



Chief Development Officer
Westchester County, Greater NYC / Remote

Life Stories is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit media and education organization that believes in the transformative power of visual storytelling as a catalyst for learning, civic dialogue, and connection. Life Stories seeks an accomplished and innovative Chief Development Officer (CDO) to help diversify its funding streams and explore the potential for resource generating initiatives. The CDO will play a key role in shaping this next chapter, helping to grow a philanthropic community that shares a belief in the power of story to educate, build connection, and inspire, in an era where the world needs it most.

Dedicated to capturing and sharing the stories of people whose lives inspire meaningful change, Life Stories has an expansive archive of over 500 in-depth, eyewitness, open-source interviews, a growing catalog of acclaimed films and docuseries, and curated educational resources that address issues of social justice, history, politics, the arts, and culture. This content explores what guides the moral leadership of individuals behind social movements, illuminates overlooked histories, reveals the inner workings of cultural institutions, and captures the changes that have unfolded in our nation during times of struggle.

Founded and led by the Kunhardt family—award-winning producers of documentaries that have introduced generations of audiences to artists and cultural, political, and civil rights leaders, Life Stories brings a deep commitment to integrity, historical truth, artistry, and public purpose. Personal accounts from John Lewis, John McCain, Gloria Steinem, Warren Buffett, Joan Baez, Bryan Stevenson, Dolores Huerta, David Brooks, and George Takei, as well as historical portrayals of former U.S. presidents and hundreds more inspire audiences with the different paths they've taken to lead meaningful lives. By experiencing these stories and engaging in conversation about them, Life Stories' audiences find the passion and purpose in their own lives and deepen their understanding of humanity—particularly in times of collective change.

In this age of rapidly evolving technology and fractured media landscapes, the need for reliable information that preserves and expands understanding of ourselves and the world is vital. Life Stories serves as a hub for trustworthy historical information and accessible learning experiences used by educators, historians, archivists, and students across the country to explore themes of democracy, justice, civil rights, and social change. Through curated teaching resources, partnerships with schools, libraries, nonprofits, and community organizations, Life Stories is fostering critical thinking, historical inquiry, and civic dialogue both in and beyond the classroom. Life Stories' educational programming reaches 25,000 students annually, and their films and interviews have been viewed more than 20-million times on their website and YouTube channel. To reach a larger audience they have formed thoughtful partnerships with groups like [826 Digital](#) who reach young writers, and are working with [Edovo](#), a platform that will distribute their content to close to one million, currently incarcerated men and women to help inspire reflection, upskilling, and personal growth.

Life Stories is at an exciting inflection point. Having fully transitioned from a hybrid production model to full nonprofit operations in 2024, the organization is building toward long-term sustainability while remaining agile, mission-driven, and creatively ambitious. Major support from a few well-known philanthropists to establish a reserve fund has helped create and deliver award winning work. As a recipient of a Bloomberg

Digital Accelerator grant, Life Stories is building an intuitive, tech-forward platform with features like AI-powered search and metadata tagging that will make content more discoverable and contextualize interviews within broader historical narratives. Users will be able to search, engage, and interact with the archive in meaningful and customizable ways. The new platform will make it possible for Life Stories to scale beyond its foundational model, driving exponential audience engagement and equipping more arts, civic, and educational institutions with powerful storytelling and learning tools.

Telling Its Own Story and Envisioning the Future

In 2018, the [Kunhardts](#) directed and produced the documentary *King in the Wilderness* about the last three years of Martin Luther King Jr.'s life, which was released on HBO and won an Emmy for Outstanding Historical Documentary. The Kunhardts oversee the education rights inclusive of the documentary video archive with raw interviews to which they gave open access to the public. Today, Life Stories shares an impressive and growing collection of primary source and eye-witness interviews as well as a portfolio of acclaimed films and docuseries with diverse audiences through its website and other digital platforms including YouTube. The organization continues to expand the reach and impact of its educational resources through multi-sector partnerships.

As a nimble, entrepreneurial team, Life Stories balances artistic excellence with deep mission alignment, benefiting from an outstanding team of award-winning filmmakers, post-production, marketing, education, operational, and development talent. Its 16 FTEs deliver high-caliber work with modest overhead. With a new five-year strategic plan nearly complete, the organization has identified four strategic pillars: Content Creation & Preservation; Digital Accessibility & Innovation, Education & Community Engagement, and Financial Sustainability as areas of priority.

While historically project-focused fundraising and reserve fund draw has supported Life Stories' work, the leadership team is committed to long-term sustainability and envisions scaling Life Stories' reach and impact through diversified philanthropic investment. In addition to cultivating a broader base of private individual and foundation grants, they are open to exploring partnerships, sponsorships, licensing, and membership models to ensure long-term impact and independence while continuing to produce mission-driven media and education resources for intersectional issues and civic dialogue.

Chief Development Officer

As part of the senior leadership team and reporting directly to Life Stories' three Executive Directors George, Teddy, and Peter Kunhardt, The Chief Development Officer will serve as a connector and ambassador for Life Stories. The CDO will design and deploy fundraising and engagement strategies that are effective, nimble, and respectfully advance existing and burgeoning relationships, often with influential changemakers and those in their orbits who have entrusted Life Stories with their portrayals and legacy. Additionally, the CDO will seek to build mutually beneficial partnerships, which activate programs, resources, and platforms that align theories of change, audience reach, and impact.

This individual will lead efforts to identify, cultivate, and steward relationships with individual donors, foundations, and institutional partners; build and manage a major and principal gifts portfolio; and collaborate closely with creative and operational teams to align development initiatives with ongoing film production, donor engagement, and educational outreach. The CDO will also play a critical role in embedding a culture of philanthropy across the organization and elevating Life Stories' visibility within philanthropic, arts and culture, civic engagement, and documentary storytelling communities.

The Chief Development Officer is responsible for raising philanthropic funding for Life Stories' organizational capacity building, visual and educational content creation, and special initiatives, ensuring the financial sustainability of the organization's \$4 million operating budget. While all three Executive Directors participate in resource generation, the CDO will be lead counsel in setting aspirational fundraising goals and serving as a strategic thought partner in devising donor strategies in ways that draw upon the Executive Directors' areas of strength and notable networks.

Essential Duties

- Provide thought partnership to Executive Directors and Board on philanthropic vision and revenue planning, with an eye toward long-term sustainability.
- Identify, cultivate, and successfully solicit, and steward a portfolio of principal and major individual donors, foundations, and institutional partners capable of making gifts in the six- and seven-figure range.
- Design and implement a multi-pronged fundraising approach to support Life Stories' general operations, visual storytelling, educational initiatives, and strategic priorities with planning and execution support from the Development Associate.
- Develop compelling cases for support and oversee the creation of donor-facing materials, including proposals, reports, and communications that reflect Life Stories' mission and impact in close collaboration with the Development Associate.
- Collaborate closely with Executive Directors and the Life Stories team to align fundraising efforts with production and programmatic timelines, release and communications strategies, impact reporting and long-term organizational goals.
- Oversee and partner with the Development Associate on development efforts including conducting donor and prospect research, maintaining CRM systems, and tracking cultivation and stewardship activities to ensure timely follow-up and personalized engagement.
- Coach and collaborate with existing staff members, to strengthen internal capacity and create consistency in donor outreach, stewardship, and engagement.
- Develop donor engagement strategies that are appropriate to Life Stories' work, such as convenings that invite dialogue about content and/or the creative process. This may include salon-like gatherings, public screenings, and select behind-the-scenes conversations.
- Serve as a public ambassador and spokesperson for Life Stories, representing the organization in philanthropic circles, at convenings, and with key stakeholders.

Experience & Qualifications

The ideal candidate is an experienced, entrepreneurial, and emotionally intelligent fundraising leader who can bridge the organization's unique creative culture with high-impact development strategies. This individual will be both a strategist and a doer, someone who can translate bold ideas into actionable plans, while earning the trust of a well-functioning, founder- and family-led team that values integrity, humility, and excellence.

Successful candidates will bring many of the following professional qualities and experiences:

- Eight or more years of directly applicable resource generation experience, including direct fundraising experience with a proven track record of soliciting and closing six and seven-figure gifts is required.
- Successful track record of engagement with individual and institutional prospects and donors and the ability to consistently develop partnerships resulting in private philanthropic support at six- and seven-figure levels.
- Demonstrated success working in a hyper-dynamic, entrepreneurial environment and in determining the prioritization and resources needed to implement diverse fundraising streams, including major and principal gifts, corporate giving and foundation/institutional giving, direct marketing, and donor and stakeholder engagement.
- High motivation and drive for both self-directed and collaborative work, with a lively, curious, and creative intellect; a style that includes flexibility and inventiveness, and an understanding that goals and mission are iterative and require flexible, realistic strategies.
- Comfort with decisions that emerge through creative process, that both explore the human condition and connect to big ideas. The ability to see emergent opportunities in connecting people, ideas, and resources. The ability to build structure without imposing rigidity. An inclination toward patience, perception, and political savvy with the skills to “work out loud” and channel creative dynamics productively.
- Superb communication skills—both verbal and written—with a commitment to transparent communications and strong collaborative practices.
- Exceptional analytical and problem-solving skills, including an ability to translate ideas and concepts into clear, implementable steps and inspire others to action.
- Superb organizational skills and the ability to multitask.
- Ability to work independently as well collaboratively with team members.
- Energy and stamina, self-confidence and humility, a strong sense of purpose, a tolerance for ambiguity, and a sense of humor.
- Ability to travel in connection with donor visits and convenings as needed.

Location, Schedule, & Compensation

Life Stories is based in Pleasantville, NY, and while the team would welcome someone located in the broader tri-state area for ease of collaboration, the role can be performed remotely, with periodic travel as needed. This position is full-time with benefits. Compensation range is targeted from \$160K to \$190K. Flexibility linked to experience and performance will be entertained for outstanding candidates.

Interested in Learning More?

Life Stories has partnered with Talent Citizen to assist in this recruitment. Please contact President Tracy D. Welsh and Senior Associate Eva Kotilinek to share your resume and cover letter via email at:

LS-CDO@talentcitizen.com.

Life Stories adheres to a policy that prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, creed, national or ethnic origin, citizenship status, age, disability, veteran status, or any other legally protected class.

About The Kunhardt Family

The Kunhardt family's devotion to storytelling and preservation dates to the Civil War. Six generations have been central to collecting, archiving, and telling life stories of prominent Americans, with an early emphasis on Abraham Lincoln. Historian Dorothy Kunhardt wrote an account of Lincoln's assassination and the twenty days that followed along with her son, Phillip B. Kunhardt, Jr. Dorothy also made history as an early innovator in interactive children's literature, authoring one of the best-selling books in history, *Pat the Bunny*. That spirit of curiosity and engagement has endured, with subsequent generations contributing to American cultural history through books, photography, and, most recently, award-winning documentary filmmaking. Peter W. Kunhardt, an Emmy-winning director and producer, founded Kunhardt Films in 1987, launching a new chapter of visual storytelling that his sons, Teddy and George Kunhardt, continue to lead. Their work for HBO, PBS, ABC, and Apple TV+ has received nine Emmy Awards, two Peabody Awards, a DuPont Award, an IDA Award, and two NAACP Image Awards and includes powerful documentaries such as *True Justice: Bryan Stevenson's Fight for Equality*, *King in the Wilderness*, and *Becoming Warren Buffett*.

Beyond filmmaking, the family created the Kunhardt Film Foundation in 2018 to produce and distribute educational media for classrooms and public audiences, emphasizing civic education, social justice, and American history.