THE SEARCH

The Student Conservation Association (SCA) seeks a strategic, creative, and team-oriented Senior Vice President of Programs (SVP) to join its senior leadership team. America’s oldest and largest youth conservation organization, SCA conserves lands and transforms lives by empowering young people of all backgrounds to plan, act, and lead while they protect and restore our natural and cultural resources.

With the arrival this May of Stephanie Meeks as President and Chief Executive Officer, SCA is primed to expand its service opportunities for youth on public lands and, in particular, to grow impactful programming at the city level that will reach new and more diverse audiences and programming that furthers the social-emotional development of young people. This is an exciting and challenging opportunity for a hands-on leader to partner with a dynamic staff and executive team to strengthen and grow programming for a $34 million/year organization that has influenced the lives and careers of tens of thousands of participants over the past six decades while providing vital services to our nation’s public lands and communities. The SVP will play a critical role in this storied institution’s next chapter, helping to chart the organization’s future as it addresses such critical issues as shifting trends in governmental support, ever-growing threats posed by climate change and environmental degradation, new competitors in its marketplace, and demographic changes across the country that profoundly impact its mission.

From its founding in 1957, SCA has brought the power, passion, and potential of America’s youth to the conservation needs of the land, and, in so doing, delivered transformational, character-building experiences for its participants. Today, the organization’s work spans all 50 U.S. states and some U.S. territories, and annually engages thousands of young people in the work of conserving, restoring, and revitalizing parks, public lands, and urban green spaces, while promoting meaningful community engagement and team-building skills, and providing opportunities for personal growth and self-discovery.

The SVP role calls for an outstanding leader who is both visionary and pragmatic – a team builder who can inspire and motivate colleagues around big-picture ideas and also, just as critically, attend to the necessary realities of turning inspiration into action. The successful candidate will have experience designing and implementing programs and initiatives, ideally for a national and/or multi-site organization; proven skills in collaborative and decisive leadership; and an ability to manage and motivate a geographically dispersed team. The SVP will partner closely with other members of the executive team in support of the organization’s mission, ensuring there is clear and readily available information for other units and colleagues across SCA about the work of the programs team. A passion for the natural environment and youth development are also essential, expressed in professional, personal, or volunteer activities, and a lived commitment to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion is a must.

Isaacson, Miller
A search committee has been appointed to conduct this search in partnership with the national executive search firm Isaacson, Miller. Inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed in confidence to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

ABOUT THE STUDENT CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

The Student Conservation Association was conceived in 1953 by Vassar College student Elizabeth “Liz” Titus Putnam, who felt a deep personal connection to the natural world and was moved by the worsening condition of America’s national parks, which had become strained by overcrowding and had fallen victim to underfunding and disrepair. Putnam hatched the novel idea to leverage the passion of America’s youth to revitalize the parks. The model she designed was drawn from the Civilian Conservation Corps, a 1940s New Deal program that provided jobs for unemployed young men in the conservation of public lands. The program launched in 1957 under its original moniker, the Student Conservation Program, where inaugural crews of 53 college-aged young people began work in Grand Teton and Olympic National Park. While trail-building was the central focus, volunteers also took internships with park biologists and naturalists. The organization was officially incorporated as the Student Conservation Association in 1964 and the participation, partnerships, and richness and complexity of the work and its impacts have grown steadily ever since.

Today, SCA’s mission is to build the next generation of conservation leaders and inspire lifelong stewardship of the environment and communities by engaging young people in hands-on service to the land. Members participate in a variety of capacities and contexts. Beyond national parks, members work on marine sanctuaries, cultural landmarks, and community green spaces in cities. Members do land management, habitat restoration, trail building, disaster rehabilitation or prevention work, environmental education, public outreach, and more. Notably, Liz Putnam remains a committed evangelist and honorary member of the board. She has received over 20 awards for her work, including the 2010 Presidential Citizens Medal from President Barack Obama.

SCA’s award-winning programs are currently designed as follows:

- The SCA Conservation Intern program, in partnership with AmeriCorps, hosts expense-paid internships for young adults (typically aged 18-25) to build their skills and advance their careers by doing environmental-based work in public land agencies, businesses, and nonprofits over the course of 3-12 months.

- The team-based SCA Corps Program, also in partnership with AmeriCorps, hosts stipend-supported young adults doing work in front-country, back-country, small-town, or large city settings, taking on major conservation challenges over the course of 3-12 months.

- The team-based SCA Residential AmeriCorps Program is a cornerstone of SCA’s programming that hosts stipend supported young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 in long-term immersive 5- or 10-month terms where they work as a group to address the conservation needs of the state in which they operate.

- The SCA Community Programs run year-round, working with young people to tackle challenging outdoor projects and introducing participants to green spaces and jobs in their home communities, supported by a stipend or wage.
• The **SCA National Crews** program hosts high school students for several weeks during the summer for a service expedition in which they complete a conservation project in nationally protected parks or forests.

• The **SCA Field Leader** program hires, trains, and develops young people, 18 and older, to lead the high school student-populated National Crew, Community Crew, and SCA Corps programs.

• There are also a number of **Special Programs** that are tailored to particular regional and national opportunities and participant populations.

SCA measures the scope, scale, and impact of its work using several important metrics. In 2019, SCA engaged 214,100 people, including nearly 4,400 program participants and 1,930 local service event volunteers. Over 1.2 million hours of conservation work was undertaken in that year alone. Across 450 sites, 94,650 acres of wildlife habitat were improved; 8,469 trees were planted; and over 1,430 miles of trail were tended. SCA is proud that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization has been able to continue operating around 50% of its programming, through a combination of in-field, virtual, and hybrid programming. This is a testament to the incredible commitment and talent of SCA’s staff as well as its corps members, each and every one of them dedicated to making a difference and to making our world a better one. To read more about SCA’s impact, visit [https://www.thesca.org/impact](https://www.thesca.org/impact) or view the organization’s **2019 Annual Report**.

The impact of SCA service is not limited to its stewardship of land, however. Early in its history, the organization established itself as a pioneer in the space where youth development and environmental conservation converge—where they are symbiotically leveraged and mutually enhanced for individual, ecological, and public benefit. Indeed, SCA program participants are themselves very often transformed by their experiences in the field, including through their interactions with nature and one another, as well as by virtue of the new environment-specific skill sets they gain, and through the experience of being called to step up as conservation leaders. For many SCA participants, the seed of environmental stewardship is sown deep: decades-long data have shown that 70% of living SCA alumni are still active in conservation and environmental work, either on a professional or volunteer basis. Thousands of SCA alumni have made careers as park superintendents, EPA scientists, environmental engineers, and urban planners. A remarkable 12% of the National Park Service workforce is composed of SCA alumni.

Yet beyond this clear and direct indicator of individual impact, recent research in partnership with the Search Institute reveals something more nuanced: in addition to amplifying conservation values and behaviors of members, SCA’s programs contribute to the overall character-building and social-emotional development of youth and young adults. This individual growth enables them to develop key life and leadership skills and competencies such as emotional intelligence, communication, teamwork, planning and decision-making, creative problem-solving, altruism, self-awareness, motivation and initiative, resilience, and perseverance. With support from the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, SCA is working to incorporate SED squarely into its organizational identity, programming, and overall strategic direction.

Through this recent strategic work, SCA has also articulated a clear priority to build on and deepen its commitment to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI). SCA has increasingly worked to diversify its program participant cohorts and address barriers to participation in outdoor experiences and environmental education, and it is committed to helping to foster a conservation movement that is more
inclusive. Looking ahead, SCA will continue to play a leading role in pushing the boundaries of the conservation space, both real and perceived, so that a more diverse cross-section of young people see themselves as part of the movement.

ORGANIZATION, FINANCE, AND GOVERNANCE

SCA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with an annual budget of $34 million and a permanent staff of 110 supported by seasonal placements of over 3,000 interns, field crew members, and crew leaders. The organization is built upon public and private partnerships. Just under half of SCA’s staff and many of its operational functions are housed on its original campus in Charlestown, New Hampshire, where the organization owns three historical buildings on 50 acres. In 2014, SCA’s headquarters moved to Arlington, Virginia to achieve greater proximity to the Washington, DC area and the major federal agencies there. Several members of the senior leadership team are based in Virginia, as well as the organization’s recruiters and fundraisers, among others. A dozen other staff are spread across smaller offices in Chicago, Houston, Oakland, Anchorage, Pittsburgh, and the Hudson Valley.

SCA’s current business model is largely oriented around fee-for-service engagements. Approximately $25 million (73.5%) of the organization’s revenue is generated through government contracts, most of which are granted at the federal level, through partnerships with agencies such as the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In the 1990s and early 2000s, there was robust government participation in these programs, the organization enjoyed significant growth, and between fee income and generous bequests, SCA remained financially sound. In the aftermath of the Great Recession, revenues flattened and today, federal funding continues to decline in the face of federal budget cuts, increasing competition, and shifting political priorities. The balance of $9 million (26.5%) is comprised of a mix of non-federal partner service fees and private philanthropic support, including foundations, individuals, and a growing amount of corporate sponsorships.

SCA is governed by a 25-member board of directors which meets three times a year. The board has an active committee structure, with standing committees in finance, governance, audit, development, marketing, and program. Board members serve up to two three-year terms. In addition to the Board, SCA is supported by the President’s Council, a group of philanthropic, corporate, conservation, and youth development leaders who serve as evangelists, advisors, and promoters of SCA’s public and private fundraising efforts.

LEADERSHIP

Stephanie Meeks joined SCA as the organization’s president and chief executive officer in May 2020, and her arrival marks an exciting turning point and new chapter in the organization’s history. Stephanie brings extensive leadership experience to SCA, having held senior positions in the conservation and nonprofit sectors. She was president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation for eight years, and prior to that, served in several senior roles with The Nature Conservancy, including interim president, chief operating officer, chief administrative officer, and chief marketing and philanthropy officer over an 18-year period.
KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF PROGRAMS

Reporting to the CEO, the SVP of Programs is a critical member of the organization’s leadership team and will spearhead the strategic, tactical, and financial operations for all SCA programming. The moment is primed for programmatic evolution and charting new paths forward, and requires a leader who will bring expertise and an innovative, can-do approach to the role.

The successful candidate will be a visionary leader and strong communicator – ready to roll up their sleeves and dig into the work at hand – with proven success leading multi-disciplinary, multi-site teams and programs. An entrepreneurial spirit, sharp business acumen, and exceptional relationship-building skills will be critical. This individual must bring a passion and appreciation for diverse perspectives, talents, and identities and the ability to work collaboratively and respectfully at all levels of SCA, serving as a role model of SCA’s core values.

Specifically, the SVP of Programs will work to address the following opportunities and challenges:

*In partnership with the CEO and the other members of the executive team, create the vision and strategy for strengthening and diversifying SCA’s programs; and effectively collaborate with colleagues across the organization.*

Building on SCA’s core commitments to conservation, diversifying its audience and crews, and the social-emotional development of its crew members, the SVP will be expected to develop and implement a new strategic framework for programs. This represents an opportunity to refine traditional programs and develop innovative new ones, achieving transformational programmatic results for SCA and the individuals and communities the organization serves.

The SVP will lead a large and diverse staff with expertise in conservation, youth development, training, risk management, and program development and assessment while also effectively collaborating with colleagues across all other divisions of the organization. The SVP will set standards and best practices to effectively mobilize SCA’s resources to achieve results on a national scale, ensuring that programs adhere to the organization’s established safety standards and that department staff assist in safety improvement measures. Specifically, for example, the SVP will work with the director of evaluation to ensure proper evaluation and outcome reporting for all programs and services and with the general counsel to ensure proper program safety management and incident reporting.

As a member of the executive team, the SVP will help develop financial, cultural, risk management, and other strategies and policies in pursuit of SCA’s mission. The successful candidate will also develop the necessary systems, processes, and tools to better support the collection and distribution of data and knowledge generated by SCA programs and services – thinking both about sharing highlights and outcomes internally and also with key external partners and constituents.

*Manage, motivate, and mentor a talented programs team.*

The SVP of Programs will be responsible for leading and developing a 47-person team of talented programs professionals, and should work to ensure an inclusive culture and shared understanding of the primary function and operating ethos of the department. The SVP must attract, develop, coach, and retain
a diverse, high-performing team, empowering them to elevate their individual levels of responsibility, purviews of control, and performances.

SCA leadership focuses on promoting a positive, adaptive, and thriving organizational culture, where staff are empowered to learn, grow, and perform at their maximum potential. The next SVP must prioritize the professional development of SCA’s future programmatic leaders, building clear systems for advancement and opportunities for growth within the organization. Staff are energized about the possibilities for SCA’s future—most notably, opportunities to think creatively about how best to link SCA’s conservation and youth development goals—and hope the new SVP of Programs will share their enthusiasm for these and other new ideas.

**Reinforce and expand the organization’s commitment to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI).**

SCA has been a leading voice in the conservation movement’s more recent efforts to address systemic issues of inequity, and the next SVP must be committed to furthering this important work. Specifically, the next SVP must demonstrate a shared commitment to centering JEDI work within SCA’s core mission and programming, as well as championing JEDI work across the conservation and youth development landscape more broadly. SCA’s community programs, which have been successful in fielding more diverse teams, remain a top priority and growth area for SCA, and the SVP should strive to build on the success of these programs in thinking about new offerings.

In the last 18-24 months, SCA has revitalized a staff committee focused on diversity efforts within the organization and among its participant groups. This committee has looked broadly at priorities for SCA’s future and identified the integration of JEDI and SED work as chief among them. These conversations and efforts have been important to the entire SCA community and are a chief priority for the CEO, for whom this mission integration and equity work is a critical objective.

**Help to grow and diversify SCA’s funding base and partners; represent SCA externally across a wide array of stakeholders.**

From its founding, SCA has built strong relationships with government funders at the state and federal levels. Over time, the organization grew and scaled this revenue stream effectively, and today these contracts account for about 70% of SCA’s total revenues. Looking ahead, the SVP of Programs will play a key role in maintaining and strengthening the organization’s partnerships with these government agencies, while also helping to broaden support for the organization’s mission, particularly from individual donors, private foundations, and corporate partners. In an increasingly competitive landscape of volunteer corps services, sharpening SCA’s brand and message has never been more important, and crafting unique and compelling programs will be key to that work.

In addition, the SVP of Programs is the primary staff liaison to the Program Committee of the Board of Directors, and will be expected to facilitate board member engagement consistent with organizational objectives.

**DESIRED EXPERIENCES AND QUALIFICATIONS**

The successful candidate will have many of the following qualifications and attributes:
• Significant leadership experience with demonstrated success in a senior management role within large and complex work environments, creating new programs based on philanthropic partnerships, budgeting, grant compliance, and contract management;

• Passion for the environment and/or youth development demonstrated through professional experience or volunteer service;

• Commitment to building diverse teams and to fostering a culture that prioritizes justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) principles and practices throughout the organization;

• Proven track record leading through transitions and change, including confidence making hard choices and experience establishing clear decision-making processes and channels;

• Excellent interpersonal and communication skills with the ability to translate vision, strategy, and outcomes into external messaging and branding;

• Experience collaborating with or working in government, and an appreciation for the importance of strong relationships with government agencies (local, state, and federal) in SCA’s work;

• Experience building and stewarding relationships with stakeholders including program participants, peer organizations, policymakers, philanthropic partners, and other stakeholders; the ability to think creatively and outside-the-box in partnering with government, private, and corporate funders;

• Proven management abilities with a record of broad operational oversight, including overseeing complex budgets and large teams;

• Strengths in team-building and effective delegation; exceptional collaboration and teamwork;

• The highest integrity, humor, emotional intelligence, patience, and can-do attitude; the flexibility to lead and respond to team members in remote locations with diverse perspectives and varied goals;

• The ability and willingness to travel nationally (position location is flexible based on experience);

• A bachelor’s degree in education, youth development, conservation, or a related field.

TO APPLY

SCA has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist with this important recruitment. Katie Rockman is leading this search with Kennedy Kearney-Fischer. For more information, to make a nomination, or to apply for this role, please visit: http://www.imsearch.com/7710.

SCA strives to cultivate a work environment that encourages fairness, teamwork, and respect among all staff members. It is firmly committed to maintaining a work atmosphere in which people of diverse backgrounds and lifestyles may grow personally and professionally. We seek and welcome a diverse pool of candidates in this search.