



Executive Director

Position Announcement

*Vermont, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan,
Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, Illinois,
Indiana, and Neighboring States*

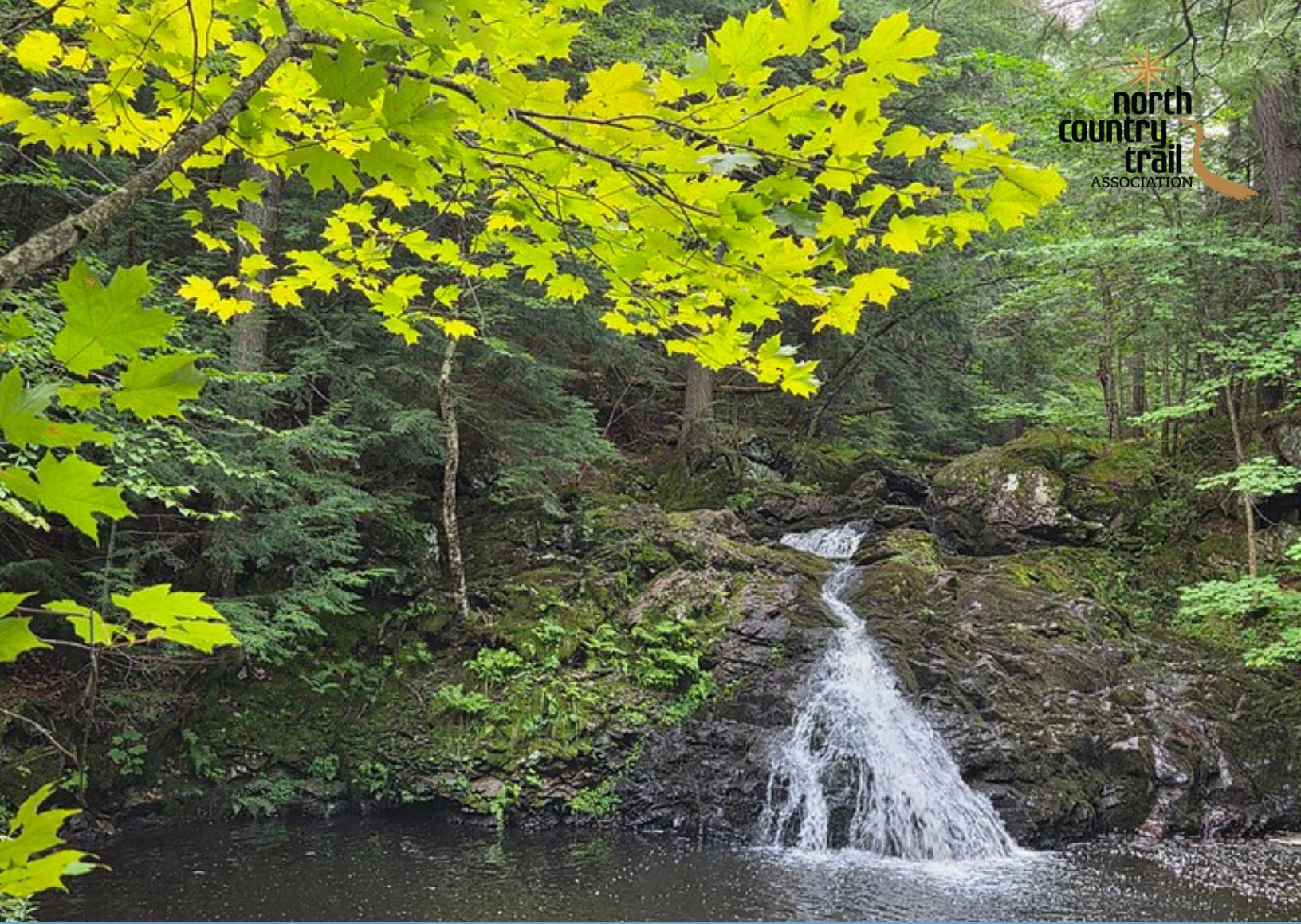
About the North Country Trail Association

The North Country Trail Association (NCTA) is the nonprofit steward of the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCT), the longest National Scenic Trail in the United States. The hiking trail extends more than 4,800 miles across eight northern states, from North Dakota to Vermont, linking forests, prairies, river corridors, rural communities, and historic landmarks along the country's northern tier.

NCTA operates within a complex, partnership-based environment. The trail crosses a mix of federal, state, local, and private lands, with a significant portion of the route dependent on long-term relationships with private landowners. NCTA plays a central role in trail protection by securing access, managing easements and agreements, and coordinating with landowners and public agencies to ensure continuity and long-term stability of the trail corridor.

The organization is chapter-driven and volunteer-powered, supported by 39 local chapters and trail affiliates and thousands of volunteers who build, maintain, monitor, and advocate for the trail at the local level. A small, geographically distributed professional staff provides national coordination, technical support, partnership management, fundraising, communications, and advocacy across the full length of the trail.





NCTA works closely with the National Park Service (NPS), state agencies, local governments, nonprofit partners, and landowners, operating within a decentralized structure that relies on trust, collaboration, and shared responsibility. Governance is provided by an engaged board focused on long-term stewardship and organizational sustainability.

As the organization continues to evolve, NCTA is focused on completing the forever trail, strengthening trail protection, improving coordination across its multi-state network, and ensuring that organizational growth directly supports the trail itself. The association is well-positioned with a clear strategic direction, experienced staff leadership, and strong relationships across its partner and volunteer network.



Role Summary

The Executive Director provides visionary leadership for the NCTA, guiding its work across eight states through clear direction, strong relationships, and effective execution. The role directly supervises the Director of Trail Operations, the Director of Development and Communications, and the Director of Trail Protection, with a total staff of 13.

The Executive Director drives shared direction and accountability across the organization, aligning people, priorities, and resources to deliver on the strategic plan and move the Forever Trail steadily toward completion. With an experienced staff and a strong operational foundation already in place, the Executive Director ensures that national-level decisions support chapters, volunteers, and agency partners on the ground. The emphasis is on refinement and follow-through, supporting trail protection, strengthening coordination, reinforcing shared priorities, and ensuring that organizational growth delivers clear, practical benefits for the trail, its volunteers, and its partners. Success in this role requires strong people leadership, sound judgment, and the ability to lead effectively within a collaborative, volunteer-driven organization.

The Opportunity

For an executive leader passionate about hiking trails, promoting the trail as a community asset, and protecting its natural, scenic, and cultural resources, this role offers the opportunity to guide a strong organization forward, enhance how it operates, implement closure of roadway gaps, and sustain a nationally significant trail for generations to come. Reporting to the Board of Directors, the Executive Director will lead one of the nation's most significant public trail organizations at a moment of stability and opportunity.

NCTA is in a healthy position, supported by a clear strategic plan, experienced staff leadership, strong partnerships, and an engaged board. The next Executive Director will build on this foundation, strengthening organizational alignment and execution while guiding continued growth and impact across a complex, multi-state landscape.

In this role, the Executive Director will have the opportunity to:

- Lead a nationally respected trail association with meaningful scale and visibility
- Strengthen coordination across staff, volunteers, chapters, and partners throughout eight states
- Deepen relationships with federal and state agencies, landowners, and trail protection partners
- Support sustainable growth in fundraising and advocacy alongside an established development function
- Ensure strategic priorities translate into measurable outcomes for trail protection, access, and long-term stewardship

What makes this opportunity especially compelling is the balance of national reach and local commitment. The NCT is a shared public resource shaped by decades of volunteer leadership, community engagement, and partnership. The successful Executive Director will value this history and lead with a long-term stewardship mindset, building on what exists while positioning the organization for enduring impact.



Key Responsibilities

Leadership & Strategic Direction

- Provide dynamic leadership to implement the organization's strategic plan, ensuring alignment with the NCTA's mission, vision, and values.
- Collaborate with the Board of Directors to set goals, develop policies, and establish priorities for the organization's growth and sustainability.
- Serve as a primary spokesperson and advocate for the NCTA, strengthening the organization's influence at local, regional, and national levels.

Partnerships

- Build durable, trust-based relationships that advance advocacy and trail protection goals.
- Forge the partnerships necessary to complete, maintain, and protect the trail. Grasp the nuances and dynamics of multiple agencies and engage in productive communication.
- Ensure effective partnerships with the NPS, state and local agencies, and other key stakeholders.
- Foster strong partnerships supporting the NCTA's chapters and affiliate organizations.

Fundraising & Financial Management

- Work with development staff to further fundraising efforts, including donor relations, major gifts, grants, corporate sponsorships, and membership growth to ensure financial sustainability.
- Oversee the development and management of the organization's annual budget to ensure financial stability and responsible stewardship of resources.
- Understand and ensure compliance with the legal, regulatory, and procedural landscapes associated with managing a multi-faceted, national 501(c)3 organization made up of multiple federated volunteer chapters.
- Demonstrate fiscal management skills, including budget development and implementation, cash flow management, long-range fiscal planning, and compliance with legal and nonprofit requirements.
- Strengthen alignment between strategy, funding priorities, and operational capacity.

Community Engagement & Advocacy

- Build and maintain relationships with members, donors, volunteers, and outdoor recreation groups.
- Enhance the visibility and impact of the NCTA through strategic communications, marketing, and public outreach.
- Represent the organization at public events, conferences, and in media engagements.
- Lead NCTA's advocacy efforts on a national and state level.
- Serve as a consistent and credible voice for the organization.

Operations & Staff Management

- Provide direction for all NCTA programs.
- Lead and manage a team of staff members, fostering a collaborative and high-performing work environment.
- Oversee human resource functions, including hiring, performance management, and professional development.
- Ensure operational efficiency by effectively using technology and organizational systems.
- Model steady, respectful leadership suited to a volunteer-centered organization.

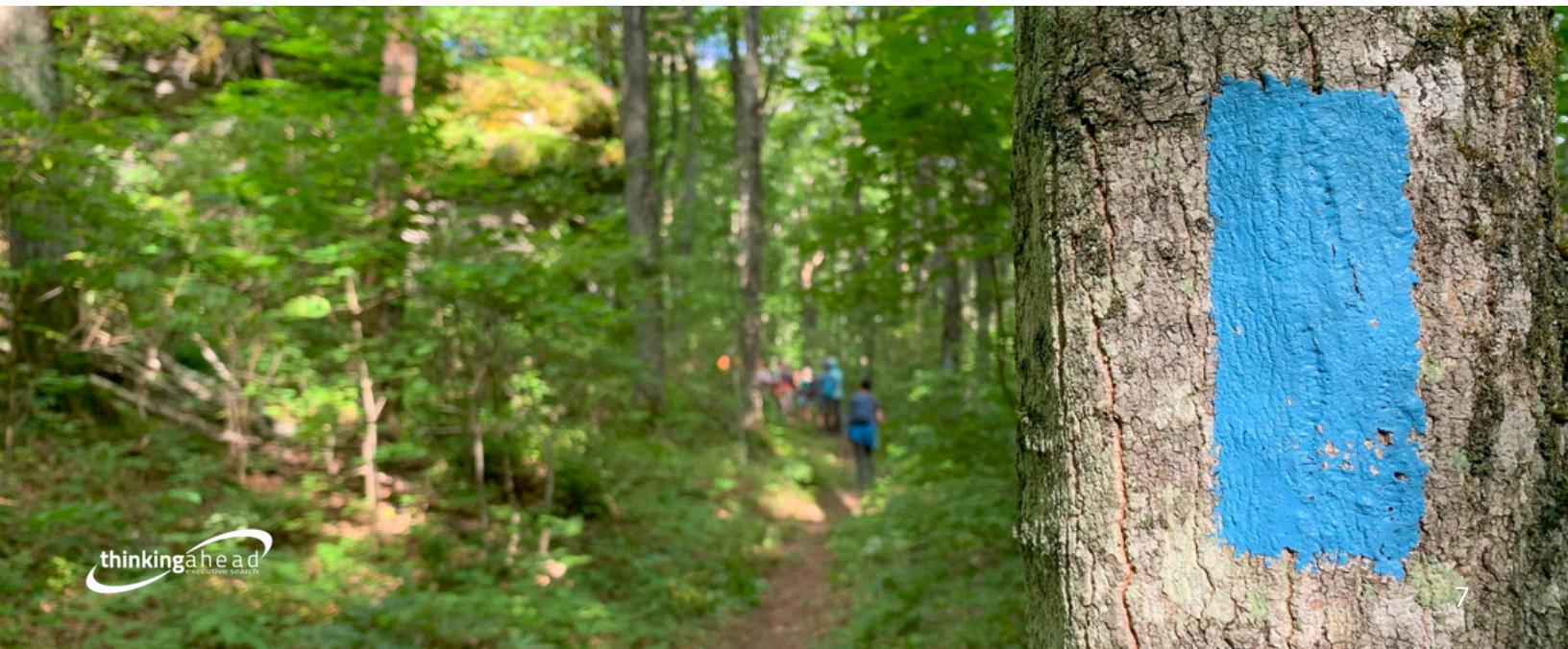
Qualifications & Experience

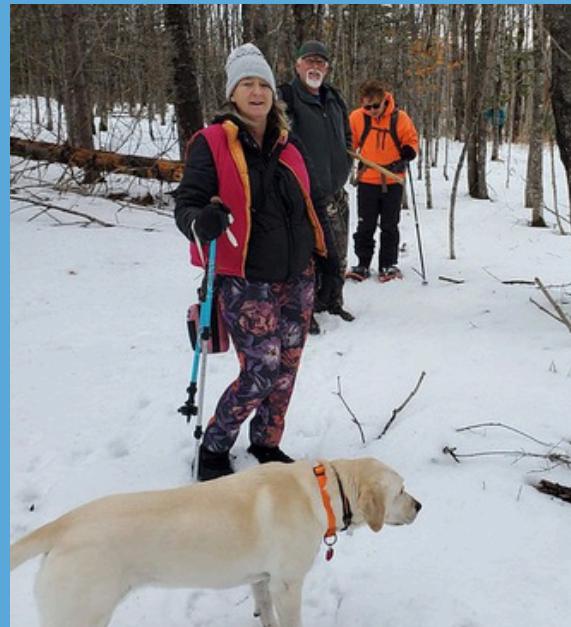
- Senior leadership experience in a nonprofit or mission-driven organization, with responsibility for overall organizational direction and external representation.
- Strong strategic planning, organizational development, and management skills.
- Demonstrated success in fundraising, grant writing, and financial management, including budget oversight, financial forecasting, and stewardship of multi-revenue-stream organizations
- Experience working with a Board of Directors and engaging volunteers.
- Strong communication and public representation skills across a wide range of audiences, including community stakeholders, agency partners, donors, and policymakers.
- Experience engaging with government entities or public-sector partners, including navigating federal, state, or local agency systems and complex partnerships.
- Demonstrated integrity, humility, credibility, and respect for mission-driven, community-centered work.

**Candidates with Experience in membership-based or volunteer-driven organizations or direct experience with a National Scenic Trail or similar public lands entities may be given priority.*

[Learn more about the the Board.](#)

[Learn more about the Staff.](#)





Location & Benefits

The Executive Director role may be in-person, remote, or hybrid. The NCTA offers a competitive benefits package, which includes paid time off, health insurance, and additional benefits consistent with those of a national nonprofit organization. Details regarding benefits will be shared during the recruitment process.

Salary will be commensurate with location and experience. Salary range \$130,000 to \$160,000

To Apply

The North Country Trail Association has retained the services of ThinkingAhead Executive Search. Interested candidates should submit a resume and expression of interest to Jessica Martinez, Partner, ThinkingAhead Executive Search: JMartinez@thinkingahead.com

North Country Trail Association is an Equal Opportunity Employer. The organization is committed to providing equal employment opportunities to all employees and applicants without regard to race, color, religion, creed, gender, gender identity or expression, age, national origin, ancestry, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, veteran or military status, or any other status protected by law.