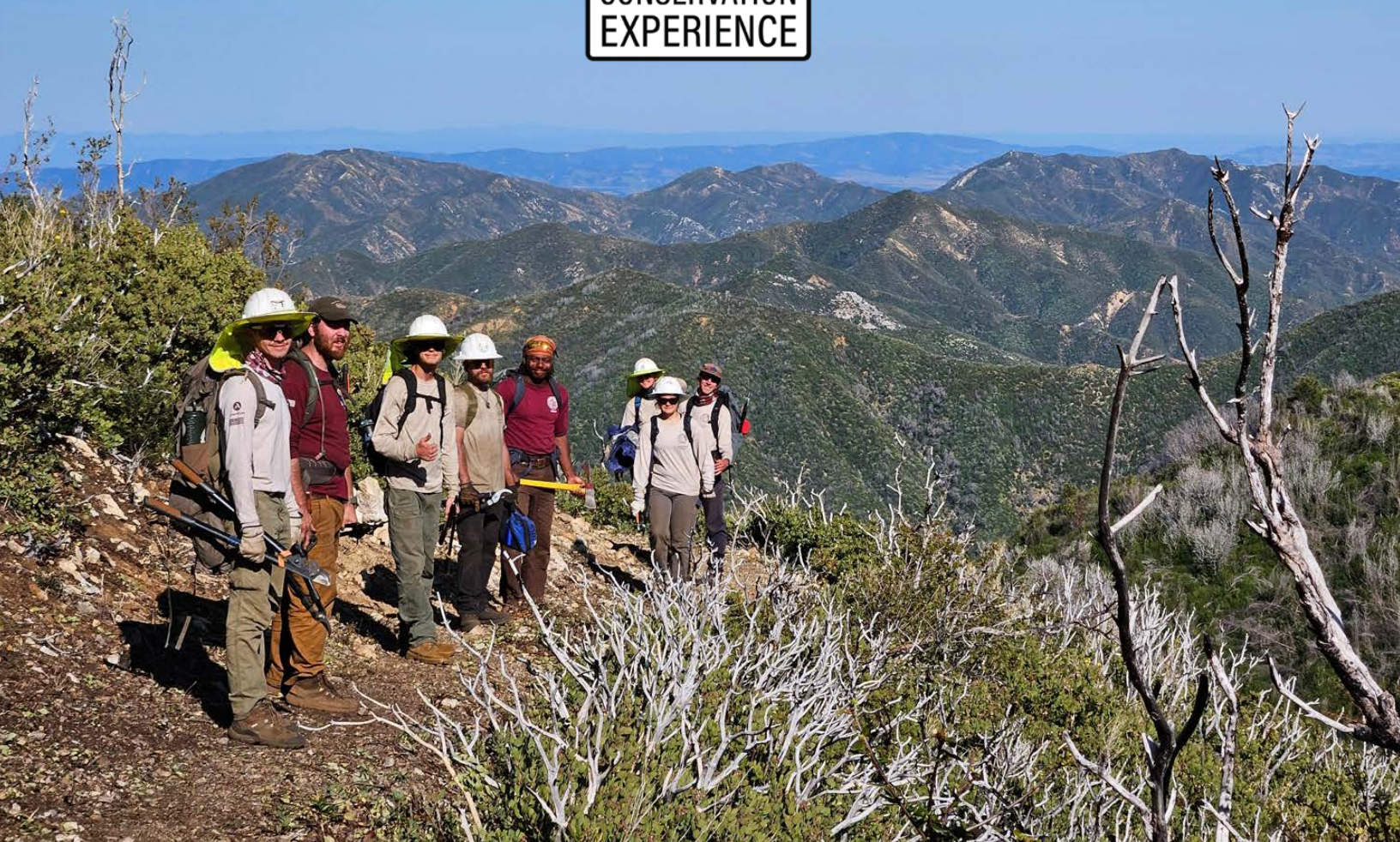




SEARCH FOR

Chief Executive Officer

FOR AMERICAN CONSERVATION EXPERIENCE

FLEXIBLE LOCATION | CONTINENTAL UNITED STATES

JULY 2026



AMERICAN CONSERVATION EXPERIENCE

American Conservation Experience (ACE) is a national nonprofit conservation corps dedicated to providing rewarding environmental service opportunities for young adults and emerging professionals of all backgrounds to explore and improve public lands while gaining practical professional experience. Founded in Flagstaff, Arizona in 2004, ACE has grown into one of the three largest conservation corps in the country, operating with an annual budget of approximately \$48 million and a team of 180 staff working across hub locations and a robust remote workforce nationwide.

ACE's work reaches every corner of the country. In 2025 alone, more than 1,300 members contributed over 835,000 hours of conservation service across 270+ project sites in 45+ states and territories, building and maintaining 296 miles of trails, planting nearly 26,000 trees, and managing more than 2,500 acres of land for invasive species.



This work is carried out through four signature programs:

- The **Conservation Crew Program** deploys members in professionally supervised teams under the guidance of ACE trainers and crew leaders as they explore future outdoor careers, learn practical skills, and complete complex field projects. Corps members are supported during their 3, 6, or 9-month service terms with a living allowance, meals on projects, and common housing provided on off days. Corps members receive industry-recognized trainings such as Chainsaw and Cross-Cut Saw Training, Trail Skills, and Wilderness First Aid, and crews are provided all tools, transportation, camping and hitch equipment, and supervision to successfully complete field projects in the front and backcountry.
- The **Emerging Professionals in Conservation (EPIC)** program places individual members alongside agency mentors on specific projects spanning the spectrum of resource management disciplines. EPIC members serve 3-12 months, receive a living allowance, and are either provided dormitory housing at their service location, an ACE-secured housing option, or a housing allowance. The EPIC program provides an invaluable opportunity for individuals seeking to bridge their academic or previous work experience with new professional milestones, allowing members to explore, connect with, and preserve America's natural and cultural resources while gaining specialized skills and advancing their careers in conservation.
- The **Disaster Response** program, a growing area of strategic investment, mobilizes ACE's skilled crews for emergency deployment in the aftermath of natural disasters, as demonstrated by ACE's sustained response to Hurricane Helene in Western North Carolina.
- The **Alumni Engagement** program deepens ACE's long-term impact by connecting its growing community of conservation alumni to ongoing opportunities, networks, and career pathways in the field.

ACE holds longstanding partnerships with the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Forest Service, as well as dozens of additional federal and state land management and conservation organizations. Its diversified revenue base spans federal and state agencies, foundations, municipalities, and nonprofits, reflecting both ACE's reach and its reputation as a trusted, high-quality partner. The organization has completed seven consecutive years of clean, unmodified audits and demonstrated exceptional financial discipline, including navigating a 44-day federal shutdown in 2025 without halting operations or compromising the member experience.

Guided by a set of aspirational 2030 Goals and a strong values framework, ACE is recognized as a flagship conservation corps with active and influential presence in national conservation and corps industry conversations. As conservation policy grows more complex and the demand for skilled public lands stewardship increases, ACE enters its next chapter focused, stable, and well-positioned for continued and diversified growth.

To learn more, please visit usaconservation.org

MISSION, VISION AND VALUES

MISSION

American Conservation Experience is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing rewarding environmental service opportunities for youth, young adults, and emerging professionals of all backgrounds to explore and improve public lands while gaining practical professional experience.

PARTNER OF CHOICE

The organization partners think of first when they have new projects, initiatives, and challenges, known for quality work products, responsiveness, and exceptional service.

VISION

ACE strives to be:

EMPLOYER OF CHOICE

A workplace where the most talented people interested in conservation and service are eager to join, bringing an inclusive environment that supports innovation, collaboration, and the contributions of people from all communities.

PROGRAM OF CHOICE

The first organization young adults look to when seeking conservation and service opportunities, offering pathways from crew-based projects into professional internships and careers.

VALUES

ACE's work is guided by five core values: **Quality**, approaching every aspect of work with a commitment to high-value outcomes; **Inclusion**, striving to create an environment where all staff and members are valued, respected, and supported; **Professional Development**, providing opportunities for staff and members to grow skills and advance their careers; **Stewardship**, partnering across sectors to foster hands-on care of natural, cultural, and historical resources; and **Partner Immersed**, pursuing and maintaining quality relationships that support member experiences and keep ACE financially sustainable.

THE OPPORTUNITY

This is a rare and consequential opportunity to lead one of the nation's most respected conservation corps organizations at a defining moment in its history.

ACE was founded in 2004 and has grown and evolved across more than twenty years of leadership. Each chapter has built on the last, strengthening the organization's culture, deepening its partnerships, and expanding its capacity to serve members and public lands across the country. Today, ACE operates with a professionalized executive team, modernized financial infrastructure, and a culture defined by transparency, care, and psychological safety. That foundation is solid. The next CEO inherits something genuinely worth stewarding.

ACE is now entering its third chapter and the organization is clear-eyed about what this moment requires. The federal funding landscape is shifting, and the external environment demands both steadiness and creativity. The board, executive management team, and staff are aligned on the mission and culture, and the team is strong. What the organization needs now is a leader who can secure its financial future, expand its partnerships and revenue base, and ensure ACE remains indispensable in an evolving landscape.



The board is seeking a leader who can do two things simultaneously: protect what makes ACE exceptional, and help the organization grow into its next chapter. That means diversifying partnerships and revenue streams beyond traditional federal relationships, strengthening internal systems, and elevating ACE's voice in national conservation conversations, all while continuing to deliver the high-quality member experience that defines the organization.

ACE is not looking for a CEO to reinvent the organization. It is looking for someone who will listen first, earn trust, and then lead with care, confidence, and conviction. A leader who is as comfortable in a funder meeting as in a conversation with a crew member. Someone who can inspire trust among partners, federal and state agencies, congressional representatives, staff, members, and board alike, and ensure ACE remains a first call for agencies, a destination for young people seeking meaningful work, and a force for lasting impact on America's public lands.



MEMBER TESTIMONIALS



"My experience as a Volunteer Coordinator intern with ACE at Cabo Rojo National Wildlife Refuge has been incredibly enriching. This has been one of the best experiences I've had in my professional journey."

- José, ACE EPIC Member

"I joined ACE Crew Mountain West division as an assistant lead for Capitol Reef National Park's native seed collection crew. These opportunities opened my eyes to the beauty of stewarding natural and cultural landscapes. As a testimony to the doors opened post-ACE, I have gained support for continuing to use my botany and outdoor leadership skills as a museum educator in southern Colorado."

- Jenna, ACE Crew Alumna

RESPONSIBILITIES

The CEO provides overall leadership, direction, and accountability for American Conservation Experience, with responsibilities including:

ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP & CULTURE

- Serve as the organization's chief executive, accountable for overall performance, sustainability, and mission impact.
- Lead the third chapter of ACE's organizational development with a listening-oriented approach, earning the trust of a high-performing executive management team before reshaping structures or systems.
- Sustain and strengthen the collaborative, people-centered culture that defines ACE, ensuring clear communication, consistent values, and psychological safety across a distributed, remote-first workforce.
- Communicate proactively and creatively across a nationally dispersed organization, using a range of tools and approaches to keep staff connected, informed and engaged regardless of geography.
- Establish accountability structures that support a maturing organization without disrupting the trust-based culture that makes the team work.

STRATEGIC VISION & PLANNING

- Translate ACE's aspirational 2030 Goals into clear annual priorities in partnership with the executive management team and board. Identify emerging opportunities and navigate organizational complexity with adaptive, calibrated decision-making.
- Guide the development of a more formal strategic planning process that connects long-term vision to measurable execution across programs, operations, and culture.
- Help the board and executive management team make explicit choices when stability and growth come into tension.

FINANCIAL HEALTH & REVENUE DIVERSIFICATION

- Provide disciplined stewardship of ACE's approximately \$48 million operating budget, ensuring strong financial health, appropriate contingency, and continued clean audits.
- Working closely with the Chief Partnerships and Strategy Officer, actively champion revenue diversification, developing new and non-traditional funding streams beyond the federal fee-for-service model, including philanthropy, state and tribal partnerships, disaster response, and private sector opportunities.
- Work closely with the President/Chief Financial Officer to ensure financial systems, processes, and projections support long-term organizational resilience.



PROGRAM EXCELLENCE & MEMBER EXPERIENCE

- Working with the Chief Programs Officer, oversee a broadening program portfolio spanning Conservation Crew, EPIC, Disaster Response, and Alumni Engagement, ensuring each program delivers high-quality, consistent experiences for members and exceptional value for partners.
- Maintain unwavering attention to safety and risk management across all program areas, understanding that ACE deploys members into physically demanding and sometimes remote environments, and that the organization's reputation depends on getting this right.
- Champion a member-first culture that invests in professional development, career pathways, and equitable access to conservation opportunities.
- Ensure that member outcomes, including skill development, career readiness, and the conservation ethic members carry beyond service terms, are tracked, celebrated, and continuously improved.
- Support program leaders in maintaining operational excellence while pursuing strategic growth and adaptation.

PEOPLE LEADERSHIP & ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Lead, develop, and retain a strong executive management team, providing coaching, clarity, and the space for experienced leaders to do their best work.
- Manage the board relationship with skill and care, building toward a more strategically engaged governance body over time.
- Foster a culture of inclusion and belonging where staff at every level feel seen, supported, and invested in their growth.
- Champion professional development and career pathways for staff across divisions and tenure levels.

EXTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS & COALITION BUILDING

- Serve as ACE's primary external ambassador, building and sustaining credible relationships with federal agency partners, congressional representatives and their staff, The Corps Network, peer conservation organizations, tribal nations, state agencies, disaster response partners, funders, and other allies.
- Navigate the political landscape with savvy and nonpartisan discipline cultivating relationships across the aisle in ways that protect and advance ACE's ability to do its work. ACE has earned a seat at the table in national conservation and corps industry conversations.
- A core responsibility of the next CEO is to protect and expand that presence, ensuring ACE is not only in the right rooms but is a recognized and respected voice within them.
- Represent ACE with authenticity and confidence in national conservation conversations, positioning the organization as a thought leader and first-call partner.
- Engage funders and donors directly, translating ACE's impact into compelling opportunities for investment.

GOVERNANCE & BOARD PARTNERSHIP

- Partner closely with a deeply committed and engaged Board of Directors, maintaining healthy governance boundaries while collaborating on strategy, financial oversight, and organizational health. Invest in the board relationship as a genuine priority, providing the information, context, and strategic framing that enables the board to function as the strong governance partner it is.
- Support the board's continued evolution as a governance body, recognizing that the most effective boards are always growing, and that the CEO plays an important role in that shared journey.

CANDIDATE PROFILE

The following six leadership competencies were identified through a comprehensive discovery process with ACE's board, executive management team, and staff as the capabilities most essential to set the next CEO up for success. If you meet at least 70% of the qualifications, we want to hear from you. We encourage candidates who are excited by this opportunity and deeply aligned with ACE's mission to apply.

STRATEGIC AND ADAPTIVE LEADER

- You are a strategic thinker who can take stock of a complex organization, build consensus around where it needs to go, and translate that shared vision into a plan that people can actually execute.
- You know how to lead an organization through the discipline of choosing priorities, and you do not confuse activity with strategy.
- You are steady under pressure and clear-headed in uncertainty.
- You read shifting landscapes quickly, communicate honestly during disruption, and help teams stay focused when the ground is moving.
- You know how to hold an organization together during a challenging external environment without letting external chaos become internal chaos.
- You make calibrated decisions with incomplete information and explain your reasoning throughout.
- You are politically savvy without a partisan identity, and you understand that ACE's ability to work across a wide political spectrum is not a preference but a structural requirement of the business model.

MISSION-ALIGNED CONSERVATION ETHIC

- You have a genuine, lived connection to conservation, public lands, and the people who dedicate their careers to protecting them.
- You do not need to have worked at a conservation corps, but you need to understand and care about the quality of ACE's conservation programs in a way that is felt rather than performed.
- You can speak credibly and personally about why this mission matters, and staff and partners will know quickly that it is real.
- You bring curiosity and humility to the specific culture of corps work and are committed to learning what you do not yet know.



PEOPLE-CENTERED LEADER

- You are the kind of leader people want to follow.
- You manage with trust rather than control, invest genuinely in the people around you, and create environments where staff at every level feel seen and supported.
- You thrive in a collaborative culture and know how to earn the right to lead change before you begin making it.
- You listen first.
- You understand that a high-performing executive management team does not need to be rebuilt, it needs to be led with care and earned trust.
- You are also clear-eyed and decisive when personnel situations require it.
- You do not avoid hard conversations, and you handle them with both directness and humanity.
- You are as comfortable in a conversation with a crew member as you are in a board meeting, and people at both ends of that spectrum can feel it.

FINANCIALLY FLUENT LEADER

- You understand money, not just at the level of financial strategy, but how funds flow through a complex, multi-source organization. ACE operates with federal and state agreements that come with significant compliance and audit requirements, and while you will not be doing this work yourself, you know what to look for, what questions to ask, and when something needs attention.
- You are fluent in internal financial management, budgets, cash flow, audit readiness, and compliance as well as external financial development, building the case for investment, working alongside the team, and helping open doors that the program team then walks through.
- You understand the fee-for-service model that has made ACE successful and know how to steward it well, while also being genuinely curious about expanding ACE's revenue base.
- You are excited by the revenue diversification challenge, whether through philanthropy, private sector partnerships, state and tribal relationships, disaster response or new program models, you see opportunity where others see risk.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDER AND EXTERNAL AMBASSADOR

- You build relationships because you understand their value, not just because it is in the job description.
- You show up credibly with federal agency partners, congressional representatives, peer organizations, tribal nations, state agencies, funders, and new partners ACE has not yet reached.
- You understand how to work across a politically diverse landscape with discipline and nonpartisan integrity, and you know that ACE's access to the rooms that matter depends on relationships built over time.
- You are willing to enter rooms you have not previously occupied and represent ACE in ways that expand what the organization is known for.
- You elevate the voices and expertise of the people around you, and you understand that the best ambassadors make their whole organization more visible, not just themselves.

BOARD AND GOVERNANCE PARTNER

- You understand the difference between governance and management and you work that boundary with skill and patience.
- You engage the board as the genuine partner it is, providing the information, context, and strategic framing that enables effective governance.
- You believe that the strongest boards are always evolving, and you see investing in that relationship as one of the most important things a CEO can do.
- You show up to the board relationship with the same care and intentionality you bring to every other leadership responsibility.



PREFERRED QUALIFICATIONS

- 10+ years of increasingly responsible leadership experience in mission-driven organizations, ideally with exposure to conservation, environmental stewardship, workforce development, public lands, or allied fields.
- 5+ years of experience as a senior executive, including direct leadership of a senior leadership team and accountability for organizational performance and financial health.
- Demonstrated experience leading organizations or teams through transition, change, or periods of external volatility, with a track record of maintaining culture and trust through uncertainty.
- Proven ability to manage and diversify complex revenue models, including fee-for-service, government contracts, philanthropy, or a combination. Experience with federal grant and agreement structures is a meaningful plus.
- Demonstrated success helping an organization diversify its revenue base, whether through developing philanthropic capacity, building new partner relationships, securing non-traditional funding, or expanding into new program areas or markets.
- Track record of building and sustaining external relationships with government agencies, partners, funders, or coalitions.
- Experience managing distributed, remote-first teams across multiple locations or divisions.
- Strong financial management skills, including oversight of multi-million dollar budgets, cash flow, audits and compliance.
- Demonstrated ability to partner effectively with an active Board of Directors, including supporting board development and strengthening governance.
- Outstanding communication skills and a credible, authentic public presence.
- Demonstrated ability to build connection and maintain organizational culture across a geographically dispersed, remote-first workforce, with a creative and intentional approach to internal communication.
- A genuine and demonstrable connection to conservation, public lands, or environmental stewardship.
- Experience working in or alongside AmeriCorps, conservation corps, national service, or workforce development programs is a plus but not required.
- Commitment to fostering a culture of inclusion and belonging where staff across all levels and locations feel supported and invested in their growth.

COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

The salary range for this position is \$300,000 to \$350,000, commensurate with experience.

ACE offers a competitive benefits package that includes medical, dental, and vision insurance; a 403(b) retirement plan with employer contributions; life and disability coverage; flexible spending accounts for medical and dependent care expenses; pre-tax commuter benefits; cell phone reimbursement; an Employee Assistance Program; outdoor gear discounts, and paid time off and holidays. All staff have access to professional development opportunities relevant to their role and career goals.

LOCATION AND TRAVEL

ACE is headquartered in Flagstaff, Arizona, with hub locations in Asheville, North Carolina; Coachella Valley, California; Ridgecrest, California; Sacramento, California; Hurricane, Utah; and San Juan, Puerto Rico. ACE also maintains a robust remote workforce across the country.

The CEO may be based anywhere in the contiguous United States. Regardless of home base, regular and meaningful in-person presence with staff across hub locations is essential to building trust, maintaining culture, and staying connected to the work on the ground. The CEO should also expect to travel to partner sites, federal agency offices, and national conservation convenings throughout the year.

Estimated travel in the first year is 20-25%. Travel in subsequent years is expected to be lighter, generally around 15%, and typically includes an annual in-person gathering with the executive team, at least one in-person board meeting, two trips to Washington, D.C. for The Corps Network's spring conference and fall leadership gathering, and one or two program and site visits. Additional travel may be needed depending on organizational priorities, and the actual cadence will vary based on the incoming CEO's location and working style.

Relatively easy access to a major airport is required.

EXPRESS INTEREST

Calibrated Search has been retained by American Conservation Experience to assist in this confidential hiring process. To express interest in this role, please share your candidate materials [HERE](#). To nominate candidates and/or ask questions, please reach out to inquiry@calibrated-search.com. Please list “ACE CEO Search” in the subject line.

Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis, and all inquiries will be handled confidentially

EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

Employment or Service with ACE is based upon ability, qualifications, attitude, and job-related factors. Every qualified employee, member, or applicant has the same opportunity for recruitment, hire, training, transfer, promotion, compensation, demotion, termination, benefits, employee activities, and general treatment without regard to race, color, religion, age, sex, creed, national origin, pregnancy, ancestry, citizenship status, genetic information, veteran or military status, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation, medical condition, marital or parental status, political affiliation, ethnicity, hair texture or style, arrest record, caste, hereditary status, endogamy, or any other classification protected by applicable local, state, or federal law. Reasonable accommodations will be made so that qualified applicants with disabilities may participate in the process. Please advise in writing at the time of application.



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