



LEADERSHIP PROFILE

**Chief Development Officer
Southern Environmental Law Center**

Charlottesville, VA¹

"Solutions start in the South."

¹ Charlottesville is the preferred location, as SELC's Executive Director, several peers on the Management Committee and most of the Development team are based there, but the client is willing to consider other options within SELC's geographic footprint.

The Opportunity

Over nearly four decades, the [Southern Environmental Law Center](#) has built an extraordinary reputation for impact and effectiveness as one of the nation's most powerful defenders of the environment.

Known for successfully tackling complex environmental issues and superbly resourced opponents, SELC consistently delivers nationally significant results through its place-based focus, its deep local presence, its strong network of partner organizations, and its effective mix of legal, strategic, and communications expertise.

The organization has never been stronger. With nearly twice the staff and four times the revenue of just over a decade ago, SELC is fully prepared for its core mission:

To protect the basic right to clean air, clean water, and a livable climate; to preserve our region's natural treasures and rich biodiversity; and to provide a healthy environment for all.

The staff of 215 provides daily evidence of the power inherent in teams that combine passion and competence in equal measure. SELC's impact in both courts and communities continues to attract the funding and talent to continue the fight for the environment.

SELC enjoys support from hundreds of foundations and philanthropists, but a substantial share of its funding comes from a small base of exceptionally loyal individuals. Their consistent funding, year after year, has helped build SELC into a legal powerhouse that routinely tackles the nation's thorniest environmental challenges.

And yet....

Common sense and prudent planning dictate that SELC be focused and strategic in developing more



“

The Southern Environmental Law Center has built an extraordinary reputation for impact and effectiveness as one of the nation's most powerful defenders of the environment.

“

Through both actions and impact, the Southern Environmental Law Center has shown that “Solutions start in the South.”



diverse funding streams from a broader network of supporters who value the national impact of the standard-setting work being done in the South. The combination of generous donors and prudent management has resulted in a well-resourced organization with responsible reserves—reserves that give SELC the breathing room to build deep relationships with a more expansive pool of major funders.

With its development objectives clearly defined, SELC is launching the present search for **Chief Development Officer**. The new executive will have the mandate to equip SELC with the development strategy, structure and leadership required to sustain a robust organization with the proven capacity to prevail against powerful polluters, advance bold policy solutions, and work for systemic change.

The Organization

SELC is rooted in the South, and its place-based focus on six southern states² is core to its success, but its influence is not contained by state lines. In fact, the challenges SELC undertakes and the victories it wins continue to provide inspiration and momentum for initiatives, policy changes and legal advocacy well beyond any regional boundaries. Through both actions and impact, the Southern Environmental Law Center has consistently shown that “*Solutions start in the South.*”

Over the past three years, for example, SELC has marked some significant milestones, among them

- 0 miles of the Atlantic open to offshore drilling
- 3 major pipeline projects cancelled
- 21 gigawatts of solar installed or planned across the South

² SELC has eight offices serving Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia plus an office in Washington, D.C.

- Over 40 major river systems better protected from industrial chemicals and pollution
- 187 coal-fired units at 50 power plants retired
- 20 million tons of carbon pollution prevented from vehicle tailpipes
- 275 million tons of coal ash removed from riverbanks.

Operationally over the same period, SELC has

- Implemented a thoroughly vetted ten-year strategic plan to sustain and build upon its successful model, now focused on addressing climate change, redressing environmental injustices, and producing national solutions out of SELC's work in the South
- Hired 55 new staff members (mostly under remote-working conditions), a third of them people of color—a direct reflection of a key pillar in SELC's refreshed strategy: "Build a more diverse organization and enhance SELC's advocacy for environmental justice in the South"
- Celebrated the service of several tenured board members and the appointment of successors from an increasingly diverse pool
- Honored the contributions of SELC's Director of Advancement, who retired after nearly three decades with the organization
- Named DJ Gerken Executive Director, just the third in SELC's history, after an extensive national search
- Concluded the three best fiscal years in the organization's history, showing yet again that money follows impact. Contributions and grants in FY 2021, 2022 and 2023 averaged just over \$44 million,³ eleven times the development revenue of 20 years ago.

³ Included unaudited estimate for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023.



“

SELC has hired 55 new staff members (mostly under remote-working conditions), a third of them people of color—a direct reflection of a key pillar in SELC's refreshed strategy: "Build a more diverse organization and enhance SELC's advocacy for environmental justice in the South."

“

Culturally, SELC is one organization, not a collection of accomplished individuals. Collaboration and camaraderie are core values shared across offices and teams.



SELC employs a matrix approach to management:

- Geographically, each office has a senior attorney in charge, three of whom are currently members of SELC’s Management Committee.
- Programmatically, each primary issue area has a senior attorney or policy professional serving as catalyst for program priorities and expertise.
- Administratively, the organization is supported by department heads responsible for the traditional functions of development, communications and marketing, and finance and administration.
- Culturally, SELC is one organization, not a collection of accomplished individuals. Collaboration and camaraderie are core values shared across offices and teams.

Overseeing this matrix is a Management Committee comprising six standing members: the Executive Director, the Deputy Director, the Chief Development Officer, the Director of Communications, the Program Director, and the Director of Finance and Administration. The Management Committee also includes state directors (currently three) and program leaders (currently one).

SELC is governed by an engaged and supportive Board of Trustees of committed community leaders and regional advocates from a variety of professional settings across all six of its states.

SELC is rightly proud of how well-integrated most of the various pieces are with one another. Development has long been viewed as mission-critical at SELC. Even so, it has tended to be more siloed than other departments were, in large part because that structure worked well under SELC’s founder, a natural connector who retained personal ownership of many of SELC’s long-standing funding relationships.

“That has to change,” notes one SELC veteran. “We need to look at everything we do through a development lens.” Instilling a culture of philanthropy across the organization will be one of the more important tasks of the new Chief Development Officer. Doing so strategically, thoughtfully and determinedly—a commitment initiated by SELC’s Executive Director and actively embraced by the entire leadership team—will be essential to SELC’s future.

For a quick overview of SELC, watch the two-minute video [here](#) describing “the muscle and the heart behind landmark environmental victories.”

For a deeper dive, peruse SELC’s extensive website to learn more about its [footprint](#), [focus](#) and [financials](#), as well as its [past](#), its people ([staff](#) and [board](#)), its [partners](#) and its [impact](#).

The Mandate

SELC’s Chief Development Officer joins a successful, respected organization known for its high-quality legal and policy work; strategic vision and pragmatic problem solving; and deep understanding of the places, politics, and culture of the South. No one knows the southern environment better than SELC, and even those who have never set foot in the South benefit from the changes SELC has championed—or prevented.

Over nearly four decades, SELC has created a well-funded and well-resourced organization with a national reputation for exceptional results. To sustain recent momentum and ensure the resources required by the complex environmental issues ahead, SELC must adjust its overall approach to funding.

Many of the pieces are in place, but SELC needs the development leadership to steer a path all involved know is essential to its future—leadership shaped by experiences derived in other high-



“

Over nearly four decades, SELC has created a well-funded and well-resourced organization with a national reputation for exceptional results.

“

The Chief Development Officer can expect to discover and harness untapped potential—within SELC and its expanding network of supporters—to ensure broad investment in the environmental successes to come.



performance contexts and informed by best practices and systems tested over time.

Some overlapping priorities the Chief Development Officer can expect to address, all supporting SELC's ten-year strategic plan:

- **Define and implement** the strategic framework for Development to deliver the robust and diverse funding streams needed to ensure SELC has the talent and the tools to tackle the full range of environmental challenges facing the region and the nation
- **Enhance** the staffing, systems, feedback loops and professional development opportunities characteristic of a best-in-class advancement function at a high-performing nonprofit with bold aspirations and no captive donor base
- **Model** a culture of philanthropy across the organization, developing and reinforcing collaborative relationships throughout and fostering collective ownership in advancement goals
- **Deepen** the focus on planned giving while expanding targeted outreach to large foundations, especially those outside the region, all without neglecting the relevant efforts needed to assure a growing base of future funders
- **Engage** the Board of Trustees fully, strategically and transparently in pursuit of ambitious advancement goals
- **Strengthen** the coordination with Communications & Marketing to enhance the cohesion and impact of funding-related messaging, whatever the medium or forum, creating “gears that mesh, not just ones that overlap.”
- **Discover** and harness untapped potential—within SELC and its expanding network of supporters—to ensure broad investment in the environmental successes to come.

The Development team is already doing very good work, and many of the pieces (and people) are in place to tackle the great work ahead. With the right leadership, Development will play a disproportionate role in future successes, thereby becoming a distinguishing factor in this extraordinary organization's journey—and yet another example that yes, solutions do start in the South.

The Relationships

The Chief Development Officer reports to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President & Executive Director
Is a member of the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 10-person Management Committee
Leads the Development department, now numbering ~20, through three direct reports:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director of Development, Foundations • Director of Development, Operations • Director of Development, Philanthropy
And engages regularly with	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications & Marketing • Finance & Administration • Individual State office directors and their teams • Current and prospective supporters, both institutional and individual • SELC Board members and the Board Development Committee • Advancement consultants and vendors • Thought-leaders and subject-matter experts relevant to SELC's mission • Peers in exemplary nonprofits

The Location

SELC is headquartered in Charlottesville, Virginia, and Charlottesville would be the preferred home base for the Chief Development Officer, as most of the Development team is based there.

“

With a development model grown organically over years of successful fundraising, SELC is ready for fresh perspective and an injection of new ideas and expertise earned in other contexts.



Five of the nine members of the current Management Committee⁴ are based in other offices. SELC is open, if not enthusiastically so, to the prospect of the Chief Development Officer being located elsewhere, with Asheville, Atlanta, Chapel Hill, or Washington, DC being the most practical alternatives.

The Candidate

The candidate to become SELC’s Chief Development Officer will be a deeply experienced development professional with successful tenures in fundraising contexts with a reputation for operational excellence, aspirational goals and robust, diverse funding streams which the candidate played a material role in developing.

We do not expect contenders to be expert in environmental issues per se, although demonstrated interest in the environment would be a clear asset. Rather, we seek an executive with an entrepreneurial bent, a collaborative operating style and a record of tenacious, gracious and successful development of superb teams realizing ambitious goals over the arc of time.

With a development model grown organically over years of successful fundraising, SELC is ready for fresh perspective and an injection of new ideas and expertise earned in other contexts. Experience developing and leading major gifts strategies and teams would be especially additive.

SELC is a place-based organization, and its place is the South. While its legal efforts are centered there, its fundraising efforts must be far more expansive. Accordingly, the most compelling contenders will be those who demonstrate an affinity for the South (or the cultural adaptability

⁴ The Chief Development Officer will become the 10th member of the committee, consistent with the new emphasis being placed on the role.

to work, lead and thrive there) *plus* a record of genuine success building programs and attracting funding from within the region and well outside it.

Among other qualities and experiences of interest:

Competence: The ideal candidate will demonstrate

- Significant success building and leading a large, sophisticated development department for a high-performing nonprofit, especially one that benefitted from a major refresh
- The experience and savvy to nurture growth in an able and eager team; a reflective, open and communicative manager who invites collaboration and fosters pride
- The facility for making major asks and a record of preparing others with the tools and training to do the same; even so, while the ability to lead a specific grant request is expected, the real value-add is in the ability to develop a comprehensively capable *team*
- The ability to lead SELC from vision through strategy to a plan of action thoughtfully executed
- Versatility in messaging, whether one-on-one with colleagues or prospects or to large audiences via traditional or new media.
- The perspective and experience to be a true partner with the Executive Director, a meticulous professional confident enough to lead and humble enough to learn—and especially keen to do so with development
- A natural bridge-builder, both internally and externally; a leader who adapts with ease to different geographies and generations
- A stable career path, with enough time on station in each major assignment to have led initiatives from concept to conclusion, learning from successes and disappointments



“

The ideal candidate will demonstrate the ability to lead SELC from vision through strategy to a plan of action thoughtfully executed.

“

SELC seeks a Development professional who embraces a focused, energetic and enthusiastic team determined to tackle the funding opportunities inherent in SELC's mission.



- Savviness in board dealings, anticipating trustees' needs, sharing information and generally modeling the partnership SELC's very capable trustees expect as they champion the mission.

Culture: SELC seeks a Development professional who

- "Thinks big and moves fast"; someone who meets the organization where it is while developing the plan to achieve major new goals
- Operates with transparency and humility, inviting rather than telling, exploring rather than declaring—a professional who leads with a light touch, combining collaboration with accountability
- Brings a fresh perspective to SELC's development challenges
- Embraces a focused, energetic and enthusiastic team determined to tackle the funding opportunities inherent in SELC's mission.

For potential consideration or to suggest a prospect, please email

SELC@BoardWalkConsulting.com

or call **Diane Westmore** or **Sam Pettway** at 404-BoardWalk (404-262-7392).