

Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition

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Part 1: Governance, Leadership, & Mission

Mission Statement

The Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition is a 501(c)(3) organisation operating throughout the state providing legal assistance and advocating for immigrants and refugees. They serve agricultural workers, undocumented migrants, juvenile migrants, and detained migrants. On the legislative front, they also advocate for the rights and welfare of refugees and immigrants when these values are affected by the lawmaking in the General Assembly or by executive policy.

Beyond the immediate services provided, TIRRC also seeks to demonstrate the contribution that refugees and immigrants bring to Tennessee Society. English and naturalisation classes are available for

Governing Officers & Organisational Structure

The current Executive Director is Lisa Sherman-Nikolaus, who previously served as Policy Director for TIRRC. Prior to her work at TIRRC, she worked in international human rights in London, Senegal, and New York. As of April 2021, Dr. Claudio Mosse, a pathologist at Vanderbilt University, is the Chairman of the Board, having been on the board since 2017.

According to self-reporting, the governing board currently has 14 officers. Many of them work or have worked in universities, Somali and Latin-American immigrant advocacy, and public education. 7 of the board officers were women, and many of them are themselves immigrants or children of immigrants. The positions on the board include the President (aka Chairman), Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and an executive director (until last year, there were two co-directors). The chairman of the board is selected from among the officers by majority consensus. Looking back, many of the board members have served for over 5 years, and turnover in the principal positions occurs at a similar rate.

The job of board officers is to oversee TIRRC's operations, provide leadership, represent the organisation, and raise funds. They rarely get involved as managers of the senior staff, which is the domain of the executive director. Many of the board members are themselves immigrants or refugees, but do not necessarily have experience in TIRRC's field before becoming board members.

The executive director(s), historically speaking, have driven the agenda of board meetings, since they are often the ones with specific expertise in the issue area.

The director position is also the only paid member of the board.

The governing model for the organisation most closely aligns with the Public Policy approach described by Armstrong (1998). The diverse stakeholders have a unitary mission which has not significantly changed since TIRRC's inception in 2005; the only variation has been the particular battles to be fought.

Accountability Mechanisms

Most of TIRRC's finances come from donors: grants, foundations, and private contributions. These grant-writers often perform site-visits to see either that their donations are being put to good use or to decide if they want to contribute. Any time the staff requires more than ten-thousand dollars, this requires signing off by the treasurer, the president, and executive director(s), all of whom sit on the finance committee.

At the end of each year, TIRRC has an annual convention for its staff and volunteers. At this convention, input is taken from community members and volunteers regarding the last year's operations.

Strategy & Decision Making

NB: This information is possibly outdated; we are seeking confirmation from current board members as to its accuracy.

The governing board takes "Strategic Planning retreats" annually, in which all board members and outside consultants draft a one year plan & five year plan for TIRRC. Finances, operations, and personnel are all reviewed during this retreat with input from the executive director.

Board meetings are held *in camera*.
