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# CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

The Chief Executive Officer must be a strategic, transformative leader who will work to deepen the impact of the organization and ensure its interpretive mission, retail services, publishing, and partnerships continue to grow and thrive.





## ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Since its inception in 1953, Smokies Life (formerly Great Smoky Mountains Association) has supported the preservation of Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP) by promoting greater public understanding and appreciation of the park’s resources through education, interpretation, and research, providing retail, wholesale, and membership programs that enrich the visitor experience. The proceeds from these programs fund the organization’s operations and allow it to give cash and in-kind donations to the park that, combined, exceed \$2.8 million annually. Smokies Life’s cumulative financial assistance to GSMNP exceeded \$50 million in 2023.

While the mission and operating model of Smokies Life are common to many nonprofit park partners, the organization’s size and sophistication make it unique. Smokies Life operates eleven stores in and around GSMNP and a growing online store. It currently publishes more than 100 offerings including books, trail guides, maps, videos, audiobooks, and podcasts, as well as a regular newspaper column, “Word from the Smokies,” the Smokies LIVE blog, and the award-winning Smokies Life Journal. Many of these items form part of the inventory sold in its stores and are distributed wholesale to businesses throughout East Tennessee and Western North Carolina; others provide the foundational content for a robust social media presence on a variety of platforms. The organization engages over 28,000 individual and 150 business members to support its work. It also holds a competitively-bid concession contract to sell visitor safety and convenience items in the park. In 2022, the organization’s gross receipts exceeded \$14 million. Smokies Life uses this revenue to support programs, park publications, and facilities throughout the park and to provide in-kind visitor services.

Smokies Life works in close coordination with the National Park Service (NPS) and three additional partners to meet park needs: Friends of the Smokies, GSMNP’s philanthropic partner; Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont, its outdoor experiential learning partner; and Discover Life in America, its science partner, managing the park’s All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory. Smokies Life’s robust partnerships and many moving parts make for a complex, challenging, and fast-paced work environment that never ceases to be engaging and rewarding.





## POSITION OVERVIEW AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Smokies Life seeks a visionary leader to drive the organization forward in its mission to support Great Smoky Mountains. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) will be responsible for overseeing strategy development and execution, management, and the success of Smokies Life’s interpretive partnerships, programs, and products.

The CEO must be a strategic, collaborative leader who understands governmental and business partnerships. The ideal candidate has the skills and experience to sustain the organization’s success as an industry leader in interpretive retail and publishing.

The CEO will collaborate with an active and engaged Board of Directors and work with a talented and dedicated team to serve Smokies Life’s mission, people, and partners. They will be the central face, voice, and heart of the organization, responsible for stewarding the ongoing operations and financial health of the Smokies Life as well as executing long-term strategy and maintaining and growing critical partnerships.





## ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP, STRATEGY, AND MANAGEMENT

- Develop and articulate comprehensive long-range strategic plans to develop and grow Smokies Life's capabilities as a premier cooperating association.
- Collaborate with the Board to develop the organization's strategic goals and oversee an annual planning, budgeting, and review process that engages new ideas through an entrepreneurial mindset.
- Collaborate with the Board and with partners to identify and prioritize high-impact projects and initiatives that best support the GSMNP's goals.
- Foster a team mentality that reinforces Smokies Life's positive and equitable workplace culture and supports a diversity of voices and experiences.
- Identify actions and opportunities to position Smokies Life as the pre-eminent innovation leader amongst its peers, building upon Smokies Life's strong reputation across park partner communities under its refreshed brand.



## FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

- In partnership with the CFO, ensure the preparation of annual financial plans and budgets for review and adoption by the Board of Directors.
- Review and manage partner funding requests to ensure compliance with the approved use of funds.
- Ensure that all reporting and audit requirements are met, and the Board is appropriately informed about key financial decisions.
- Continually monitor key risks across the organization and proactively develop risk mitigation strategies.





## STAFF AND OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP

- Oversee multiple facilities, physical assets, and inventory to optimize resource utilization, fulfill Smokies Life's mission, and manage financial contributions to agency partners.
- Continually evaluate retail operations and administrative programs to identify revenue enhancement and expense savings opportunities.
- Work with the leadership team to keep current with best practices and continuously demonstrate leadership and innovation in interpretive retail and publishing.
- Manage permanent and seasonal staff and ensure they are a cohesive, aligned team who collaborate effectively to meet annual goals, establish top-priority mission-driven programs, and achieve financial targets.
- Build a diverse, inclusive staff team and organizational culture that represents Smokies Life's community, partners, and visitors.

## BOARD RELATIONS

- Work effectively with the Board of Directors to achieve Smokies Life's long-term strategic and financial goals.
- Lead the board to define and identify appropriate engagement opportunities and accomplish objectives collaboratively with organizational staff.
- Maintain effective relationships between the staff and board.

## RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AND PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

- Achieve exceptional outcomes with the park and its partners through strong relationships and a collaborative vision.
- Continually foster a culture of partnership, communication, trust, and goodwill within the organization and among NPS, nonprofit partners, business partners, park constituencies, community partners, and others.
- Manage relationships with the park's direct partners to help achieve top priorities and maximize Smokies Life's direct and indirect aid contributions to the park.
- Respond to partner institutions' priorities, views, and concerns and support their interests and needs through the organization's work.
- Support staff to build and maintain effective collaborative relationships with institutional and individual partners essential to Smokies Life's operations, programs, products, and goals.
- Working closely with the leadership team, ensure operations, programs, and products meet the parameters of agreements and NPS policies.
- Seek new and expanded partnerships that support Smokies Life mission delivery and enhance opportunities for impact.





## DESIRED EXPERIENCE AND COMPETENCIES

The ideal CEO will have an extensive background in management, leadership, and retail including a track record of progressive positions with effective operational and financial oversight, brick and mortar and online retail, and developing innovations to drive organizational and sales growth. They must be motivated by a deep love for the great outdoors and protection of public lands.

The ideal candidate may come from a variety of career pathways including for-profit business leadership, retail management, interpretation, or nonprofits. Excellent interpersonal skills are essential, including staff leadership and development, a diplomatic approach to collaborating with the Board, and the ability to cultivate strong relationships with partners, vendors, and the community.

The successful candidate will be a visionary leader with the strategic ability to chart a path forward and the attention to detail to execute the operational steps needed to ensure success. Proven executive experience, experience leading retail growth and sustainability initiatives, and strong financial management, all paired with a creative, collaborative, and entrepreneurial approach, are essential.



## MANAGEMENT AND STRATEGIC VISION

- A track record of meeting or exceeding expected organizational results in positions of increasing responsibility and authority
- Deep commitment to the mission of the organization and the conservation of the natural world
- Experience managing large, complex projects or initiatives with multiple stakeholders
- Track record of objective, data-driven strategic and operational decisions; quantitative and qualitative decision-making skills
- Embrace, support, and demonstrate a commitment to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Nonprofit leadership experience is strongly desired
- A sophisticated understanding of our core business areas is desired (e.g. retail, publishing, membership, interpretive and educational services, partnership collaboration)
- A sophisticated understanding of cooperating associations is preferred but not essential

## MANAGEMENT AND STRATEGIC VISION

- An influential leader who can develop and articulate an innovative vision for the next chapter of a complex, multi-site retail cooperating association
- A collaborative partner to board members and experience working closely with board committees in an approachable and professional manner
- An inspiring manager who develops a team-based environment that leads to team output that is greater than the sum of individual inputs
- A consensus builder who can bring people together and facilitate effective collaboration, problem solving, and decision making
- Excellent oral and written communication skills and comfort with public speaking

## OPERATIONAL OVERSIGHT

- Skilled in organizational development, administration, and personnel management
- Broad experience in nonprofit management, ideally in a cooperating association, public lands, or federal partnership institution
- An understanding of retail best practices and revenue model diversification
- A values-driven approach rooted in ensuring the best possible visitor and customer experience
- Capable project manager with careful attention to detail and follow-through
- Experience managing a complex budget with multiple funding sources and grant obligations

## INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

- Empathetic, diplomatic, and inclusive of various perspectives; able to resolve conflicts and find common ground
- Able to deeply listen to and acknowledge stakeholder viewpoints and support their engagement, while also maintaining a strong sense of vision and strategic direction for the organization
- A confident leadership presence, comfort making decisions and maintaining strong convictions while remaining open to the ideas of others
- Positive, optimistic, personable, charismatic, and transparent
- High ethics, integrity, sound professional judgment, and ability to maintain confidentiality with tact and discretion
- Adaptable and flexible in the face of changing conditions; tolerance for adversity and uncertainty





## COMPENSATION

The CEO is a full-time, exempt, benefit-eligible position. The anticipated annual salary is \$130,000–\$170,000, commensurate with experience.

A comprehensive benefits package includes medical, vision, and dental insurance, employer-sponsored flexible spending, a 403b plan, and generous paid time off.

## LOCATION

The Chief Executive Officer will work from our offices at park headquarters in Gatlinburg, TN. Regular travel throughout the park is expected.

## START DATE

Summer 2024

## TO APPLY

Interested candidates should apply by **March 17, 2024** for priority consideration. Please visit [potrerogroup.com/smokies](https://potrerogroup.com/smokies) to apply. Applications should include a resume and a cover letter describing your qualifications that match the position criteria and what you will bring to the role.



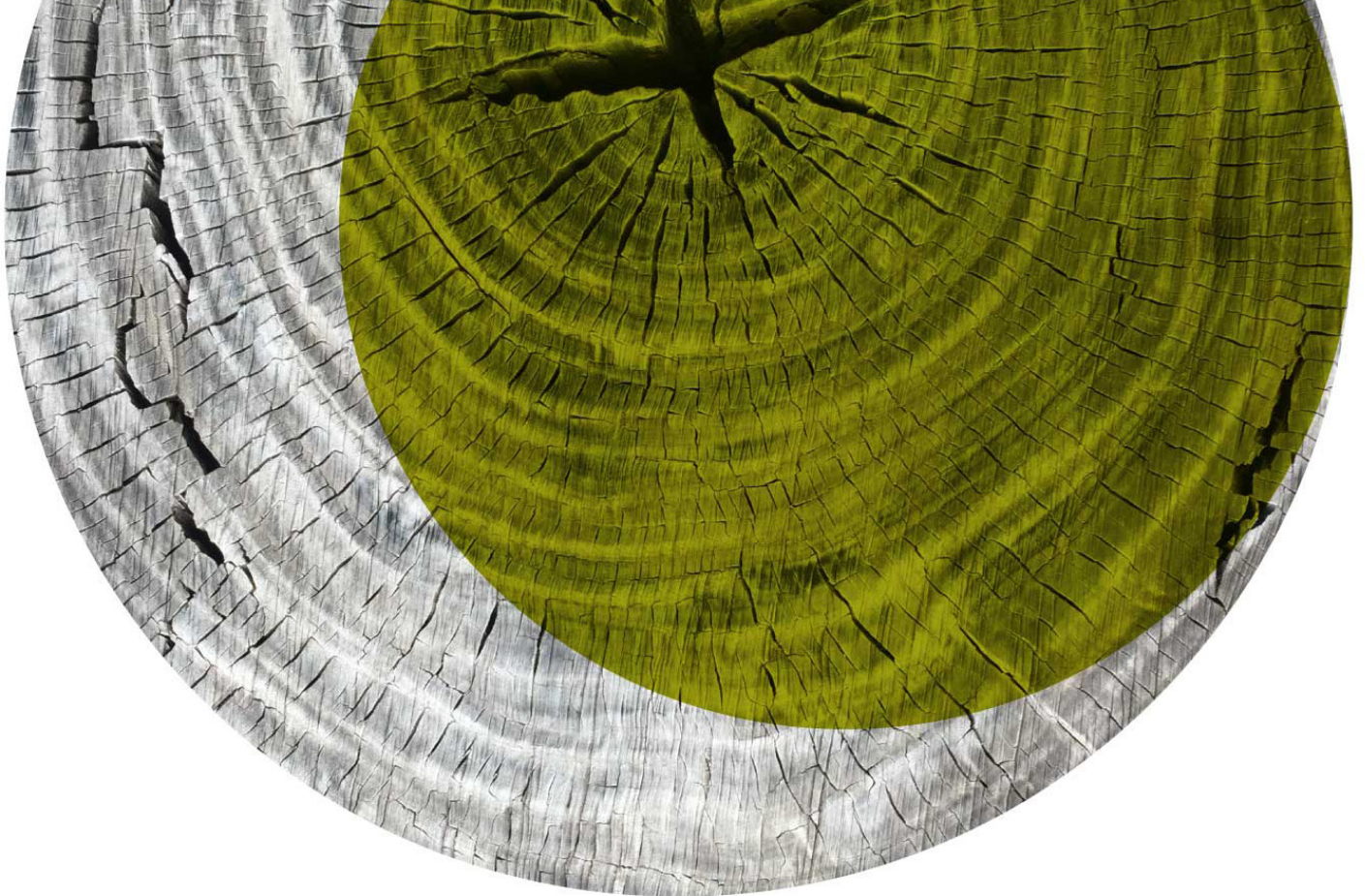


## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

More information on Smokies Life can be found at [smokieslife.org](https://smokieslife.org).

For additional information regarding this opportunity, please contact Cleveland Justis, Founder and Principal, at [cjustis@potrerogroup.com](mailto:cjustis@potrerogroup.com).





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GROUP



Potrero Group is honored to coordinate this search on behalf of Smokies Life. Supporting a world-class park partner organization is in perfect alignment with Potrero Group's commitment to providing rigorous strategy and business planning, organizational effectiveness, and nuanced search services to mission-driven organizations. Potrero Group supports innovative leaders and organizations making a difference in the world. We are committed to equitable and inclusive practices in all of our work.

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