



Executive Director

SFEI seeks a collaborative, strategic, and dynamic Executive Director to lead one of the Bay Area's most respected environmental science organizations.



Organization Overview

About SFEI

The San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI) is a leading nonprofit environmental research organization focused on advancing science that supports rebuilding and sustaining the chemical, physical, and biological health and the resilience of the San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary and beyond. With a multidisciplinary staff of more than 90 scientists, analysts, and professionals, SFEI brings science, partnerships, and practice together to protect and restore aquatic ecosystems and mitigate the impact of pollution and climate change on communities. The organization also operates as a joint powers authority for the Bay Area Clean Water Agencies and the State Water Board, as the Aquatic Science Center (ASC). The joint governing boards comprise representatives from state and federal partner agencies and volunteer directors, most of whom serve on both the SFEI and ASC boards.

SFEI actively partners with communities, tribes, nonprofits, the private sector, academics, and government agencies at all scales to identify, monitor, and pragmatically address issues challenging the health of aquatic ecosystems.

Mission

To deliver visionary science that empowers people to revitalize nature in our communities

Programs

SFEI's work is organized across three core programs:

- [Clean Water Program](#)
- [Environmental Informatics Program](#)
- [Resilient Landscapes Program](#)

To learn more about SFEI's work, visit sfei.org.



Position Overview

The incoming Executive Director will take the helm of a thriving organization renowned for its rigorous, unbiased scientific research, deep regional partnerships, and collegial culture during an exciting period of organizational growth. Serving as SFEI's visionary leader, public champion, and internal cornerstone, this individual will be responsible for stewarding the organization's growth, strengthening its financial resilience, and expanding SFEI's reach to new audiences and communities while preserving the impact, identity, and culture that make the organization distinctive.

The Executive Director reports directly and serves as the chief liaison to SFEI's joint board. They will also manage a talented team of seven director-level staff. The new Executive Director will diversify SFEI's funding base to ensure long-term sustainability, strengthen the infrastructure and management practices needed to support a maturing organization, invest in staff well-being, and foster a transparent, collaborative environment that encourages partnership and innovation. This individual must be a clear, inspiring, and credible communicator across a broad spectrum of audiences, from scientific experts and regulatory partners to philanthropic funders, community and tribal groups, and the general public, with the ability to translate complex, cross-disciplinary work into narratives that inspire partnership, investment, and trust. Intellectual curiosity, a deep appreciation for scientific integrity, and decisive strategic leadership in the face of complexity are essential qualities in this leader. This is a rare opportunity to shape the next chapter of an organization with an extraordinary foundation, an urgent, meaningful mission, and the potential for even greater impact.

Responsibilities



Strategic Vision and Leadership

- Lead the development and implementation of an updated strategic plan, engaging the board, staff, and partners in a participatory process that integrates program, financial, and operational goals as well as organizational culture priorities.
- Uphold and strengthen SFEI's identity as a collaborative, rigorous science institute and protect its scientific independence and credibility.
- Strengthen the organization's ability to pivot strategically in response to climate change impacts, public policy shifts, and evolving funding landscapes.
- Identify and pursue opportunities for innovation and collaboration across program areas, applying systems-level thinking to the organization's direction.
- Serve as the primary liaison to SFEI's Board of Directors and joint ASC board, ensuring effective communication, governance support, and alignment on organizational priorities.



Fundraising and Financial Stewardship

- Ensure the financial health of SFEI operations and key programs by maintaining and expanding its existing government contracts and public grant relationships.
- Oversee financial management and scenario-based planning to ensure SFEI can adapt to funding changes.
- Innovate SFEI's business model and diversify its revenue portfolio by establishing new philanthropic relationships to increase unrestricted funding to support emerging programs, organizational infrastructure, and long-term financial sustainability.
- Collaborate with the board and development staff to cultivate a culture of fundraising and philanthropic engagement.
- Maintain transparency and accountability in financial management and reporting.



Organizational Leadership and Team Culture

- Model and enhance SFEI's established collaborative, consensus-driven, and inclusive workplace culture, maintaining high morale and shared mission.
- Oversee internal systems modernization to match SFEI's scale, including HR, financial management, and operational infrastructure.
- Directly supervise and mentor seven key leadership staff, enabling effective leadership throughout the organization.
- Build clear pathways for leadership advancement and structures that support retention of top scientific and professional talent.



External Relations and Communications

- Serve as SFEI's primary spokesperson and ambassador, elevating its visibility through media, public speaking, and stakeholder convenings.
- Champion science communications that connect SFEI's research to the lives and well-being of Bay Area communities.



Partnership Building

- Maintain and grow SFEI's long-standing relationships with key federal, state, and local regulatory and partner agencies.
- Cultivate new partnerships with universities, research institutions, water suppliers, nonprofits, community organizations, and the private sector to expand SFEI's collaborative reach.
- Build and sustain relationships that deepen SFEI's role as a community science resource.
- Represent SFEI in regional forums, policy discussions, and cross-sector initiatives, ensuring the organization's science informs decision making at the highest levels.

A Great Egret with a long, sharp beak and a yellow eye stands in profile, looking towards the left. It is positioned next to a weathered wooden post that has some green algae or moss growing on it. The background is a body of water with gentle ripples, reflecting light. The overall scene is calm and natural.

Desired Experience and Competencies

The ideal candidate understands how to lead, organize, and fund a complex, technically sophisticated scientific organization. They bring a collaborative, people-centered leadership style, exceptional interpersonal skills, and the credibility to inspire trust across staff, board, partners, and the public. They lead with transparency, empathy, and genuine investment in the people around them. They bring scientific curiosity and communicate with ease about environmental science, particularly in water, aquatic systems, estuaries, or coastal ecosystems.

Strategic Vision and Leadership

- Proven experience leading organizational strategy through significant growth or transition, setting direction, navigating uncertainty, and uniting diverse partners around a shared mission.
- Track record of developing or implementing strategic plans through participatory and inclusive processes that build board, staff, and partner buy-in.
- Decisive and adaptive under uncertainty, with strong consensus-building and transparent communication to a board and staff.
- Systems thinker who can identify and articulate an organization's unique value within a broader nonprofit community, and make strategic choices accordingly.
- Experience working effectively and transparently with a governing board.

Fundraising and Financial Stewardship

- Financially sophisticated nonprofit manager with experience overseeing organizational budgets, managing large grant and contract portfolios, and leading proactive financial planning.
- Track record in managing and growing government contracts and public grants.
- Demonstrated success innovating the business model of a grant-dependent organization by diversifying revenue, including building new relationships with foundations, corporate partners, and individual donors, and making a compelling case for philanthropic investment in scientific work.
- Experience building a culture of philanthropic engagement across an organization and board without compromising mission delivery.

Organizational Leadership and Team Culture

- Experienced manager with a track record of leading organizations through growth while maintaining staff morale.
- Proven ability to modernize internal systems, including HR, financial management, and operational infrastructure.
- Skilled at supervising senior leaders, with a coaching approach that strengthens leadership, collaboration, and delegation throughout the organization.
- Demonstrated success in building clear pathways for advancement and implementing structures that support the mentorship and retention of scientific and professional talent.
- People-centered leader with a history of fostering inclusive, transparent, and equitable workplace cultures where a diverse staff feels a strong sense of shared mission.

External Relations and Communications

- Exceptional written and verbal communicator with the ability to translate complex science for diverse audiences ranging from technical experts to community members to policymakers to media.
- Organizational spokesperson experienced in public speaking, press engagement, and representing an institution in high-stakes settings.
- Ability to inspire alignment and action among partners, funders, and decision makers by articulating the urgency and relevance of scientific work clearly and accurately without sacrificing nuance.
- Experience connecting research to community concerns and engaging authentically with communities of color, tribes, and underrepresented groups, with sensitivity to the equity dimensions of environmental science.

Partnership Building

- Demonstrated ability to build and sustain strong collaborative relationships with environmental regulatory agencies, government partners, academic institutions, funders, peer organizations, the private sector, and community organizations.
- Skilled at representing an organization in regional and national forums and connecting staff-level partnerships to broader institutional strategy.
- Familiarity with the San Francisco Bay Area's environmental regulatory and policy landscape, or equivalent familiarity with a comparable regional ecosystem.



Compensation

This is a full-time, exempt, benefit-eligible position. The anticipated annual salary range for this position is \$200,000–\$240,000, commensurate with experience and in accordance with **SFEI's Compensation Philosophy**.

SFEI offers a comprehensive benefits package including:

- 403(b) retirement plan with 5% employer match (vested immediately)
- 12 paid holidays per year, vacation starting at 3 weeks, and 12 paid sick leave days per year
- A range of medical, dental, and vision plan options with good value of costs to coverage and generous employer contributions
- Medical and dependent care FSAs
- Employer-paid life insurance and long-term disability policies
- Pre-tax commuter benefits
- Employee Assistance Plan
- Great workplace facilities including a full kitchen, bike room, shower, and easy access to BART

Location

SFEI is based in Richmond, California, in the San Francisco Bay Area. This position requires regular in-person presence at SFEI's offices and regular travel throughout the Bay Area for stakeholder engagement, partner meetings, and public events. Hybrid and flexible work arrangements are supported.

To Apply

Please visit potrerogroup.com/sfei and select "Apply Here." Applications should include a resume and a cover letter describing your qualifications relative to the position criteria and what you will bring to the role. Interested candidates should apply by **June 7, 2026** for priority consideration.

Start Date

Late Summer 2026



Additional Information

More information on SFEI can be found at sfei.org

For additional information regarding this opportunity, please contact:

Jena Kuznik

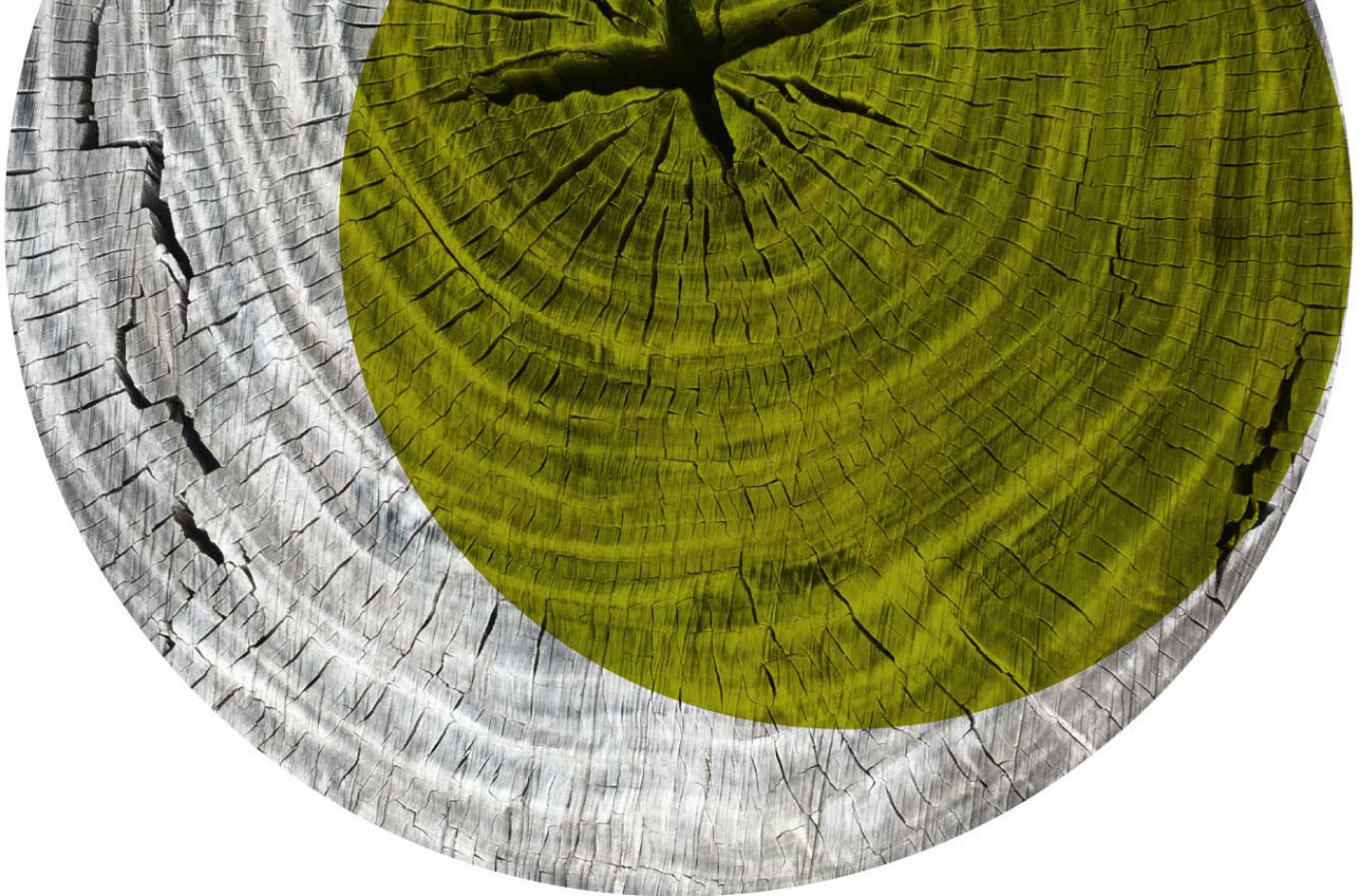
Potrero Group Senior Consultant
and Search Lead, at

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Equity and Inclusion Statement

San Francisco Estuary Institute is committed to providing employees with a work environment free of discrimination and harassment of any kind. All employment decisions are based on organizational needs, job requirements, and individual qualifications. Qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, disability, family or parental status, protected veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by applicable federal, state, or local law.



Potrero Group is honored to coordinate this search on behalf of the San Francisco Estuary Institute. 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 visit:

PotreroGroup.com