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Chief Program Officer

DarkSky International seeks a strategic and collaborative Chief Program Officer to lead and grow conservation programs that protect the night sky worldwide, including policy work and certifications, and to guide a talented team and a growing set of partnerships to turn awareness into lasting action.



Photo by John Rowley

Organization Background

Propelled by a vision of a world where natural darkness at night is protected as essential for people and nature, DarkSky International has been a leader in reducing and mitigating the effects of light pollution since 1988. What began as a small group of astronomers known as the International Dark-Sky Association is now a recognized global authority protecting the nighttime environment, with work reaching communities, parks, industries, and governments around the world.

The organization has grown quickly. Revenue has climbed roughly 350 percent in recent years while public awareness of the issue keeps rising, and new programs and funding opportunities are arriving faster than ever. A significant scale-up is underway, with new earned-income work set to launch soon. Within three to five years, DarkSky expects to pass \$5M in revenue and to operate as a mission-driven conservation organization supported by more sophisticated, globally implemented programs. The Chief Program Officer will shape that next chapter.

DarkSky's mission is to restore the nighttime environment and protect communities and wildlife from light pollution. Unfortunately, few environmental problems are growing as fast as light pollution, which has increased by nearly 10 percent per year over the past decade. DarkSky's strategic plan meets that challenge by taking the movement from awareness to action. The plan rests on three goals: activating over 5,000 volunteer advocates to win strong outdoor lighting policy, expanding certification programs that set the standard for responsible lighting, and building dark sky principles into global conservation work on biodiversity, climate, and equity through its more than 65 chapters worldwide.

Protecting the night for people and wildlife, everywhere.



Position Overview And Responsibilities

The Chief Program Officer leads DarkSky's program team and owns the strategy, quality, and financial performance of its programs. This is a senior leadership role that reports to the Chief Executive Officer and partners closely with the Chief Development Officer and the rest of the leadership team.

DarkSky's programs serve to enhance the mission, driving conservation outcomes across the globe. The organization develops policy, certifies products, places, and lighting applications, and educates about naturally dark landscapes and outdoor lighting. Programs support mission outcomes and can be an important driver of revenue for the organization. The Chief Program Officer will ensure these programs run well, grow over time, and remain true to DarkSky's principles. After they settle into the role, they will be expected to identify new opportunities, lead several regional expansion efforts, and help guide DarkSky further into the conservation space.

The role also carries a clear leadership mandate. The program team is passionate about its work and is ready for steady and supportive leadership that will nurture a collaborative culture. The right person listens closely, sets boundaries with respect, and keeps the whole organization in view.

Responsibilities

Photo by Dan Zafra



Program Strategy and Quality

- Set the direction for DarkSky's programs and ensure each one is designed, staffed, and administered to deliver real conservation impact.
- Strengthen the certification programs, including International Dark Sky Places, DarkSky Certified lighting products, and projects so they run efficiently and maintain high standards.
- Proactively analyze the marketplace to recognize opportunities to further protect dark places before they are lost.
- Apply systems-level thinking to program design, backing efforts that build efficient, automated workflows and can scale, while weighing new opportunities with discipline.
- Exercise clear authority over program decisions, in consultation with the Chief Executive Officer and other leaders as needed.
- Champion the program staff and their expertise across the organization, trust the people doing the work, and lead without micromanaging.



Technical and Communications Leadership

- Ensure technical expertise is incorporated into a diverse portfolio of lighting programs, and keep their requirements aligned and consistent.
- Working with the team and technical colleagues, write and communicate about technical elements clearly to lay audiences across the channels that carry DarkSky's standards, from website content to program guidance.
- Sharpen DarkSky's evaluation of certification applications while keeping the process simple and scientifically sound.
- Work comfortably with scientific, academic, and statistical data, and use it to set the baseline for program standards.

Photo by Torben Eskerod



Regional Expansion

- Lead DarkSky's regional staff to drive business development for programs in their areas, working hand in hand with the Chief Development Officer, the program team, and partners across the world.
- Grow program lines with regional reach in step with DarkSky's advocacy work.
- Build the partnerships and national governance that let programs scale beyond any single region.



Team Leadership and Culture

- Provide steady, supportive leadership to a passionate program team, empowering staff and nurturing a collaborative culture of continuous learning and psychological safety.
- Coach and mentor staff, make the call when a decision is needed, and give direct reports what they need to do their best work.
- Live DarkSky's team culture: do less, better; make it safe to speak up and to fail; handle disagreement with respect; keep promises; and lift colleagues up.
- Stay flexible as priorities shift and help the team pivot when plans change without losing momentum or morale.

Partnerships and Field Leadership

- Identify and win the allies DarkSky needs to expand, from land trusts and conservation groups to industries and governments.
- Pursue high-value certifications that advance the mission, such as certifying major conservation lands held by partner organizations.
- Represent DarkSky's programs in the field, including speaking at gatherings (e.g., Land Trust Alliance events and relevant local and international conferences).
- Keep DarkSky centered on ground-based light pollution while staying alert to emerging issues such as satellite constellations.

Our programs are how we turn awareness into action.

Desired Experience and Competencies

DarkSky seeks a program leader who has grown something and can do it again. The right candidate moves easily in a fast-growing organization where priorities shift, and new opportunities often arrive. They lead with clarity and decisiveness, holding firm on the plan while trusting the expertise of the people around them. They write and speak well, and, with the help of team members and colleagues, translate complex technical material for both specialists and the public. Above all, they bring a genuine commitment to the mission and a real care for the team.

Program Leadership and Growth

- A record of building and growing conservation, certification, or other programs with regional, national, or global reach, backed by concrete results.
- Experience running a fee-for-service or earned-revenue model and expanding it over time.
- A systems-level thinker who designs programs that scale and knows which opportunities to decline.
- A broad leadership skill set and conservation experience are preferred, while an understanding of or direct participation in the lighting industry would be an advantage.

Team and Organizational Leadership

- A seasoned manager who leads as a coach and mentor and knows when to seek input and when to be decisive.
- Attuned to people and human dynamics, understanding that decisions carry downstream effects across the team and the wider organization.
- Able to set boundaries respectfully and to establish and clearly communicate priorities.
- Brings steadiness to teams that have weathered change, and earns trust by listening before acting.
- Experience working with volunteer committees and boards of directors.
- Partners well with the Chief Executive Officer, the Executive Leadership Team, the Director of Lighting, Technology, and Strategy, and colleagues across departments.

Technical Fluency and Communication

- Comfort with technical subject matter; a purely technical background is not required. An environmental or industry background suits this work better than a purely engineering or scientific one.
- A strong writer who can turn technical evidence and complex ideas into clear narratives and produce public-facing content such as website and program materials.
- History of working with and communicating to international audiences, with a sensitivity to how people of different cultures process information.
- Comfortable with scientific, academic, and statistical data, and able to apply it to program standards.
- Able to move between technical experts and general audiences, and to step back from their own technical depth when the moment calls for it.

Philanthropy and Partnerships

- Comfortable working alongside development colleagues and engaging funders, including family foundations and corporate partners.
- Skilled at forming the partnerships and coalitions that programs need to grow.
- A credible public voice who can speak for DarkSky's programs to partners, funders, and the field.

Mission Commitment

- Committed to protecting DarkSky's mission and values.
- Driven by the work and the team's success rather than personal recognition.
- A genuine, personal investment in the conservation mission, in reducing light pollution, and in expanding dark sky programs worldwide.
- An understanding that care, for the work and for the people doing it, is essential to success in this role.



Compensation

This is a full-time, exempt, benefit-eligible position. The anticipated annual salary range is \$138,000–\$161,000, commensurate with experience.

DarkSky International offers comprehensive benefits:

- 100% of employees' medical, dental, and vision premiums
- 50% for their dependents
- 401(k) retirement plan, with a 4% company match
- Paid vacation, 160 hours per year
- Paid sick time, 80 hours per year

Location And Requirements

DarkSky serves a global constituency, and domestic and international travel is expected. Some evening and weekend work will be needed to support events and meet deadlines.

This position requires:

- ✓ Availability during core hours (10 am to 2 pm MST)
- ✓ Experience with U.S.-based nonprofit corporations
- ✓ Experience outside the United States
- ✓ Remote position with easy access to a primarily U.S.-based team
- ✓ Ability to travel to the United States as needed
- ✓ Availability to travel up to 25% of the time

To Apply

Please visit potrerogroup.com/darksky and select “Apply Here.” Applications should include a resume and a cover letter describing how your qualifications match the position criteria and what you will bring to the role.

Interested candidates should apply by **November 13** for priority consideration.

Additional Information

More information on DarkSky International
can be found at darksky.org

For additional information regarding this
opportunity, please contact:

Daniel Student

Managing Director and Search Lead, at

dstudent@potrergroup.com



DarkSky International is an Equal Opportunity Employer

DarkSky International is committed to the principles of equal employment. We are committed to complying with all federal, state, and local laws providing equal employment opportunities, and all other employment laws and regulations. It is our intent to maintain a work environment that is free of harassment, discrimination, or retaliation because of age, race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex (including sexual orientation and gender identity), pregnancy (including childbirth, lactation, and related medical conditions), physical or mental disability, genetic information (including testing and characteristics), veteran status, uniformed service member status, or any other status protected by federal, state, or local laws. The organization is dedicated to the fulfillment of this policy in regard to all aspects of employment, including but not limited to recruiting, hiring, placement, transfer, training, promotion, rates of pay, and other compensation, termination, and all other terms, conditions, and privileges of employment.



Potrero Group is honored to coordinate this search on behalf of DarkSky International. 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.

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