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BAY AREA RIDGE TRAIL

Executive Director

The Bay Area Ridge Trail Council seeks an experienced, collaborative Executive Director to guide completion, activation, and stewardship of a world-class 550-mile regional trail system encircling San Francisco Bay.





Organization Background

The Bay Area Ridge Trail Council is a regional nonprofit dedicated to planning, promoting, and sustaining a connected hiking, cycling, and equestrian trail on the ridgelines around San Francisco Bay. The Ridge Trail links people, parks, and open space across nine Bay Area counties—from San Francisco to Marin, Sonoma, Napa, Berkeley, Oakland, the Peninsula, San Jose, Fremont, and beyond.

Founded in 1987 through the vision of park pioneer William Penn Mott, Jr., the Ridge Trail Council was established by the Greenbelt Alliance, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, National Park Service, and citizen advocates who came together to realize Mott’s audacious idea: to unite the ridges encircling the Bay Area into one continuous 550-mile park system. The first Ridge Trail segment was dedicated in May 1989, and by 1995, 200 miles of existing trail on public lands had been dedicated.

Today, over 400 miles are connected, including an 80-mile stretch on the Western Ridge from northern Marin to Highway 92, and a 43-mile section on the Eastern Ridge from El Sobrante to Union City. The Ridge Trail Council is currently pursuing National Scenic Trail status—a designation that would provide federal recognition and support for the trail’s completion and long-term preservation. The Ridge Trail Council receives sustained support from major funding partners, including the California Coastal Conservancy, a robust network of agency partnerships across the region, and a growing community of trail advocates. The Ridge Trail Council stands at a pivotal moment for its vision to complete the remaining trail gaps and activate users, volunteers, collaborators, and landowners to ensure the trail’s vitality, impact, and sustainability for future generations.



All Image are Courtesy of Bay Area Ridge Trail Council

Position Overview and Responsibilities

The Bay Area Ridge Trail Council seeks an inspiring, strategic, and deeply collaborative Executive Director to lead the organization through its next chapter of growth, trail completion, and popularity and public use. The Executive Director will serve as the primary advocate for the Ridge Trail Council's regional vision, building partnerships across public agencies, private landowners, elected officials, community organizations, land trusts, and tribes to close critical gaps and sustain the trail for future generations.



The Executive Director must be a skilled relationship builder who can cultivate trust and forge meaningful connections with diverse constituents—from agency partners managing trail segments to landowners holding key parcels, from elected officials who can champion funding to community organizations working to expand access. The Executive Director translates the Ridge Trail's regional importance into compelling narratives that resonate with local communities and demonstrate how individual trail segments connect to the larger vision of a world-class regional recreation, economic, and community resource.

The Executive Director will lead with collaborative energy and authentic partnership, recognizing that the Ridge Trail's success depends on engaging agency partners and connecting organizations and communities. The Executive Director will serve as a convener of regional trail discussions, a catalyst for funding opportunities, a coordinator of technical work, and a promoter for community connections. They will navigate complex partnerships, direct a skilled and motivated staff, enhance Ridge Trail growth and funding, balance natural resource protection with public engagement, and champion the Ridge Trail throughout the communities it serves.

Strategic Leadership and Partnership Development

Serve as the primary spokesperson and champion for the Ridge Trail's regional vision, articulating how local trail segments connect to create transformative regional impact

Build and maintain deep, authentic relationships with public agency partners, private landowners, elected officials, tribal leaders, funders, and community organizations

Develop and implement comprehensive strategies for closing trail gaps, prioritizing both major gap closures and smaller segments that create long connected sections

Serve as a researcher, connector, and relationship builder with private landowners to understand their values and identify pathways to secure rights-of-way

Lead efforts to secure National Scenic Trail designation and leverage this status for enhanced funding and federal support

Convene partners by geography and function to facilitate collaborative problem-solving and shared resources



Fundraising and Resource Development

Enhance a comprehensive, diversified development program including major gifts, foundation grants, government funding, planned giving, and community fundraising

Bring private funding to leverage public money, demonstrating the value of philanthropic investment in public infrastructure

Work collaboratively with agency partners to identify and pursue funding opportunities, including state and federal grants, bond measures, and local funding mechanisms

Lead legislative advocacy efforts for transportation funding to close infrastructure gaps and secure resources for safety improvements

Cultivate relationships with individual donors, foundations, corporate sponsors, and public funding sources

Oversee grant writing and management, ensuring strong stewardship and reporting to all funding partners



Advocacy and Policy Leadership

Build and activate a constituency of trail advocates who can support Ridge Trail priorities with agency partners and elected officials

Engage elected officials, board members, and decision-makers to elevate the Ridge Trail as a regional priority

Lead legislative advocacy for transportation funding, trail infrastructure, and policies that support trail completion and access

Navigate regulatory environments related to land acquisition, conservation easements, public lands management, and environmental protection

Promote the Ridge Trail at groundbreaking events, openings, and community gatherings to reach new residents and visitors in the rapidly changing Bay Area

Community Engagement and Access

Serve as a communicator and organizer who works to activate trail use, connect people to nature, and build public support for trail investment

Champion equitable access to the Ridge Trail, working to connect underserved communities and reduce barriers to trail use

Build partnerships with service providers, lodging and accommodation operators, and nonprofits that convene outdoor experiences to expand multi-day trail experiences and increase access for all users

Develop strategies to improve trail access beyond vehicle-dependent options, considering accessibility for people with limited mobility

Foster engagement with tribal communities, building on partnerships such as those at Mount Umunhum

Oversee volunteer programs that engage community members in meaningful trail stewardship service

Organizational Management and Operations

Provide strategic leadership and day-to-day management of organizational operations, staff, budget, and programs

Work effectively with the Board of Directors, providing leadership on conservation strategy, business operations, and policy development

Build organizational capacity and systems to support efficient operations and program delivery

Recruit, develop, and retain talented staff who are passionate about the Ridge Trail mission

Oversee financial management, ensuring strong fiscal health and accountability to constituents

Support staff in coordinating stewardship activities that complement rather than duplicate the work of agency partners and other trail organizations

Foster a collaborative, respectful workplace culture that encourages innovation, celebrates success, and supports professional growth





Desired Experience and Competencies

The Bay Area Ridge Trail Council seeks an exceptional leader who combines strategic vision with great relationship-building skills and a genuine passion for connecting people to nature through trails. This is an extraordinary opportunity for a collaborative leader who thrives on building partnerships and navigating complex constituent landscapes, and is passionate about advancing a bold regional vision that serves communities across the San Francisco Bay Area.

The ideal candidate is a skilled connector and relationship builder who naturally inspires confidence and draws diverse partners into shared purpose. They are politically savvy without being political, able to engage elected officials and agency leaders while maintaining the Ridge Trail Council's nonpartisan focus on trail completion and stewardship. This leader brings proven fundraising success, an entrepreneurial approach to problem-solving, and the emotional intelligence to navigate both opportunities and challenges with grace and determination.



Leadership and Strategic Thinking

Demonstrated ability to lead regional, multi-stakeholder initiatives that require coordination across jurisdictions, agencies, and diverse interests

Strategic visionary who can articulate how individual trail segments connect to create a transformative regional impact

Experience building and activating constituencies to support public infrastructure or land conservation priorities

Proven track record of navigating complex political environments and building consensus among diverse constituents

Entrepreneurial mindset with the ability to identify opportunities, adapt strategies, and lead organizational evolution

Solutions-oriented leader who finds common ground and builds momentum toward shared goals



Partnership and Relationship Building

Exceptional relationship builder with the ability to cultivate authentic, lasting partnerships with agency partners, elected officials, landowners, and community leaders

Strong track record as a convener and connector who brings stakeholders together and facilitates productive collaboration

Ability to serve as a thought partner to agency partners, adding value through strategic thinking and connection to resources

Comfort engaging with elected officials, board members, and decision-makers to advocate for Ridge Trail priorities

Cultural competency and commitment to building relationships with diverse communities, including tribal nations and underserved populations

Fundraising and Development

Proven success raising funds for mission-driven organizations, including major gifts, foundation grants, and government funding

Experience in diversifying funding streams and bringing private resources to leverage public investment

Track record of securing legislative support and government funding at local, state, and federal levels

Ability to make the case for philanthropic investment in public infrastructure and conservation

Familiarity with grant writing, institutional funding, and complex public-private funding partnerships

Comfort serving as organizational spokesperson and primary relationship manager with major donors

Public Lands and Conservation

Deep knowledge of public lands management, park systems, land trusts, and environmental conservation

Understanding of trail development and land management practices

Familiarity with regional conservation challenges, including climate adaptation, wildfire risk, habitat protection, invasive species management, and public use issues

Understanding of regulatory, social, and demographic issues related to parks, conservation lands, and trail infrastructure

Commitment to equity, inclusion, and justice, particularly as it relates to the history of conservation lands in North America, and co-creating meaningful outdoor experiences for all

Advocacy and Communications

Strong communicator who can articulate complex regional visions in compelling, accessible ways

Experience with legislative advocacy, policy development, or civic engagement campaigns

Ability to engage media and utilize communications platforms to build public awareness and support

Comfortable speaking to diverse audiences, including elected officials, agency staff, community groups, and donors

Skills in community organizing and building grassroots support for policy priorities

Understanding of regional economic development and ability to articulate trail systems' economic value



Organizational and Operational Management

Proven ability to lead a complex organization, including staff supervision, budget management, and operations

Experience working effectively with boards of directors and an understanding of nonprofit governance

Track record of building organizational capacity, systems, and infrastructure to support growth

Strong financial management skills and understanding of nonprofit fiscal accountability

Ability to balance strategic leadership with hands-on engagement when needed

Commitment to fostering collaborative, inclusive workplace cultures that support staff development

Compensation

This is a full-time, exempt, benefit-eligible position. The anticipated annual salary range for this position is \$160,000–\$200,000. The range provided is an estimate and will be evaluated on an individual basis, taking into consideration the candidate’s knowledge, skills, abilities, experience, and education.

The Bay Area Ridge Trail Council offers a comprehensive benefits package, including:

- ◆ Medical, dental, and vision insurance for employees
- ◆ 401(k) plan with annual contributions when annual organizational finances permit
- ◆ 12 days of paid time off starting in year one, increasing with tenure
- ◆ Rest week time off around the July 4 or end of the year holidays

Location and Requirements

The Bay Area Ridge Trail Council office is located in Berkeley, CA. The Executive Director will be based in the San Francisco Bay Area with a hybrid work arrangement. The position requires regular in-person presence for meetings with agency partners, elected officials, landowners, donors, and community constituents throughout the nine-county Bay Area region.

The Executive Director will need to travel regularly throughout the Bay Area. The position requires flexibility to attend evening and weekend events and activities as needed.

The Bay Area offers an exceptional quality of life with vibrant urban centers, beautiful natural landscapes, world-class cultural institutions, and strong communities committed to environmental stewardship and outdoor recreation.

To Apply

Please visit potrerogroup.com/ridge 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 and qualified candidates should apply by April 17, 2026, for priority consideration. The position is open until filled.

Start Date

Summer 2026





Additional Information

More information on the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council can be found at ridgetrail.org.

For additional information regarding this opportunity, please contact Andrew Leider, Managing Director and Search Lead at Potrero Group, at aleider@potrerogroup.com.

Bay Area Ridge Trail Council is an Equal Opportunity Employer

Bay Area Ridge Trail Council is an Equal Opportunity Employer committed to building an inclusive workplace where all individuals feel welcome and respected. Bay Area Ridge Trail Council does not discriminate based on race, color, religion, national origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, ancestry, disability, veteran status, or any other protected characteristic. Reasonable accommodations are available as required by law.



Potrero Group is honored to coordinate this search on behalf of the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council. 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, please visit PotreroGroup.com.