



# **Friends of International Friendship Park**

## **Executive Director**

*Remote Office  
Greater San Diego Metropolitan Area*

**J. Michael Durnil, Ph.D.**  
Director, Executive Search

[michael.durnil@coopercoleman.com](mailto:michael.durnil@coopercoleman.com)

## About Friends of International Friendship Park

Friends of International Friendship Park is a trinational, grassroots, community-driven nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving, restoring, and reimagining one of the most symbolically significant sites along the U.S.–Mexico border, located on the ancestral lands of the Kumeyaay Nation. Rooted in a vision of connection over separation, the organization brings together individuals, families, advocates, and partner institutions from across the United States, Mexico, and beyond who share a common belief that borders need not define the limits of human dignity, relationships, understanding, or cooperation.

Friends of International Friendship Park, Inc. received its official IRS tax-exempt ruling and 501(c)(3) status in 2024 and serves as the fiscal sponsor of The Border Church.

The organization's mission is to advance International Friendship Park as a fully accessible cross-border meeting place and living symbol of peace, cultural exchange, and shared humanity. Inspired by successful cross-border parks along the U.S.–Canada boundary, Friends of International Friendship Park envisions a future in which the Park once again serves as a welcoming and inclusive space where people from various countries can gather, connect, and celebrate their common bonds.

For decades, International Friendship Park functioned as a rare and powerful point of contact where families separated by borders could meet face-to-face, where communities gathered for cultural and religious events, and where acts of connection transcended geopolitical lines. While access to the Park has been significantly restricted in recent years due to federal policy changes, infrastructure development, and prolonged closures, its meaning and importance have only deepened.

In response, Friends of International Friendship Park has emerged as both a steward of the Park's legacy and a catalyst for its future. The organization works to safeguard the site's history, advocate for restored public access, and elevate the Park's role as a model for cross-border cooperation and humanitarian connection. Through coalition-building, public engagement, policy advocacy, and cultural programming, the organization is actively raising public awareness and shaping a renewed vision for the Park that reflects dignity, equity, and shared belonging.

At this pivotal moment, Friends of International Friendship Park is growing its reach and influence by mobilizing a diverse and expanding movement committed to ensuring that the Park is not only remembered for what it once was, but realized for what it can become: an enduring international space where friendship, unity, and possibility prevail.

### About International Friendship Park

International Friendship Park stands as one of the most symbolically significant sites along the U.S.–Mexico border, where geography, policy, and human connection intersect. Located

within Border Field State Park at the westernmost edge of the border between San Diego and Tijuana, the park occupies a small but powerful footprint where the Pacific Ocean meets the international boundary.

Established in 1971 and dedicated by First Lady Pat Nixon, International Friendship Park was envisioned as a space of unity—a rare, intentional gathering place where families and communities from both countries could meet, embrace, and celebrate shared culture across borders. For decades, it functioned as the only location along the nearly 2,000-mile U.S.–Mexico border where binational, in-person interaction was formally permitted.

Over time, shifting federal border policies and security priorities significantly altered the Park's accessibility and function. Today, the site is located entirely on federal land under the authority of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and is monitored continuously by U.S. Customs and Border Protection. What was once an open meeting place evolved into a highly controlled environment, with layered fencing and limited, supervised access.

Despite these constraints, International Friendship Park has remained a powerful symbol of cross-border connection. Even as physical contact became restricted to interaction through mesh fencing, families and supporters continued to gather to speak, celebrate, and maintain relationships across the border. The site also historically features Friendship Park/Jardín de Amistad cultivated collaboratively by volunteers from both countries, reflecting the shared stewardship and community investment that define the Park's legacy. Federal agents removed the garden on the US side during more recent border infrastructure construction activities. However, Friendship Garden flourishes on the Mexican side as an open invitation to friendship and future possibilities.

In recent years, access to the Park has been further disrupted and regulated. Closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic and environmental impacts, combined with ongoing border wall replacement and infrastructure projects initiated in the early 2020s, have left the Park inaccessible to families on the U.S. side. While substantial construction activity was completed by 2024, the park has yet to fully reopen, and its future operational model remains uncertain.

Today, International Friendship Park represents both a legacy and a future. Its next chapter will be defined by how a place rooted in connection can be preserved, reimagined, and reactivated within a complex and evolving border environment. For Friends of International Friendship Park, this moment represents a critical leadership opportunity. The new Executive Director will need to advocate for access, steward a site of profound cultural and humanitarian importance, and help shape the next chapter of trilateral engagement at the border.

## Position Summary

Friends of International Friendship Park (FOIFP) seeks a strategic, culturally fluent, and politically savvy Executive Director to lead the organization into its next phase of growth,

visibility, and impact. At a defining moment, following its formal establishment as a 501(c)(3) and increasing regional and national attention, the organization is positioned to evolve from a deeply respected grassroots movement into a sustainable, high-impact institution at the intersection of border culture advocacy, immigrant well-being, and as a site of conscience.

The Executive Director will serve as both chief strategist and lead advocate, responsible for advancing a clear, actionable vision for International Friendship Park as a fully accessible, trilateral space rooted in connection, cultural exchange, and shared humanity. This leader will build upon decades of community trust and advocacy to align stakeholders, strengthen organizational infrastructure, and drive forward a coordinated strategy for long-term success.

Reporting to and partnering closely with the Board of Directors, the Executive Director will play a central role in shaping governance, expanding resources, and establishing the operational and strategic foundation necessary to achieve FOIFP's mission.

The Executive Director will be an engaging, thoughtful, and values-centered leader with a passion for the complex issues of immigration, generational trauma, border culture, and grassroots organizing. The successful candidate will build authentic and sustainable relationships across a wide spectrum of stakeholders. This is a consequential leadership role, with responsibility for building upon FOIFP's legacy and setting a course for the future impact and sustainability of the organization for years to come.

## Essential Job Functions

### Strategic Leadership

- » Balance vision with execution in a complex environment.
- » Translate FOIFP's founding vision into a clear, actionable strategic plan that advances the development of International Friendship Park as a cross-border symbol of connection.
- » Define and drive near-term priorities (12–24 months), including organizational growth, advocacy positioning, and stakeholder alignment.
- » Balance visionary leadership with pragmatic execution in a complex and evolving political and cultural environment.

### Cross-Border Engagement

- » Convene and engage diverse stakeholders across border communities.
- » Operate effectively in a bilingual, multicultural environment, maintaining an active presence on both sides of the U.S.–Mexico border.
- » Serve as a steward and bridge-builder, honoring the lived experiences and cultural significance of the region.
- » Ensure that FOIFP's work reflects and elevates the voices of border communities, including historically underrepresented and underserved groups.

## Advocacy + External Leadership

- » Serve as the organization's primary spokesperson, raising awareness and shaping public narrative around the Park and its significance.
- » Build and maintain relationships with key stakeholders, including elected officials, cross-border communities, advocacy groups, and institutional partners.
- » Advance a coordinated advocacy strategy across local, state, federal, and trilateral contexts, in collaboration with allied organizations.

## Resource Development

- » Lead all fundraising efforts, including foundation relations, individual giving, and emerging revenue streams.
- » Renew and expand support from existing funders while cultivating new philanthropic and institutional partnerships.
- » Position FOIFP for long-term financial sustainability through diversified and expanded funding strategies.

## Board Partnership + Organizational Development

- » Partner closely with the Board of Directors to support its continued evolution toward a governance-focused body.
- » Build organizational systems, structures, and team capacity to support growth.
- » Develop and lead a high-functioning organization, including staff, volunteers, and partner networks.

## Operations + Infrastructure

- » Establish systems, processes, and operational discipline necessary for organizational growth and accountability.
- » Oversee financial management, compliance, and administrative functions appropriate to a scaling nonprofit.
- » Build internal capacity to support programmatic expansion and advocacy efforts.
- » Increase FOIFP's visibility and presence among allied organizations at the local, regional, national, and trilateral levels.

## Qualifications

### Experience + Leadership

- » History of increasing experience and responsibility in nonprofit leadership, preferably within a grassroots and/or advocacy organization focused on human rights, immigration, border culture, or environmental issues.
- » Demonstrated success in organizational growth, fundraising, and stakeholder engagement in complex environments.
- » Experience operating in or deeply engaging with cross-cultural, binational, or politically nuanced contexts and networks.

## Core Competencies

- » Exceptional relationship-builder with the ability to convene and align diverse stakeholders across sectors and geographies.
- » Poised communicator with a credible public presence, capable of serving as a compelling advocate and storyteller.
- » Strategic thinker with the ability to translate vision into execution and sustained progress.
- » High emotional intelligence, humility, and authenticity; able to lead with trust, credibility, and cultural sensitivity.

## Subject Matter + Contextual Understanding

- » Deep appreciation for the cultural, historical, and political dynamics of the U.S.–Mexico border region, including the impact on Indigenous communities; past and present immigration policies; intergenerational trauma and restorative justice.
- » Understanding of advocacy, community organizing, and/or public policy environments.
- » Commitment to equity and inclusion, and to the values of Friendship/Amistad, Trust/Confianza, Nature/La Naturaleza, Family/La Familia, and “Fronteriza” Culture/La Cultura Fronteriza.

## Skills + Competencies

- » Proven fundraising and financial stewardship experience.
- » Strong organizational and operational leadership skills, including the ability to build systems from early-stage foundations.
- » Ability to navigate ambiguity and manage competing and fluid priorities while leading in a dynamic, evolving environment.
- » Exceptional written and oral communication skills, including the ability to present and speak publicly on relevant issues.
- » Proven experience in financial oversight of an organization of comparable size and complexity, with strong analytical and financial management skills.
- » Demonstrated commitment to and experience in immigration and border-related issues.
- » Exceptional interpersonal skills, with a keen ability to cultivate and maintain effective relationships with diverse stakeholders, including donors; impacted families; community supporters; allied community organizations; and local, regional, state, and national officials.
- » Experience in building, managing, and motivating staff and volunteers.
- » Demonstrated experience partnering with and supporting a nonprofit Board of Directors.

## Education + Additional Requirements

- » Bachelor’s degree preferred, or equivalent lived or professional experience commensurate with FOIFP mission and goals.
- » Fluency in English and Spanish required.

- » Willingness and ability to work regularly in both the United States and Mexico, including periodic travel to Tijuana and broader regional or national engagement as needed.
- » Knowledge of applicable laws, compliance requirements, and best practices affecting advocacy and nonprofit organizations.

## **Leadership + Key Colleagues** *(Please do not contact the organization or its leaders directly)*

### **Mona Kuczenski** **President, Founding Board of Directors**

Mona Kuczenski is a retired principal of a local environmental planning firm, where she managed projects ranging from the Long Beach Sports Park to the San Diego Bay Sediment Remediation Project. She has been a volunteer with Friends of International Friendship Park for more than three years, including work on the Steering Committee, Advocacy Committee, and currently as President of the Founding Board of Directors. Mona is committed to helping fulfill the promise of an International Friendship Park that welcomes all people, celebrates the history of the border region, recognizes our common humanity, and builds an infrastructure of friendship between nations.

### **Michelle A. Holling, Ph.D.** **Co-Chair, Search Committee**

Dr. Holling is a Chicana, North County (San Diego) resident, and friend of International Friendship Park since 2019. As a professor of rhetoric, her research analyzes intersections of race, gender, and violence in public discourse and social and political issues affecting Chicana/os-Latina/os. She uses her role as a professor at CSU San Marcos to teach and research about Friendship Park. Her championing of International Friendship Park also includes her involvement on the Advocacy team, Rebranding Committee, the Steering Committee, participation in Marchas de Silencio, and demonstrations held in prior years. As a board member of Friends of International Friendship Park, she brings prior experience leading professional organizations and service to another non-profit foundation.

### **Kathryn Vomero Santos, Ph.D.** **Co-Chair, Search Committee**

Dr. Santos is a scholar of literature and performance studies and an Associate Professor of English at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. She is a co-founder of the Borderlands Shakespeare Colectiva, a group of scholars, educators, artists, and activists who reimagine Shakespeare's works to reflect the cultures, languages, and lived experiences of La Frontera. In collaboration with several members of the Friends of International Friendship Park coalition, she is leading a project to develop a living community archive that preserves and provides

access to the many histories of this culturally significant site and those who have gathered here.

## Reporting Relationships

The Executive Director reports to the Chair of the Board of Directors and works in close partnership with the full Board.

The Executive Director currently supervises two staff members responsible for programming and communications and engages additional contract staff on both sides of the border to support and expand programming and communications efforts.

## Compensation + Benefits

**The salary range for this position is \$100,000 to \$130,000, inclusive of a 20% allotment toward benefits.**

The Executive Director will succeed a longtime founding volunteer and a recent Executive Director, providing visionary leadership as the organization strengthens its programs, membership, partnerships, and impact.

As part of this evolving leadership role, the Executive Director will collaborate with the Board of Directors to design and implement an employee benefits framework that reflects the organization's commitment to care, equity, and family well-being. The Board is dedicated to supporting a healthy work-life balance.

As such, a competitive benefits package is envisioned, including, but not limited to:

- » 20% salary allowance for Medical, Dental, and/or Vision Insurance.
- » PTO hours to be determined in conjunction with FOIFP and the successful candidate.
- » 11 observed federal holidays, plus three additional California-observed holidays, as well as New Year's Eve and Christmas Eve.
- » The Foundation will provide required equipment and supplies.

**As a reflection of our firm's commitment to equity and equal pay for all, Cooper Coleman requires that salary ranges or salary starting points be published for every search we conduct. The practice of not posting salaries perpetuates the gender and racial wage gap and discriminates against women, people of color, and other historically excluded populations by causing individuals to negotiate from a disadvantaged starting point.**

## Location + Expected Travel

While this position is remote, with no central office, the Executive Director is expected to reside in the greater San Diego metropolitan area, within a reasonable commuting distance of Border Field State Park, and to travel weekly to Tijuana, Mexico.

As resources allow, the Executive Director will also represent Friends of International Friendship Park at conferences, convenings, and advocacy events at the local, regional, state, and national levels.

A valid passport must be maintained throughout employment to support required travel.

## EEO + Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

**Friends of International Friendship Park complies with California employment rules and regulations and is, by nature, an Equal Opportunity Employer.**

FOIFP is an Equal Opportunity Employer and does not discriminate based on actual or perceived race, color, national origin, ancestry, sex, gender, gender identity, and gender expression, religious creed, disability (mental and physical), or any other characteristic protected by federal, state, or local law.

FOIFP values are a demonstration of a deep commitment to equity and inclusion:

- » Friendship/Amistad
- » Trust/Confianza
- » Nature/La Naturaleza
- » Family/La Familia
- » “Fronteriza” Culture/La Cultura Fronteriza

The Friends of International Friendship Park celebrates diversity and is committed to creating an inclusive environment for all employees. Candidates from historically underrepresented backgrounds are encouraged to apply.

Research shows that members of overlooked, underserved, excluded, or marginalized communities self-select out of considering opportunities if they do not meet every single qualification. If your experience does not align perfectly with every qualification outlined in this prospectus, but you believe you can succeed in this role, we encourage you to apply.

## Background Checks

Before sending your resume for this position, please read it over for accuracy. Cooper Coleman verifies its candidates' employment and academic credentials at the time of offer, and our clients frequently conduct comprehensive civil and criminal background checks before finalizing an offer.

## Submission Instructions *(read carefully)*

[Cooper Coleman](#) is leading this search on behalf of the Friends of International Friendship Park. To apply, please [visit this link](http://www.coopercoleman.com/current-searches) ([www.coopercoleman.com/current-searches](http://www.coopercoleman.com/current-searches)). **All expressions of interest should be made through the online application.** Please send nominations of qualified candidates directly to

J. Michael Durnil, Ph.D.  
Director, Executive Search  
[michael.durnil@coopercoleman.com](mailto:michael.durnil@coopercoleman.com)

**Kindly use the position title as the subject line of your email.** All inquiries will be held in confidence.

**A cover letter is not required with your initial application but is welcomed to help us understand your fitness for and interest in this role during our initial evaluation.** Candidates invited for interviews will be asked to provide a thoughtful letter of interest indicating their specific qualifications for the opportunity, desire to join the Friends of International Friendship Park, and connection to its mission.

*Cooper Coleman LLC is committed to providing equal employment opportunities to all qualified candidates and will refer candidates without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation or identity, age, ability, veteran status, or any other legally protected basis.*

## Follow Friends of International Friendship Park + Stay Connected



<https://internationalfriendshipark.org/>



<https://www.friendshipark.org/borderchurch>



<https://www.facebook.com/FofPark/>



<https://www.facebook.com/BorderChurch/>

## About Cooper Coleman

Cooper Coleman is a full-service recruiting firm partnering exclusively with nonprofit organizations, foundations, and research and academic institutions to drive meaningful growth. We move organizations *forward* by placing the right leaders in the right roles at the right time, and we help to strengthen management and fundraising capacity to amplify their mission and impact.

Follow us to stay informed of new opportunities.



[www.coopercoleman.com](http://www.coopercoleman.com)



<https://www.linkedin.com/company/coopercoleman>