



WOLF RIDGESM
ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER

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GROUP



Executive Director

Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center seeks an experienced, versatile leader to continue its legacy of educational excellence, stewardship, innovation, and experiential learning in

"a classroom with no boundaries."



Organization Background

Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center (Wolf Ridge) is a private, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that provides outdoor, hands-on learning for school groups, children, families, and adult learners from throughout the upper Midwest.

Established in 1971 by Jack Pichotta, a social studies teacher from nearby Cloquet, Minnesota, Wolf Ridge is recognized nationally and internationally as a leader in environmental education and was the first environmental learning center in the country to be accredited as a K-12 school.

Now, more than 50 years later, experienced naturalists offer more than 50 dynamic classes that build awareness, curiosity, and sensitivity to the natural world. In the process, Wolf Ridge programs promote self-awareness, confidence, leadership, and an ethic of stewardship, sustainability, and appreciation for the natural world.

“Wolf Ridge is more than just a learning destination; it’s a place where curiosity is sparked and minds are opened to the joy and wonder of nature.”

Wolf Ridge serves over 10,000 participants annually at its campus and field station near Finland, Minnesota. With sweeping views of the Sawmill Valley and Lake Superior, the 2,000-acre main campus includes several dormitories, educational spaces, a working organic farm, naturalist housing, a dining hall, and maintenance facilities. The entire Wolf Ridge facility is a teaching tool, including the first remodeled building to achieve full Living Building Challenge certification, the highest international standard for sustainability. A 66-acre field station just down the road provides additional outdoor learning facilities along the Lake Superior shoreline.

With an annual operating budget of \$3.5M+, Wolf Ridge is funded through program user fees, philanthropic funding from individuals, businesses, and foundations, and limited on-site retail sales and site rental fees. Wolf Ridge is guided by a regional 16+-member Board of Trustees and employs 90+ full-time and seasonal staff. In addition, Wolf Ridge partners with organizations across the country to enhance student access to real-world scientific research, and conducts teacher and graduate naturalist training programs that have helped transform environmental education nationwide.

Mission

To develop a citizenry that has the knowledge, skills, motivation, and commitment to work together for a quality environment.

Wolf Ridge achieves this by:

- Fostering awareness, curiosity, and sensitivity to the natural world
- Providing lifelong learning experiences in nature
- Developing social understanding, respect, and cooperation
- Modeling values, behaviors, and technologies that lead to a sustainable lifestyle
- Promoting the concepts of conservation and stewardship

Core Values

1. Leaders in our field
2. Learning and innovation
3. Can do attitude
4. Collaborative community
5. Environmental stewards
6. Playful and welcoming



Position Overview

The Executive Director (ED) is responsible for Wolf Ridge's overall leadership and management. This multifaceted position has broad authority to lead and manage operations to achieve Wolf Ridge's mission, goals, and strategic objectives as approved by the board.

The ED is the face, voice, and heart of the organization and is a trusted and visionary leader and ambassador in local, regional, and national communities. The ED energizes staff, board, and school partners to drive strategic success, grow financial resources, deepen organizational culture, and embody Wolf Ridge's commitment to experiential education and personal development.

The Wolf Ridge ED leads a five-person leadership team and provides active, hands-on leadership across the organization, including responsibility for EOS (Entrepreneurial Operating System) based leadership and administration, relationship management, board engagement, fundraising, and strategic planning. Through the leadership team, the ED addresses marketing, public relations and communications, facility and operations management, program design and delivery, and financial and human resources management. Given these responsibilities, the ED is expected to spend approximately seventy percent of their time on external matters (e.g., fundraising, school relationships and recruiting, partnerships, and stakeholder communications) and thirty percent on internal matters (e.g., programs, operations, facilities, marketing, finance, HR, planning).

The ED will model creating a warm, hospitable, welcoming atmosphere for the staff, students, and volunteers at the heart of the Wolf Ridge community, and will also be an important ambassador for Wolf Ridge in the greater Finland and Lake Superior North Shore communities. Physical presence in these communities and an authentic love for the people, geography, culture, and lifestyles of these amazing places are essential to professional and personal success and fulfillment in this role.

Responsibilities



Executive Leadership

- Lead by example and embody WRELC's mission, goals, values, and professional standards.
- Establish and maintain clear patterns and channels of authority, responsibility, supervision, and communication.
- Lead and inspire the Leadership Team, which oversees all center programs, development, finance, marketing, administration, and facility operations.
- Adapt and utilize the EOS business management system for Wolf Ridge operations.
- Set Wolf Ridge's long-range vision and manage progress toward rolling one, three, and 10 year goals; utilize the EOS Vision Traction Organizer structure.
- Lead regular strategic planning and goal-setting efforts in collaboration with the board and Leadership Team.
- Ensure Wolf Ridge is financially healthy and maintains appropriate financial reserves.
- Develop and strengthen relationships with key stakeholders from local communities, agencies, foundations, corporate partners, major donors, and school districts.
- Maintain a national leadership role in the field of environmental education.
- Collaborate with the board to develop and support a thriving board and ensure best practice governance.
- Provide regular, effective, and timely communications with the board chair and board committees.
- Serve in an active role on all board committees.
- Support Wolf Ridge employees in all areas as needs arise.



Fundraising

- Partner with the Development Director and development staff to set and achieve annual and long term contributed revenue goals.
- Work with the board and development staff to design and implement fundraising and development activities. Core focus areas include major foundation and corporate gifts, "Leaders of the Pack" (planned giving), specific campaigns and events, key individual donors, and partner agencies.
- Identify resource requirements and support staff to research funding sources, establish strategies to secure large gifts, submit proposals, and manage fundraising records and documentation.
- Conduct visits and communicate regularly with major donors, partners, foundations, and corporate sponsors.
- Support development staff grant writing efforts and review grant strategies.

Communications & Engagement

- Serve as Wolf Ridge's primary brand ambassador and maintain its local, regional, and national environmental education leadership profile and brand distinction.
- Partner with the Marketing Director to set marketing, public relations, and outreach strategies to achieve enrollment goals in all programs.
- Maintain a current understanding of the forces affecting Wolf Ridge and its constituents and engage in activities that positively position Wolf Ridge as a leader in the field.
- Represent Wolf Ridge through community, regional, and national engagement and speaking opportunities, professional organization and board participation, and other promotional opportunities.
- Support website and other communication material development.



Administration & Operations

- Implement effective human resource systems and programs in collaboration with the Leadership Team.
- Attract, retain, and engage a highly qualified and motivated staff.
- Ensure all staff represent Wolf Ridge core values and maintain the highest customer service, safety, and program quality standards.
- Ensure Wolf Ridge operates as an exemplary nonprofit business in accordance with IRS regulations and reports financial performance in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles.
- Oversee the creation of an annual budget and operational plan.
- Ensure that Wolf Ridge, its staff, programs, policies, and procedures operate in compliance with applicable local, state, and federal laws and regulations.
- Oversee and approve all legal matters, including all written contracts and formal agreements.
- Provide financial oversight for all program and facility operations.
- Oversee risk management and safety practices for all activities.
- Partner with the Program Director to provide oversight for all educational programs to ensure high levels of program quality and effectiveness.
- Partner with the Operations Director to ensure facility services maintain the highest level of hospitality and guest service, and that all facility operations meet applicable codes, laws, and quality standards.
- Ensure resilient and effective capital asset management in coordination with the Operations Director.
- Serve as an emergency contact and responder for facilities and operations needs whenever they arise.



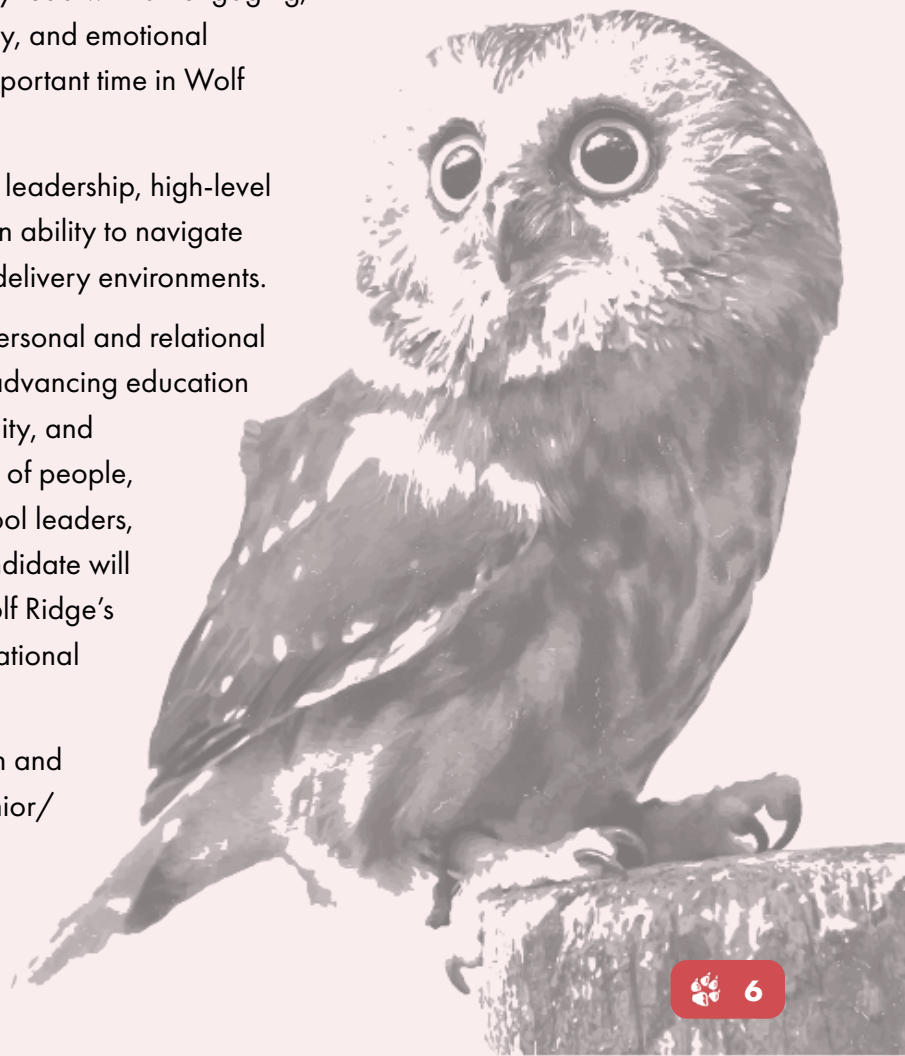
Requirements and Desired Attributes

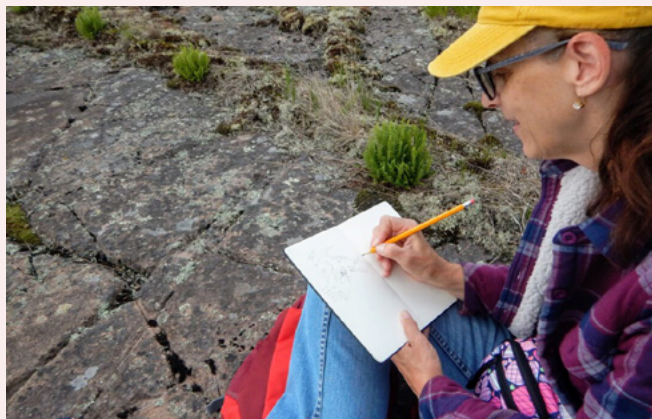
The ideal ED is a skilled organizational leader with significant experience in site-based education or related situations. They lead with an engaging, authentic personality and the confidence, humility, and emotional intelligence to work with a talented staff at an important time in Wolf Ridge's history.

The ED will have a deep history of values-based leadership, high-level fundraising and relationship skills, and the proven ability to navigate complex, changing organizational and mission delivery environments.

The ideal candidate will have outstanding interpersonal and relational skills and excel at developing, leveraging, and advancing education and stewardship work with integrity, accountability, and humanity. The position works with a wide variety of people, including Wolf Ridge staff, board members, school leaders, donors, and partners. Additionally, the ideal candidate will be creative and entrepreneurial in achieving Wolf Ridge's mission and maintaining the organization as a national leader in the field.

This position requires a combination of education and experience equivalent to at least 10 years of senior/ executive management experience.





Requirements

- Nonprofit executive management experience in similar or equivalent situations.
- Demonstrated understanding of environmental education.
- Demonstrated leadership of high-performing teams to achieve mission-driven business outcomes.
- Sales leadership and financial responsibility for generating high levels of earned income.
- Demonstrated success in fundraising, including major gifts development, planned giving, grant writing, and annual funds.
- Strong business and financial management skills, including budget development and implementation, operating statements, balance sheets, and negotiation skills.
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills and a natural, engaging public speaking and presentation style.
- Excellent problem-solving, conflict resolution, decision making, and prioritization skills.
- Possess the presence and gravitas to cultivate productive partnerships with constituents and partners from a variety of backgrounds.
- Excellent organizational development, marketing, communication, administrative, personnel, and project management skills.
- Experience with the EOS (Entrepreneurial Operating System) business methodology is ideal.
- Proven passionate, inspirational, collaborative, and ethical leadership skills and the ability to inspire and motivate others.
- Current drivers license.



Attributes

- A genuine passion for education and stewardship.
- Strong affinity for Wolf Ridge's culture, mission, vision, and strategic priorities.
- Enthusiasm for thinking about the future with vision and hope.
- Systems thinking and problem-solving skills and approaches.
- Proactive decision-making approach and courage in the face of difficult decisions.
- Adaptability and flexibility in the face of changing conditions and information; tolerance for adversity and uncertainty.
- Strong interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, self-awareness, confidence, and humility.
- Ability to resolve conflicts, find common ground, and maintain and develop strong relationships among diverse perspectives and backgrounds.
- Integrity and a commitment to high ethics and standards.
- Self-directed work ethic and the energy to sustain long days managing a workload that involves balancing multiple competing tasks.
- Comfortable working in outdoor settings as well as in the office.





Compensation

This is a full-time, exempt, benefit-eligible position. The ED's anticipated annual salary range is \$125,000–\$140,000, commensurate with knowledge, abilities, and experience.

The Wolf Ridge benefits package includes:

- Health coverage; employer-paid percentage based on plan
- 403b retirement plan with up to 7% employer match
- Four weeks annually accrued paid time off, plus holidays, personal days, and development time
- Life and long-term disability insurance coverage
- Access to HSA account, with employer contributions, and dental plan
- Meals in the Wolf Ridge Dining Hall when working on site

Location

The ED works from the Wolf Ridge campus in Finland, Minnesota. There are many communities within commuting distance of the Wolf Ridge Campus. This position requires the ability to be on site regularly and respond to urgent needs when they occur.

This position also requires frequent travel throughout the upper Midwest and nationally. Occasional night and weekend work is expected in coordination with site, program, and operational needs.

Start Date

Late April 2026

To Apply

Visit potrerogroup.com/wolfridge and select "Apply Here." Please include a resume and a cover letter describing your qualifications that match the position criteria.



Equal Opportunity and Inclusivity

Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center is committed to equal opportunity for all participants, employees, and applicants regardless of race, creed, color, national origin, citizenship status, age, disability, religion, genetic information, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, or veteran status.

Additional Information

More information about Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center can be found at wolf-ridge.org or hike over to Wolf Ridge on Instagram: [instagram.com/wolfridgeelc](https://www.instagram.com/wolfridgeelc)

For additional information regarding this opportunity, please contact:

Andrew Leider
Managing Director & Search Lead, Potrero Group
aleider@potrerogroup.com



Living and Working on the North Shore

The greater North Shore of Lake Superior has all that Minnesota has come to offer and represent—four seasons, deep woods, accessible small cities, and unsought treasures tucked away in small towns and down rural roads, and, of course, the Lake.

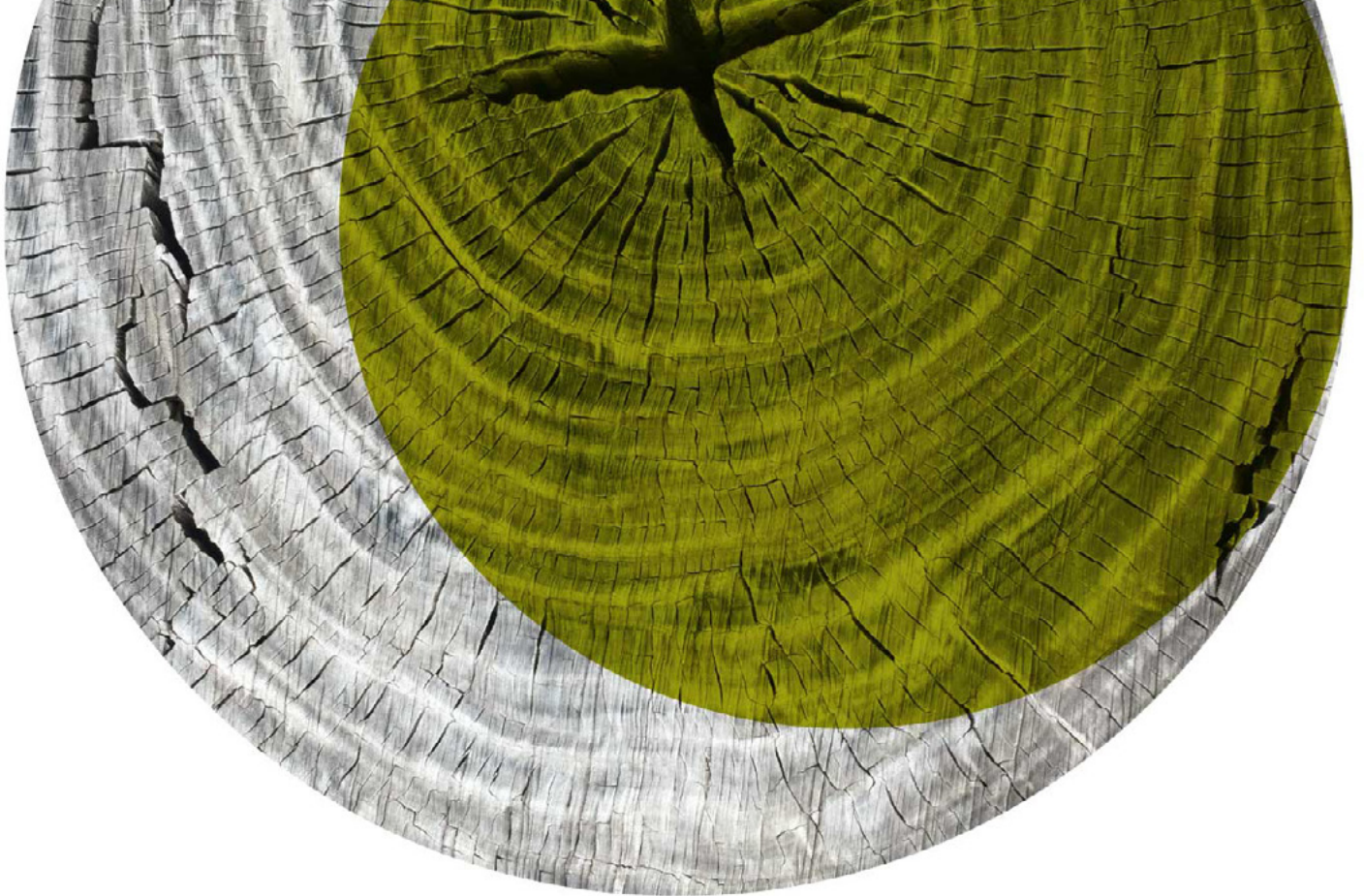
Finland, MN, is one of a series of small, nearshore hamlets up and down the North Shore. With a history of lumber milling and forestry, Finland continues to be a community with close ties to its landscape and history. Outdoor activities are everywhere, including the Superior Hiking Trail, numerous state parks, biking trails, rivers and lakes, and innumerable places to slow down and simply watch the sun rise over the big lake or set over the big woods.

North Shore communities are home to people at all stages of life. The COVID pandemic saw a strong migration to the area as people sought new communities with a different quality and pace of life. People have long retired to the North Shore or were born here and simply never felt pulled away. Wolf Ridge is approximately 75 minutes north of Duluth, MN, and 3¼ hours north of the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul.

More Information

The links below lead to additional information and resources for living and working along the North Shore. Wolf Ridge encourages you to explore, ask questions, and do your own research. We are sure you will realize that this amazing location is a significant benefit of working at Wolf Ridge.

- Wikipedia, North Shore of Lake Superior (history, sites, lots of links): [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Shore_\(Lake_Superior\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Shore_(Lake_Superior))
- Lake County Chamber of Commerce, Finland, MN info: lakecounty-chamber.com/communities/finland/
- Finland is in the Lake Superior School District ISD381 www.isd381.k12.mn.us/
- North Shore Community Radio, What Matters To Us: Growing Up on Lake Superior: wtip.org/features/what-matters-to-us-growing-up-near-lake-superior/
- NorthForce, 10 Reasons Living Up North is the Best: northforce.org/10-reasons-living-up-north-is-the-best/
- Zillow real estate information (don't forget to check other nearby communities): www.zillow.com/finland-mn/
- More North Shore local info: northshorevisitor.com/communities/



Potrero Group is honored to coordinate this search on behalf of Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center. 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.