

Chief Executive Officer

[Project Return](#)

Organizational Overview

"Project Return is solely dedicated to the successful new beginnings of people who are returning to our community after incarceration. We provide the resources and services needed to gain employment and build full and free lives."

For nearly 50 years, [Project Return](#) has helped the recently incarcerated return to community by connecting them to employment, housing, and the support needed to rebuild their lives.

Project Return has a staff of 17 and an annual operating budget of \$3.7 million, supported by substantial funding from the State of Tennessee and the philanthropic community. The organization operates out of its own headquarters building in Nashville's Napier neighborhood and uses its real estate holdings to partner with aligned organizations serving the same community.

Project Return maintains multiple programs to serve its participants:

- **Prison in-reach:** Transition programming delivered inside correctional facilities to prepare people for their return to the community.
- **Case management:** Support for participants who have recently returned to the community, addressing the practical barriers to work, including securing identification and other essential documents, building resumes and interview skills, and connecting participants directly to employers ready to hire.
- **Job search assistance:** Direct connections between participants and available jobs.
- **Social enterprise:** Project Return's own transitional work program, providing jobs alongside supportive services such as transportation and skills building.
- **Housing:** 32 units of housing that Project Return owns and rents to program participants at below-market rates, creating greater stability and financial footing for those returning to the community.

To support this work, Project Return is seeking a Chief Executive Officer ready to grow its social enterprise and expand its impact.

The Opportunity

Project Return was founded by a coalition of Nashville church leaders committed to grace, dignity, and second chances for people returning from incarceration. That mission

connects returning community members to employment regardless of where their incarceration took place or the nature of their offense. This full inclusion remains a defining feature of the organization's identity, and a core value the next CEO is expected to protect and carry forward.

While the core mission of welcoming community members back to Nashville by providing substantive support has remained steady, Project Return has sought new ways to serve that mission. In 2013, the organization launched PROe, a social enterprise providing transitional employment directly to participants. Over the past decade, it has grown into one of the organization's most important assets: a primary reason people come through Project Return's doors, a proven training ground for real-world work experience, and a meaningful revenue driver.

Project Return has weathered a period of significant change, including leadership transition, financial restructuring, staff reductions, and a renewed focus on its core programs. The organization enters this search leaner and on stronger financial footing, while recognizing that important work remains to strengthen systems, clarify accountability, rebuild organizational capacity, and determine where future growth can be sustained. The next CEO will have the opportunity to lead Project Return from stabilization into its next era of disciplined, strategic growth.

Project Return seeks a Chief Executive Officer who is genuinely curious and energized by complex challenges. Project Return has a strong history of innovating its way forward, and the next CEO should carry forward that same instinct, looking for creative and sustainable ways to grow the organization's impact. The position focuses on executive leadership: setting direction, building strong systems, and holding senior directors accountable for excellent programs.

The next Chief Executive Officer will play a defining role in Project Return's next chapter. The most immediate priorities are financial and operational: building disciplined business and financial processes, growing the social enterprise into a stronger engine for both employment and revenue, and aligning the organizational structure to match its current scope of work.

Project Return needs a CEO who can bring discipline to the organization without losing sight of the people it serves. The CEO will need to strengthen finances and operations, grow PROe, strengthen processes and senior leadership, and represent Project Return effectively with government, philanthropy, employers, and the broader Nashville community.

Key Responsibilities

Strategic & Mission Leadership

- Clarify and build Project Return's strategic direction, using participant outcomes, staff experience, and financial realities to decide what to strengthen, what to change, and where to grow.
- Serve as Project Return's chief external ambassador and thought leader, strengthening partnerships with public agencies, elected officials, philanthropic partners, individual donors, and field-building networks to advance systems change and secure sustainable investment.
- Champion equity, dignity, and the right to a full and free life after incarceration, embedding trauma-informed and community-rooted approaches into organizational strategy, policy positions, and public engagement.
- Build alignment and shared purpose across Board, staff, and stakeholders, fostering clarity, trust, and collective ownership of Project Return's strategic direction.

Finance, Operations & Performance

- Provide fiduciary leadership for Project Return's operating budget, including financial controls, forecasting, and risk management.
- Partner with Project Return's contracted accounting firm to ensure accurate financial statements, strong internal controls, and reliable reporting.
- Establish an organizational and staffing structure aligned with Project Return's current scope of work, and ensure operations and infrastructure, finance, HR, IT, compliance, and facilities are integrated and appropriately scaled.
- Lead PROe as both a mission strategy and a business enterprise, strengthening its operating model, pricing, margins, employer pipeline, workforce capacity, and performance so that it produces strong participant outcomes while contributing meaningfully to organizational sustainability.
- Provide strategic oversight of Project Return's housing and real estate portfolio, ensuring sound property management, consistent policies and controls, regulatory compliance, financial sustainability, and alignment with the organization's broader mission and strategy.
- Integrate data, research, and lived organizational experience into organizational learning, using findings to refine practice and adapt to emerging needs and policy shifts.

- Use participant and program data to understand what is working, identify where programs need to improve, and clearly communicate Project Return's results to funders, partners, and the Board.
- Supervise, coach, and develop Project Return's senior directors, holding them accountable to clear goals while providing the support they need to lead their teams well; hire people for key leadership positions as organizational needs require.

Development, Fundraising & Communications

- Lead an integrated development and communications strategy and infrastructure.
- Serve as a primary steward of external relationships, cultivating and sustaining strong partnerships with public agencies as well as foundations, individual donors, and other key supporters.
- Partner with the Board to expand resources and visibility, activating board members as ambassadors, advocates, and connectors to philanthropic, civic, and policy networks.
- Diversify funding streams by building on Project Return's continued success securing state and federal grants and sustained foundation support, while exploring new opportunities for funding through the social enterprise, government contracts, and private giving.

Board Partnership & Governance

- Serve as the primary partner to the Board, fostering a strong, transparent, and trusting relationship, and providing timely, accurate information on organizational performance, risk, finances, and impact to support effective governance and decision-making.
- Collaborate with Board leadership on strategic planning, ensuring continuity, stability, and long-term organizational health following a period of significant change.
- Engage and activate board members as strategic assets, supporting their roles in fundraising, advocacy, and relationship-building, and partner with the Board on recruitment, development, and evaluation to build a diverse, skilled, mission-aligned Board that reflects the communities Project Return serves.
- Ensure strong governance practices and compliance, including adherence to bylaws, policies, ethical standards, and nonprofit best practices.

Compensation: Salary range \$165-\$175

Qualifications & Experience

Skills & Experience

- A minimum of 7 years of senior leadership experience within a complex organization, whether nonprofit, public sector, or business, with responsibility spanning strategy, operations, finance, and external engagement.
- Experience strengthening organizational culture and accountability, including clarifying roles, addressing performance issues, navigating conflict, and creating an environment where staff can raise concerns while remaining accountable for results.
- Demonstrated experience managing complex organizations with multiple programs, revenue streams, or business lines, and a proven track record of financial stewardship, including oversight of multi-million-dollar budgets.
- Strong financial acumen, including experience with budgeting, financial oversight, interpreting financial statements, and partnering effectively with outside accounting or finance professionals.
- Experience leading organizations, teams, or divisions through periods of growth, change, or transition, with the judgment and steadiness to manage both opportunity and uncertainty.
- A demonstrated ability to operate at a strategic, executive level: setting direction, holding senior leaders accountable, and building strong systems, rather than managing day-to-day service delivery directly.
- Demonstrated ability to navigate conflict, difficult personnel dynamics, and high-stakes conversations with steadiness, sound judgment, and appropriate boundaries, while building systems and a culture that addresses issues before they escalate.
- Ability to build strong working relationships with government agencies, philanthropic partners, donors, policymakers, employers, and community organizations.
- A collaborative, values-driven leadership style, grounded in integrity and accountability, that builds trust across staff, Board, and community stakeholders.

Mindset & Approach

- A track record of innovation and creative problem-solving in keeping with Project Return's own history of building new solutions.
- A demonstrated drive to make real progress on hard, ambiguous problems, energized by complexity and willing to make difficult decisions when there isn't an obvious answer.

- A sharp instinct for what matters most, particularly in finance and compliance, and the discipline to build systems and hold others accountable for getting the details right.
- Resilient and steady, able to lead a rebuilding organization with calm confidence, think ambitiously about Project Return's future, and stay close to the financial, operational, and human realities of running the organization.
- A deep and sincere commitment to second chances and the full humanity of every person, along with genuine interest in being part of the broader effort to improve reentry systems and outcomes.

Nonprofit Leadership LLC is facilitating this executive search on behalf of Project Return. Interested candidates should email a resume and cover letter to elle@nonprofit-leadership.com sharing an experience that shaped their belief in second chances and how it would inform their leadership. Applications are due October 23, 2026, will be reviewed as they are submitted, and early applications are appreciated. Project Return is an equal opportunity employer and welcomes all applicants.

[Opportunity Packet](#)