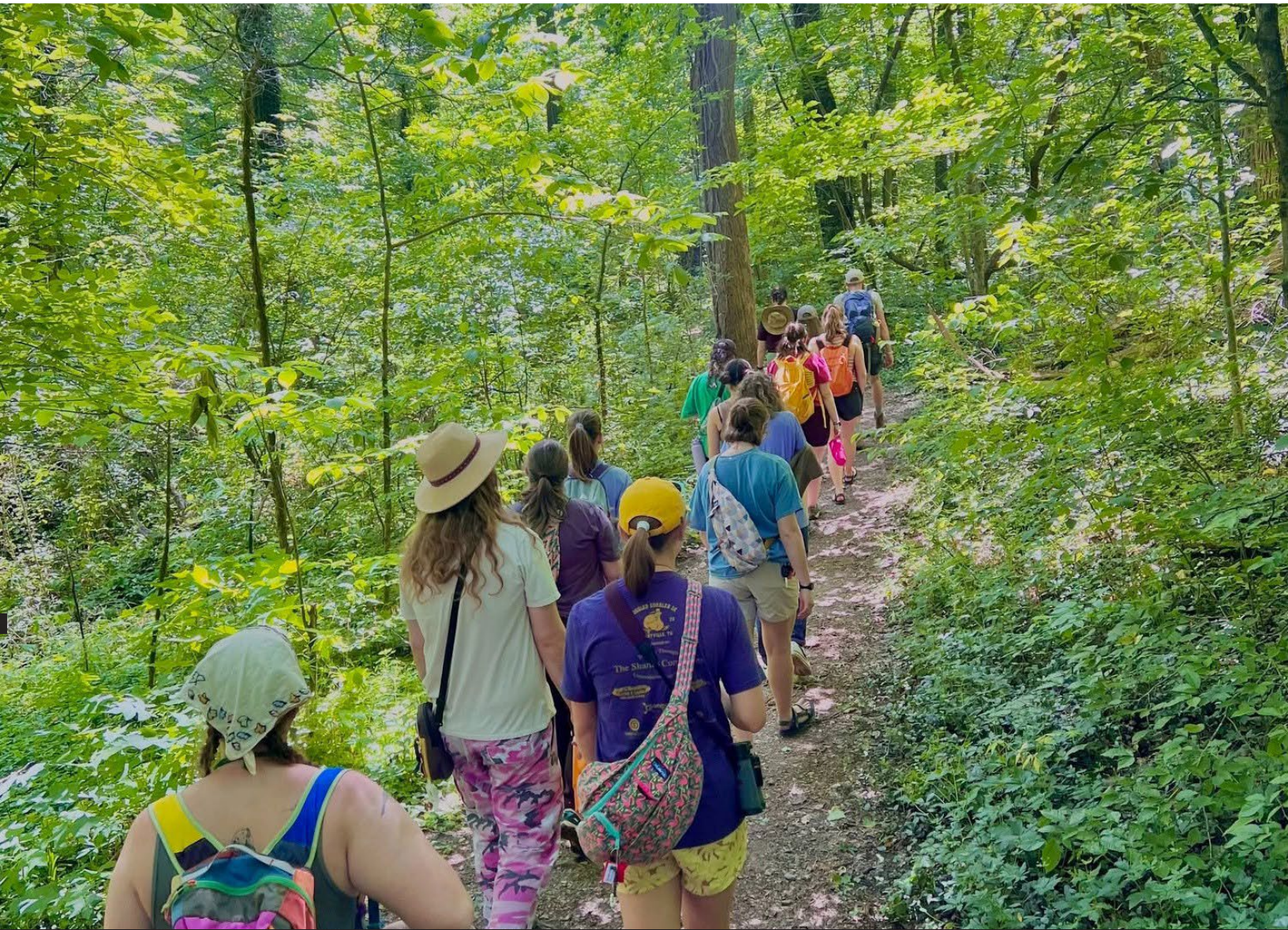




ljams
NATURE CENTER

Search Conducted By

POTRERO
GROUP



Chief Executive Officer

ljams Nature Center seeks an accomplished, mission-driven Chief Executive Officer to steward its education, conservation, and community impact along the Tennessee River.



Organization Overview

Ijams Nature Center is a nationally respected nonprofit natural area and nature center located along the Tennessee River near downtown Knoxville, Tennessee. As one of the region's most significant urban green spaces, Ijams connects hundreds of thousands of people each year to the natural world through environmental education, land conservation, outdoor recreation, and community partnerships.

Ijams operates at the intersection of education, conservation, public access, and civic life. It features an integrated system of trails, river access, quarry lake recreation, educational facilities, gardens, and public gathering spaces, spanning more than 336 acres of protected land. Its programs reach learners of all ages, from school field trips and early-learning programs to adult education, conservation initiatives, and large-scale community events. The organization works closely with the City of Knoxville, Knox County, regional partners, and national networks to advance the stewardship of natural resources while ensuring that nature remains accessible and relevant in a rapidly growing urban region. As a defining component of Knoxville's nationally known Urban Wilderness, Ijams is both a beloved community asset and a regional destination.

As Ijams approaches its next chapter, the organization is financially sound and operationally strong, with deep community trust, an engaged board, and a clear vision for continued growth and impact. The next Chief Executive Officer will step into this moment of strength and momentum with the opportunity to sustain organizational excellence while thoughtfully shaping what comes next.



About Knoxville

Located in East Tennessee, Knoxville is a dynamic and growing city nestled in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. The region offers exceptional access to outdoor recreation, including its proximity to Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the most visited national park in the United States, and Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area, known for its dramatic landscapes, trails, and backcountry experiences.

Knoxville is a community that deeply values nature, conservation, and outdoor access, with residents embracing an active lifestyle and lending strong public support to preserving and expanding natural spaces. Along the city's south waterfront, it is home to the nationally recognized Urban Wilderness, a 1,000-acre outdoor adventure area. It features an extensive network of trails and greenways that connect users to a wildlife area, lakes, quarries, historic sites, playgrounds, city parks, and Ijams Nature Center. Outdoor enthusiasts can hike, bike, climb, paddle, or stroll, all within minutes of downtown.

Beyond its natural assets, Knoxville is a vibrant and welcoming city with a strong sense of place.

It offers a thriving arts and culture scene, an expanding food and local business community, and a flagship research institution in the University of Tennessee. The city has experienced steady growth and investment in recent years, with a revitalized downtown and a collaborative spirit that brings together public, private, and nonprofit sectors. For many families and working professionals, Knoxville also offers an affordable cost of living, with housing costs well below the national average, and Tennessee's lack of a state and municipal income tax means residents keep more of their paycheck.

Knoxville is widely recognized as a forward-looking and increasingly progressive community, committed to quality of life, sustainability, and community-oriented growth. Its size allows for meaningful civic engagement and leadership impact, while still offering the amenities and energy of a larger metropolitan area.

Together, these qualities make Knoxville an exceptional place to live, work, and thrive, particularly for those passionate about connecting people, community, and the natural world.



Position Overview

Ijams Nature Center seeks an accomplished, mission-driven executive to serve as its next Chief Executive Officer. This is a rare opportunity to lead a beloved, thriving, highly visible, community-anchored institution. The CEO reports to the Board of Directors and holds overall responsibility for the strategy, operations, and external leadership of the organization.

The incoming leader will inherit an organization that is stable, respected, and ambitious, actively shaping the future of urban conservation and environmental education in the region. The CEO will be charged with sustaining organizational excellence, stewarding key relationships, and guiding Ijams on its path of strategic growth while honoring its culture, values, and public trust. The role will appeal to a leader who thrives in complex environments, values collaboration, and is energized by the opportunity to balance continuity with thoughtful evolution.

KEY STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



Execute and Evolve Organizational Strategy

- Execute Ijams' Master Plan, advancing long-term strategic priorities, stewarding organizational direction, and ensuring continued alignment between mission, strategy, and outcomes.
- Guide the organization through leadership transition while sustaining operational stability, staff morale, and donor confidence.
- Ensure that systems, documentation, and leadership practices support continuity and long-term sustainability.



Ensure Sustained Financial Health and Growth

- Steward Ijams' forthcoming \$32M capital campaign and guide long-term planning to ensure future resource needs are identified and met.
- Champion a comprehensive, diversified fundraising and revenue strategy, including membership growth, that reflects Ijams' current strength and supports its future growth, in alignment with its mission and priorities.
- Build genuine, lasting donor relationships marked by warmth, energy, and authenticity, across the political and demographic spectrum.
- Collaborate with the Board of Directors and development staff to advance major gifts, campaign giving, planned giving, and grants.
- Sustain financial health through disciplined financial management, budgeting, and strong fiscal oversight.



Sustain Organizational Momentum

- Oversee operational excellence and risk mitigation across the organization.
- Guide facilities improvements and capital expenditures to accommodate increased visitation, expanded programming, and long-term site needs.
- Champion land stewardship goals that reflect Ijams' conservation values and long-term ecological commitments.

Cultivate a High-Functioning Board

- Partner with the Board of Directors on governance, strategy, fiscal oversight, and organizational succession planning.
- Nurture a strong board-CEO partnership grounded in transparency, trust, and shared accountability.
- Keep the board transparently and proactively informed, engaged, and supported, enabling effective, well-aligned decision-making.



Support a Healthy, Inclusive Workplace

- Lead and support a strong executive and management team.
- Foster a workplace that attracts, develops, and retains talented, mission-aligned staff.
- Champion an inclusive culture of collaboration, professional growth, and shared accountability.



Build Community Connections

- Strengthen Ijams' role as a civic asset, regional leader, and role model in conservation, education, recreation, and public access to nature.
- Serve as a visible, trusted ambassador to donors, partners, and the broader community.
- Sustain and deepen relationships with the City of Knoxville, Knox County, and regional and national conservation networks.
- Represent Ijams publicly through media appearances, conferences, and speaking engagements.



Desired Experience and Competencies

Ijams Nature Center seeks a seasoned, mission-driven executive who leads with clarity and warmth. The ideal candidate brings a track record of leading complex organizations, partnering effectively with governing boards, and building strong, motivated teams. This experience is paired with the financial discipline, fundraising acumen, and relationship-building skills needed to sustain Ijams' track record of success. They must have the executive presence to serve as a trusted, visible leader across a broad and engaged community. Above all, the next CEO brings a genuine commitment to public service and environmental stewardship.

Strategic Leadership

- Senior executive leadership experience within nonprofit, conservation, education, or other public-facing, mission-driven organizations.
- A demonstrated track record in strategic planning and organizational leadership.
- Skilled at leading an organization through periods of transition and implementing forward-thinking strategies that balance continuity with thoughtful evolution.
- A meaningful commitment to environmental stewardship, public service, and community-centered impact, ideally with a degree in a related field.

Fundraising Acumen

- A proven track record of supporting development strategy and successful fundraising efforts.
- Well-versed in supporting capital campaigns, major gifts, planned giving, and grant strategies.
- Ability to expand membership, and diversify and strengthen revenue streams that support long-term financial health.
- Skill in building significant, lasting connections with donors and funders, bringing warmth, energy, and authenticity to varied relationships.
- A genuine commitment to connecting supporters with the mission through compelling storytelling and relationship-building.

Board Partnership and Governance

- An effective partner to governing boards with a gift for building strong, trust-based relationships.
- Skilled at keeping the board informed and engaged, supporting effective and well-aligned decision-making.

Operational and Financial Expertise

- Sound judgment and a disciplined approach to risk mitigation, budgeting, fiscal oversight, and long-term financial planning.
- Experienced in organizations with complex facilities management, land stewardship, and programmatic needs.
- Flexibility to manage shifting priorities and changing environments.
- A talent for analyzing complex issues and developing creative, workable solutions.

Team Leadership

- Skilled at building and inspiring strong leadership teams, with the emotional intelligence to connect with and motivate people.
- A track record of attracting, retaining, and developing talented, mission-aligned staff.
- Adept at cultivating a healthy, inclusive workplace culture of collaboration, innovation, growth, and shared accountability, where staff feel valued, supported, and respected.

External Relations

- Exceptional written, verbal, and presentation skills, with compelling executive presence.
- Comfort and experience representing an organization publicly, including through media, speaking engagements, and community events.
- Skill in championing an organization's story and brand with vision and authenticity.
- Politically and socially savvy, with the ability to navigate a complex civic and regional landscape.
- A natural relationship builder with experience cultivating connections with governmental, nonprofit, and community partners.



Compensation

This is a full-time, exempt position. The salary starts at \$120,000 annually, commensurate with experience.

Ijams Nature Center offers a comprehensive benefits package, including:

- Medical, dental, and vision insurance
- 403(b) retirement plan match
- Paid vacation, holidays, and sick leave

Location

This position is based at Ijams Nature Center in Knoxville, Tennessee. The role requires a consistent physical presence on site and in the community to meet with partners, funders, and constituents. Occasional evening and weekend availability for events, programs, and organizational activities is required.

To Apply

Please visit potrerogroup.com/ijams and select "Apply Here." 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.

Interested candidates should apply by **September 27, 2026**, for priority consideration.



Additional Information

More information on Ijams Nature Center can be found at ijams.org

For additional information regarding this opportunity, please contact:

Jena Kuznik

Senior Consultant

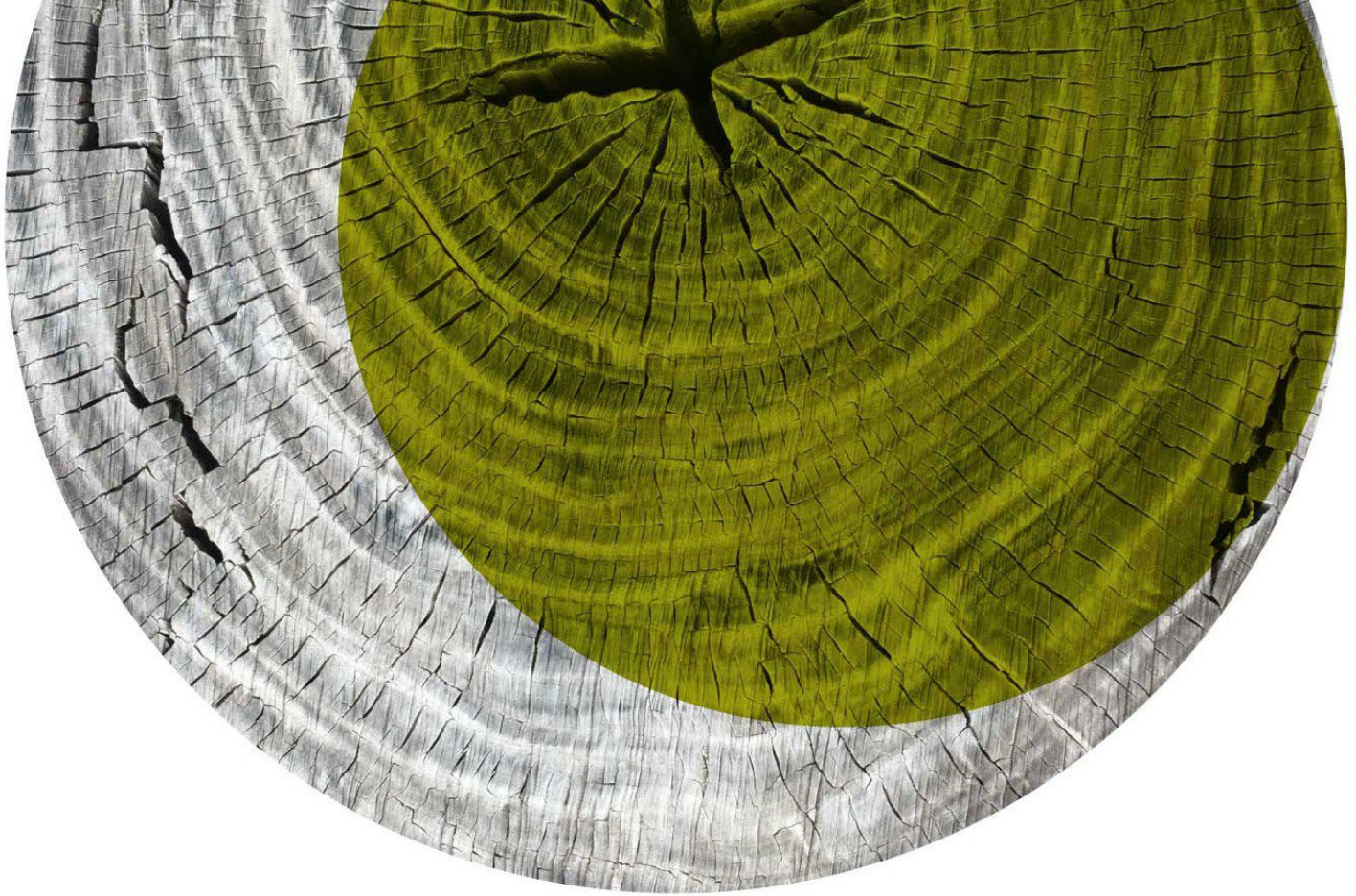
jkuznik@potrergroup.com



Equal Employment Opportunity Statement

Ijams Nature Center is an equal opportunity employer committed to creating a workplace where all individuals are treated with fairness, dignity, and respect. Employment decisions are made without regard to race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, national origin, disability, veteran status, or any other protected status. Reasonable accommodations are available throughout the hiring and employment process.





POTRERO
GROUP



Potrero Group is honored to coordinate this search on behalf of Ijams Nature Center. We support innovative leaders and organizations making a difference in the world with strategic planning, facilitation, organizational development, and board and executive search services. We are committed to equitable and inclusive practices in all of our work.

To join our mailing list or for more information visit **PotreroGroup.com**