



Lake Erie Nature & Science Center

Position Profile **Executive Director** **Lake Erie Nature & Science Center** **Bay Village, Ohio**

The Organization

For more than 80 years, Lake Erie Nature & Science Center (LENSC) has connected people of all ages with the natural world through education, exploration, and discovery. Founded in 1945 by renowned environmental educator Dr. Elberta W. Fleming, the Center's mission is to educate and inspire each of us to understand, appreciate, and take responsibility for our natural world. Located on the Huntington Reservation within the Cleveland Metroparks in Bay Village, Ohio, the Center is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization serving Northeast Ohio through environmental education, wildlife conservation, and space science programming.

Lake Erie Nature & Science Center provides a broad array of educational experiences for children, families, schools, and the community. Visitors enjoy free admission seven days a week to explore live native animal exhibits, natural history displays, and interactive learning opportunities. The Center is also home to one of only two public planetariums in Northeast Ohio, offering public programs and curriculum-based school field trips that introduce audiences of all ages to astronomy and space science. In addition, the Center operates the only wildlife rehabilitation facility in Cuyahoga County, providing care for ill, injured, and orphaned native wildlife while educating the public about conservation and coexistence with local species. Educational offerings also include award-winning early childhood programs, school and scout programming, nature camps, internships, and year-round community engagement opportunities.

Each year, more than 100,000 visitors from all 50 states and around the world experience LENS C's exhibits, services, and hundreds of annual program sessions focused on animal, preschool, youth, and teen programming as well as seasonal camps, planetarium shows, special events, and workshops. As an independent nonprofit organization located within the Cleveland Metroparks, LENS C is financially separate from the park district and receives no operating support from the Metroparks, local municipalities, or school systems. Its approximately \$1.85MM annual operating budget is supported through philanthropic contributions, foundation grants, memberships, earned program revenue, and other private support. This diversified funding model has enabled the organization to maintain free public admission while continuing to invest in high-quality educational programming, exceptional animal care, and accessible visitor experiences.

The Center continues to build upon its strong foundation through thoughtful investments in its campus and programs. In June 2025, Lake Erie Nature & Science Center completed the first phase of a nearly \$2 million renovation of its Wildlife Gardens, creating enhanced habitats for resident animals, expanded wildlife rehabilitation facilities, and new opportunities for public education and engagement.

Building on more than eight decades of service to the community, the organization is well positioned for its next chapter of leadership as it continues to advance its mission, broaden its community impact, and inspire future generations of environmental stewards. More information can be found on the Lake Erie Nature & Science Center website: www.lensc.org.

After 16+ years of leadership and service to LENS C, Catherine Timko recently left the Lake Erie Nature & Science Center. As a result, the Board of Directors has begun a national search to identify and recruit a new Executive Director for the organization.

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The Position

Location:

The position is based at the Lake Erie Nature & Science Center at 28728 Wolf Road, Bay Village, Ohio 44140.

Reporting Relationships:

The Executive Director reports to the President of the Board of Directors and to the full 18-member volunteer Board. This executive has 4 direct reports: Finance & Operations Coordinator; Animal Programs Coordinator; Preschool Coordinator; Marketing & Development Coordinator. There is a total staff of 9 full-time and 22 part-time employees, and more than 70 volunteers.

In addition to Board, staff at all levels, and volunteers, other important interactions include: members of the Lake Erie Nature & Science Center Women's Board; donors; foundations and grant making entities; representatives of other nature centers and related organizations on a local, regional, state and national basis; community organizations and partners such as the Cleveland Metroparks and local schools, among others; local, state, regional, and national elected officials, government representatives and government organizations; local veterinarians; members of the media; and the public at large.

Position Charter:

The Executive Director serves as the chief executive officer of Lake Erie Nature & Science Center and reports directly to the Board of Directors. In partnership with the Board, the Executive Director provides strategic leadership to advance the organization's mission, assists in developing and executing long-term strategic priorities and policies, and ensures LENSOC operates in accordance with Board-approved policies and all applicable laws and regulations. The Executive Director is responsible for the organization's overall leadership, management, financial sustainability, and operational success, while serving as its principal leader and primary public ambassador. Working collaboratively with the Board, staff, donors, volunteers, and community partners, the Executive Director cultivates the philanthropic support necessary to sustain and grow the organization's operations and endowment, ensures sound financial stewardship and organizational accountability, and strengthens LENSOC's visibility, reputation, and community impact.

Major Duties and Responsibilities:

The Executive Director is responsible for the following activities within the limits of the organizations' bylaws and the policies established by and with appropriate delegation by the Board of Directors:

Philanthropy, Development & Community Partnerships

The Executive Director provides executive leadership for the organization's fundraising strategy and works closely with the development function, Board, and key donors to ensure long-term philanthropic success.

- Provide strategic leadership for the organization's fundraising and development efforts.
- Partner with the Board and development staff to strengthen major gifts, annual giving, foundation support, corporate partnerships, and capital initiatives.
- Personally cultivate and steward key donor and community relationships while supporting broader fundraising efforts across the organization.
- Serve as an active ambassador for LENSOC within the community to increase visibility and philanthropic support.
- Ensure fundraising strategies are aligned with the organization's long-term strategic priorities.

Board Relations

Provide strong support to the Board of Directors in fulfilling its governance responsibilities and maintaining effective communication and alignment.

- Maintain consistent and transparent communication with the Board regarding organizational performance, risks, and opportunities
- Partner with Board leadership on agendas, priorities, and strategic initiatives
- Support best practices in governance and board engagement
- Serve as the primary liaison between Board and staff

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Financial Management

Ensure the organization maintains strong financial discipline, accuracy, and accountability.

- Ownership of the development and management of the annual operating budget
- Ensure financial reporting is accurate, timely, and reliable
- Maintain appropriate financial controls and risk management practices
- Partner with finance staff and the Finance Committee to ensure strong oversight and decision-making
- Ensure proper stewardship and use of philanthropic funds
- Monitor cash flow and financial sustainability, particularly during periods of growth or transition

Leadership & Organizational Management

Provide collaborative executive leadership across the organization while empowering an experienced management team.

- Deliver clear direction and ensure alignment across all departments
- Guide organizational decision-making while encouraging collaboration and shared problem solving.
- Foster accountability while supporting the continued growth and development of an experienced leadership team.
- Develop future organizational leaders and strengthen succession planning across the organization.

Administration

Provide executive oversight of organizational operations.

- Ensure systems, processes, and resources effectively support program delivery
- Oversee human resources, staff development, and organizational culture
- Ensure compliance with all regulatory, legal, and organizational requirements
- Maintain appropriate operational infrastructure to support organizational goals

Strategy & Planning

Lead the organization's long-term strategic direction.

- Partner with the Board to define and execute a clear strategic vision
- Identify opportunities for growth, expansion, and increased impact
- Evaluate and prioritize major initiatives and investments
- Use data and insights to inform decisions and future planning
- Anticipate challenges and proactively develop solutions
- Evaluate organizational structure and recommend adjustments that strengthen leadership capacity and position LENSNC for long-term success.

Communications & External Relations

Serve as the primary external representative of the organization.

- Act as the public face of the Nature Center with donors, partners, and the community
- Build and maintain relationships with key stakeholders, including foundations, corporations, and government entities
- Ensure consistent and strategic messaging during both stable and transitional periods
- Strengthen community presence and organizational reputation

Compensation:

The Executive Director is expected to earn an attractive compensation package which includes appropriate benefits.

The Candidate

Education:

A bachelor's or other advanced degree in an appropriate field is preferred but lived and learned experience will be valued and given equal consideration.

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Professional Qualifications:

The ideal candidate may currently serve as an Executive Director, Chief Executive Officer, Chief Operating Officer, Deputy Executive Director, development or external relations leader, or another senior leader prepared to lead a mission-driven nonprofit organization. Relevant backgrounds may include leadership in a comparable nature, science, education, conservation, conservation, cultural, or community-focused nonprofit; a senior role at a larger organization with readiness to step into a first Executive Director position; or private-sector leadership combined with meaningful nonprofit governance, volunteer, or philanthropic experience.

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities:

- **Board relationships** (significant involvement with governance issues and Board of Director/Trustee interactions).
- **Community relations** (effective interactions with the public, community groups and able to articulate organization's mission, goals, objectives, and policy positions).
- **Commitment to mission** (demonstrated strong belief in the mission of nature- and education-focused organizations like the Lake Erie Nature & Science Center).
- **Established contacts** (has developed and maintained regional and national connections with other nature center/scientific organization/nonprofit leaders).
- **Facility management** (demonstrated knowledge of building and facility management).
- **Fiscal management** (demonstrated ability to manage financial affairs of an organization, i.e., develop revenue sources and control expenditures to preserve financial stability).
- **Fund raising leadership** (demonstrated success providing strategic leadership for development efforts, cultivating and stewarding donors, supporting major gifts and capital initiatives, and partnering effectively with development professionals, the Board, foundations, and corporate supporters).
- **Government relations** (experience interacting with local, state, regional and national government representatives, and government organizations).
- **Management experience** (has effectively led a complex organization and managed large team of professional and hourly employees and volunteers).
- **Media relations** (ability to effectively articulate goals, objectives, and policy positions of the Lake Erie Nature & Science Center to the media).
- **Non-Profit experience** (minimum of 3 years of executive leadership background in a nature or environmental type organization; or demonstrated leadership experience in a comparable non-profit organization; or significant Board/volunteer experience with a comparable non-profit organization).
- **Planning** (experience in developing, implementing, and executing strategic and operational plans).
- **Staff development and retention** (demonstrated success developing and empowering staff, strengthening management capacity, supporting professional growth, building teams, and planning for succession).
- **Technology development** (demonstrates comfort with organizational technology, embraces innovation, and can evaluate and support the implementation of technology solutions that improve operations, fundraising, communication, and visitor experience.)

Attributes:

- **Collaborative** (works effectively with and through others; builds strong partnerships and encourages teamwork across the organization and community).
- **Communication skills** (an exceptional listener and communicator with strong written, verbal, public speaking, and presentation abilities; able to clearly articulate the organization's mission, vision, and priorities).
- **Credibility** (commands the respect and confidence of the Board, staff, donors, volunteers, and community through demonstrated competence, authenticity, and sound judgment).
- **Creative** (innovative and resourceful; brings new ideas and serves as a catalyst for strategic thinking, growth, and continuous improvement).
- **Change agent** (demonstrated ability to successfully lead change, manage transitions, and guide an organization through evolving opportunities and challenges).

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- **Empowering Leadership** (a visionary and decisive leader who sets direction, inspires others, motivates teams, delegates effectively, and drives achievement of organizational goals).
- **Emotional intelligence** (demonstrates strong self-awareness, sound judgment, empathy, and the ability to understand and navigate complex situations and relationships; listens thoughtfully, considers diverse perspectives, and makes informed decisions that balance organizational needs, mission priorities, and stakeholder interests).
- **Energetic** (enthusiastic, engaged, and committed; demonstrates a strong personal work ethic and recognizes the commitment required of an executive leader).
- **Ethical** (possesses the highest standards of honesty, integrity, accountability, and professional conduct).
- **Executive presence** (polished, confident, and approachable; represents the organization effectively with internal and external stakeholders).
- **Leadership & Team Development** (a visionary and decisive leader who sets clear direction, inspires and motivates teams, empowers and develops staff, delegates effectively, establishes accountability, and fosters a culture of collaboration, professional growth, and achievement of organizational goals).
- **Persuasive** (able to build consensus, synthesize diverse perspectives, influence others, and bring stakeholders together around shared goals).
- **Results oriented** (highly organized; effectively prioritizes initiatives, manages resources, and executes strategic and operational objectives).
- **Visibility** (an active and engaged community presence; builds relationships with staff, volunteers, visitors, civic leaders, donors, and regional partners).
- **Vision** (a forward-thinking leader who sees the broader opportunities beyond day-to-day operations and effectively translates vision into strategic priorities and measurable results).

Challenges and Opportunity:

The projected first 12-18-month accomplishments for the new Executive Director include:

- Successfully lead the completion of Phase II of the Wildlife Gardens project, including the remaining implementation, fundraising, donor stewardship, and transition to long-term operational success.
- Provide steady leadership during organizational transition by building alignment, trust, and accountability among staff, Board, donors, and community stakeholders.
- Advance philanthropic growth and sustainability by strengthening the fundraising strategy and pipeline, cultivating donor relationships, and partnering with the Board and development staff to secure support for strategic priorities, including capital initiatives.
- Strengthen the organization's external presence and reputation by maintaining donor confidence, enhancing community relationships, and effectively representing the mission and impact of Lake Erie Nature & Science Center.
- Partner with the Board and staff to evaluate, refresh, and execute the organization's Strategic Plan to ensure it remains aligned with LENS's mission, vision, and long-term priorities.
- Ensure strong financial stewardship and operational discipline by maintaining accurate financial reporting, effective resource management, and sound organizational practices.

The Executive Director position at Lake Erie Nature & Science Center represents a unique and outstanding opportunity for an accomplished leader to guide a respected and mission-driven organization into its next chapter of growth and impact. Following 16 years of successful leadership, the Board of Directors seeks an executive who can build upon a strong foundation and an experienced staff team while bringing vision, energy, and strategic focus to the organization's future. This leader will have the opportunity to advance a nationally recognized mission centered on connecting people with the natural world, strengthen relationships with key stakeholders, and further position LENS for continued success through thoughtful leadership, community engagement, philanthropic partnership, and sustainable growth.

The next Executive Director will inherit a financially stable organization, an experienced and committed leadership team, a respected reputation throughout Northeast Ohio, and a Board committed to supporting the organization's continued growth and long-term success.

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Bay Village, Cleveland, and Northern Ohio

Lake Erie Nature & Science Center is located in Bay Village; an attractive lakefront community of approximately 16,000 residents situated 15 miles west of downtown Cleveland along the southern shore of Lake Erie. Consistently recognized for its excellent public schools, extensive park system, and exceptional quality of life, Bay Village offers the charm of a close-knit community while providing convenient access to the cultural, educational, and business resources of the greater Cleveland region.

Northeast Ohio is home to a diverse economy anchored by nationally recognized healthcare systems, advanced manufacturing, higher education, technology, and professional services. The region offers an outstanding quality of life with world-class arts and cultural institutions, award-winning restaurants, vibrant neighborhoods, and abundant outdoor recreation, including the Cleveland Metroparks and Lake Erie waterfront. Residents also enjoy access to excellent public and private schools, numerous colleges and universities, and professional sports featuring the Cleveland Browns, Cleveland Cavaliers, and Cleveland Guardians, as well as a wide variety of collegiate athletic programs.

More information about the communities and overall quality of life in Northeastern Ohio can be found at www.northeastohioregion.com.

Contacts

Interested candidates should send a resume in confidence to WAVERLY PARTNERS, the executive search firm retained by the Lake Erie Nature & Science Center Board on this search using the following email address:

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