a moment of both institutional strength and meaningful transition.

The Executive Director is the chief executive of BDS, responsible for the overall leadership, management, and strategic direction of the organization. Reporting to the Board of Directors, the Executive Director oversees a staff of more than 750, a multi-million-dollar budget spanning government and private funding streams, and a broad portfolio of legal and holistic defense services across Brooklyn and Queens.

BDS enters this transition from a position of strength: nationally respected advocacy, extraordinary client service, a deep and capable leadership bench, financial stability, and a culture of relentless commitment to justice. The next Executive Director will honor this foundation while guiding BDS through its next chapter: strengthening organizational infrastructure, developing leaders across the institution, deepening staff trust and engagement, and ensuring BDS continues to evolve as a bold force for justice.

Strategic Leadership and Vision

- Set the strategic direction for BDS in partnership with the board, senior leadership team, and key external stakeholders.
- Represent BDS publicly, building and maintaining relationships with elected officials, government agencies, funders, peer organizations, and the communities served.
- Lead BDS's advocacy and policy work at the city, state, and federal levels, including engagement with the district attorney's office, the courts, and criminal justice reform coalitions.
- Ensure the organization's growth remains mission-centered, particularly as BDS builds its integration of the Queens office into its work.

Organizational Leadership and Culture

- Lead, develop, and support a senior leadership team across legal practice areas, operations, finance, HR, and external affairs.
- Foster a workplace culture grounded in the values of racial equity, holistic defense, and staff wellbeing, while managing effectively across a unionized environment.
- Ensure strong internal communication across a large, complex, and geographically dispersed staff.

Financial Oversight and Resource Development

- Oversee a multi-million-dollar budget, ensuring fiscal integrity, sustainability, and responsible stewardship of public and private funds.
- Manage and grow BDS's relationships with government funders, including New York City, New York State, and the federal government.
- Partner with the Board of Directors to strengthen governance, expand board capacity, and build an increasingly engaged group of ambassadors, advocates, and philanthropic partners for BDS's next chapter.
- Lead or closely oversee major institutional processes such as government RFPs, audits, and contract renewal.

Operational Excellence

- Ensure that administrative infrastructure, including HR, compliance, finance, and technology, keeps pace with organizational growth.
- Delegate effectively to a capable senior team while maintaining appropriate accountability and oversight over programs, funding and operations.
- Manage through complexity with calm, decisive leadership, particularly during periods of institutional change or external pressure.

Location	Reports to	Direct Reports
Brooklyn, NY	Board of Directors	Senior Leadership Team

The ideal candidate for the Executive Director position at Brooklyn Defender Services possesses the following competencies:

Commitment to Public Defense and Racial Justice

Genuine conviction about the mission of public defense and a clear understanding of the racial dynamics shaping the criminal legal system. Must carry an authentic commitment to the clients BDS serves and the principles the organization embodies.

Executive Leadership at Scale

Demonstrated experience leading or co-leading a complex, dynamic organization with multiple functions, constituencies, and evolving priorities. Energized by environments that require both vision and execution, the ideal candidate brings the ability to build systems without diminishing the creativity, responsiveness, and entrepreneurial spirit that make BDS exceptional.

Experience in Unionized Environments

Direct experience working in or managing within a union environment. Understands labor relations and can build trust across that dynamic.

Legal Expertise or Deep Familiarity with Legal Systems

While an attorney with a background in either criminal or family law for low income clients is preferred, attorneys who have related experience, at the intersection of law, policy, and social services are strongly encouraged to apply.

External Presence and Resource Development

Comfortable engaging with elected officials, government agencies, funders, and the media. Brings capacity to grow private philanthropy, which represents a significant opportunity for BDS going forward.

Financial and Operational Command

Experience managing large budgets, navigating government contract systems, and building or strengthening administrative infrastructure. Understands nonprofit finance at a senior level and can work closely with a finance team and board on long-range planning.

Additional Qualifications

- Juris Doctor (J.D.) required. The ideal candidate will bring a strong understanding of public defense, legal advocacy, and the systems impacting BDS clients, with direct experience in criminal defense, public interest law, or a related field strongly preferred.
- Track record of sustained senior leadership in a complex nonprofit, government, or legal services organization.
- Experience working with a board of directors at the governance level.
- Familiarity with New York City's legal, political, and philanthropic landscape is a significant asset.
- Record of building and retaining diverse leadership teams.
- Strong written and verbal communication skills, with the ability to speak credibly to multiple audiences.
- Comfort operating under public scrutiny and in complex political environments.

Work Environment

BDS is a dynamic, mission-driven community of advocates who bring urgency, creativity, and deep commitment to the pursuit of justice. Staff are united by the belief that every person deserves zealous representation, dignity, and the opportunity to move forward. The organization combines the innovation and responsiveness of its entrepreneurial roots with the reach and influence of one of the nation's leading public defense institutions.

BDS is headquartered in Brooklyn with operations in Queens. Staff work across multiple practice areas and office locations. BDS has made significant investments in its new facility, which is currently under construction and represents a major milestone for the organization's capacity.

Our Values

- High quality, client-centered defense.
- Holistic services available for all people we represent.
- Racial equity and social justice in everything we do.
- Transparency, accountability, and integrity.
- Investment in the growth and wellbeing of staff.
- Bold advocacy grounded in the lived experience of the people we serve.

Compensation and Benefits

Salary

\$325,000 - \$400,000

Benefits

BDS has generous policies to support our staff. This includes:

- Paid Time off for vacations, religious and cultural observance, holidays, and for sickness, disability, bereavement, parental leave and other needs.
- Comprehensive health benefits.

Brooklyn Defender Services is a proud equal opportunity employer committed to celebrating diversity and maintaining an equitable and inclusive work environment. We strongly encourage candidates of all identities, expressions, orientations, disabilities, and experiences to apply. If you require an accommodation due to a disability or another reason, please contact Omar Lopez at olopez@drgconsulting.com or Kennedy Pierre at kturner@drgconsulting.com.

Omar Lopez
Principal
olopez@drgconsulting.com

Kennedy Pierre
Senior Consultant
kturner@drgconsulting.com

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