

POSITION DESCRIPTION

FOR THE POSITION OF CHIEF OPERATIONS OFFICER



**OPEN SPACE
INSTITUTE**

August 2021

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POSITION DESCRIPTION

POSITION	Chief Operations Officer
ORGANIZATION	Open Space Institute
REPORTS TO	Christopher "Kim" J. Elliman, President and CEO
LOCATION	New York, NY
WEBSITE	www.openspaceinstitute.org

OPEN SPACE INSTITUTE OVERVIEW

The Open Space Institute (OSI) began over 46 years ago as a local land trust to preserve the natural integrity of the lower Hudson Valley in New York. Over the past four decades, both its geography and impact have expanded. OSI has grown from a local environmental organization to become a conservation leader throughout the eastern United States. Across this geography and working with partners, OSI has conserved close to 2.5 million acres, benefiting both nature and people.

With a \$100 million-dollar budget and over \$300 million in assets, OSI engages 55 staff members and completes over 100 transactions and 30 grants and loans a year in its pursuit to protect the most environmentally sensitive landscapes.

The mission of OSI is to protect scenic, natural, and historic landscapes to provide public enjoyment, conserve habitat and working lands, and sustain communities. OSI achieves its mission through the following programs:

Land Acquisition - Protects critical open spaces, habitats, recreational lands, family farms and historic sites through direct fee acquisition and conservation easements. This program includes sales and contributions of protected land to public agencies and other nonprofit organizations. Over 46 years, more than 228,000 acres have been protected across the Eastern United States. As opportunities have arisen for significant, complex, and large-scale conservation transactions, this program has completed acquisitions in New York, New Jersey, Georgia, Florida, Maine, South Carolina, and Virginia. The Open Space Institute Land Trust is the land acquisition and capital program affiliate of the Open Space Institute.

Stewardship - Monitors and enforces more than 80 conservation easements, implementing complex disposition plans, overseeing the management of dozens of conservation properties by third-party partners and providing interim management for properties and easements, many to be conveyed eventually to public agencies or other nonprofit organizations.



Conservation Capital - Accelerates the rate and effectiveness of conservation by working closely with recognized foundations to design and administer programs that support the protection of habitat, open space, water quality, and lands that safeguard the environment in a changing climate. The program provides grants and short-term, low-cost bridge loans to land trusts for transactions in selected geographies in the eastern United States and Canada. The program also synthesizes and integrates science into conservation plans to focus on land protection. Over its 20-year history it has financed 1.9 million acres of land protection.

Parks Program – Enables access to parks and trails through design and construction of appealing facilities; champions increased state and federal public investment; raises private dollars to leverage that investment; and brings know-how to make park improvement projects more engaging for visitors. Past successes include the design, funding, and development of visitor centers, trails, trailheads, carriage roads, parking areas and other public amenities aimed at enhancing the use and enjoyment of public lands. OSI strongly identifies with conservation projects that create, protect, and enhance parks, which has led to a renewed focus on the visitor experience. By developing innovative public-private partnerships, OSI is increasing access and enhancing the value of public parks.

Outdoors America Campaign - Since 2009, the Open Space Institute has operated the Outdoors America Campaign (OAC) to bring greater capacity, cohesion, and a broader lens to build support for consistent, dedicated federal funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Consolidating a coalition of over 1000 interest groups, the OAC educates decision-makers and the public about the benefits of preserving open space and the vital role of federal funding in land acquisition.

OSI also helps craft and advocate for the funding mechanisms that make land protection possible, from local efforts to the federal level, thus shaping national, regional and state-wide efforts to preserve habitat and natural resources.

Conservation Communities - As the primary initiative, Citizen Action provides fiscal sponsorship and administrative support for a broad range of community-based projects that protect natural habitat, enhance communities to make cities more livable, promote environmental sustainability, provide education, and connect people with land. This program also includes two grant award initiatives. The Malcolm Gordon Charitable Fund awards grants to local organizations to further environmental education. The Barnabas McHenry Hudson River Valley Awards Program recognizes pairings of young leaders and exemplary projects that make significant contributions in environmental conservation, historic preservation, tourism, and the arts. In addition, the Conservation Diversity Fellowship seeks candidates pursuing professional experience in the conservation field. The Fellowship offers candidates, two annually, the chance to work with colleagues and leaders at the Open Space Institute to accomplish meaningful conservation goals.

OSI's varied and complementary programmatic initiatives are driven by a consistent conservation strategy of permanent land protection on a landscape scale.

As OSI moves toward its 50th year, the organization is pledging to ensure that equity, long overdue in the environmental movement, is inherent in its values, and is present in its work.

ROLE SUMMARY

Reporting to the Chief Executive Officer, the Chief Operations Officer (COO) will collaborate with other members of the senior leadership team to prepare, service and oversee a \$100 MM annual budget for a complex organization. The COO will work with the CFO to track annual and departmental budgets, and coordinate with the CEO, Board and Senior Staff on Finance. The COO will play a critical role in overseeing the processes that support over 50 large land transactions a year. The COO will partner with the General Counsel on Risk and Compliance and with the CFO on matters of finance and accounting, and oversee all administrative functions including Human Resources, Information Technology, and office management. The COO will be a dynamic leader with proven experience in finance, real estate and successfully driving organizations toward greater impact.

OSI distinguishes itself as an entrepreneurial organization with an extremely knowledgeable, dedicated, and creative staff committed to the organization's mission. The nature of the work is transactional, highly complex, requiring someone who understands the nuances of OSI's different programs, and who has an appreciation for the wide range of partners, stakeholders, and other constituents with whom OSI engages.

OSI seeks a respected and collaborative leader who combines a high level of professional competence in finance, operations, and administrative leadership with a passion for its mission. The successful candidate will be a proven leader, manager, mentor, and collaborative colleague who is comfortable leading major initiatives, supporting the leadership and expertise of others, and has a track record of effectively leading and supporting organizational change.

Understanding the commonalities across the various programs, while appreciating the unique characteristics that distinguish OSI's activities will require a collegial, astute, and talented COO who demonstrates the following attributes:

- **Leadership and Organization** - Exceptional capacity for managing and leading people; a team builder who has experience in scaling up organizations; ability to connect with staff both on an individual level and in large groups; capacity to enforce accountability, and learn the strengths and weaknesses of the team to put people in a position to succeed.
- **Building Partnerships:** Honest, trusting, and engaging are defining personal attributes. An operations leader who is highly collaborative and effective at building strong relationships with OSI staff and board members. Respects others; actively seeks and shares ideas; takes the initiative to understand the unique needs of the different program areas.
- **Experience with Complex Financial Models.** Ability to understand the finances, management, reporting, and risks associated with multimillion-dollar real estate transactions. Willing to invest the time needed to understand the OSI business model and its interplay between capital and operating budgets.
- **Excellent Communication and Interpersonal Skills:** Conveys complex information effectively. Strong written, verbal, and listening skills. Possesses willingness to share knowledge, but just as

importantly encourages colleagues to provide input and feedback, where appropriate. Ability to work harmoniously with others and displays a positive “can-do” attitude and enthusiasm for working in a team.

- **Problem Solving and Decision-Making Expertise:** Possesses a superior ability as a problem solver by assembling and analyzing data effectively, drawing conclusions, and making decisions that will ultimately become the basis for sound business decisions. Ability to earn the respect of the staff based on an ability to add value to the organization and propose meaningful operational enhancements and recommendations.
- **Passion for Mission:** Willing to develop an understanding of the conservation space and demonstrate a passion for working with a purpose driven organization that is making a huge impact in the areas it serves.
- **Adaptable:** Displays willingness to be flexible when the situation requires. Effectively conveys the benefits of adopting consistent processes and structures without being rigid or mandating compliance. Has the ability to bring others along; can sell the advantages of adopting new approaches and gain support from the team.
- **Interpersonal sensitivity:** Understands importance of institutional knowledge and historical norms that characterize a close-knit organization that might be skeptical about embracing change and adopting new operational processes. Displays strong people skills; keen to help an organization grow by building upon a strong foundation.
- **Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** Promotes a culture that values and embraces the benefits to OSI of strengthening its efforts to create a more diverse and inclusive environment. Helps drive change needed to ensure that OSI promotes equity in its internal and external operations.

Primary Responsibilities

- Provide advice and counsel to the CEO on overall operations that help him stay abreast of significant areas of concern that require his input or attention while assuming much of the day-to-day minutia and oversight required to “keep the trains running.”
- Oversee all non-programmatic operations and business practices in collaboration with the senior leadership team. Collaborate with these colleagues to develop strategies and systems to support the quality, efficiency, and responsiveness of a range of programs and operations.
- In partnership with other members of the senior leadership team, coordinate and monitor long-term organizational strategic planning and enterprise-wide annual operating plans, integrating them appropriately across functional departments and programmatic areas, and utilizing established organizational metrics to measure progress.
- Work collaboratively with OSI colleagues to enhance and strengthen the operational and administrative functions of OSI to ensure alignment with organizational goals. Demonstrate a

visible presence, an emphasis on the "team," effective communications, superior goal clarity, and organized problem-solving.

- Drive best-in-class, nonprofit management practices to ensure OSI has the people, infrastructure, and systems to maintain and strengthen the Institute's role as a leader in the conservation field. Document existing processes and develop a supportive set of policies, procedures and guidelines to enhance OSI's day-to-day operations.
- Cultivate a strong, collaborative working relationship with the Board of Trustees, serving as a direct liaison to ensuring open communication regarding administrative and operational matters and status of financial goals, programmatic activities, new endeavors, and organizational challenges.
- Oversee the information technology environment that supports OSI's work, providing vision and direction to ensure that integrated, efficient, and secure technology platforms and systems are in place for both administrative and programmatic areas.
- Ensure effective strategies to address emergency planning and management of strategic, operational, or compliance-related risks, consulting with other members of the senior leadership team as necessary. Anticipate changing business demands both within OSI as well as externally, and accordingly develop operational strategies and tactics to address these business changes.
- Oversee Human Resources Department and ensure HR processes are in place to evaluate, recruit, reward, mentor, and provide growth opportunities for staff members. Maintain a culture that enables optimal creativity, collegiality, open communication, accountability, and a sense of shared contribution to achieving organizational goals.
- Ensure the activities of OSI are conducted in accordance with sound policies and procedures that meet all relevant regulatory financial reporting and LTA requirements. Ensure sound operational fiscal measures are in place to achieve overall financial objectives.
- Promote and drive towards an inclusive culture on all levels, while demonstrating respect for differences, cultural sensitivity, and a commitment to diversity.

Professional Requirements

- A broad understanding of human resources, information systems, legal requirements, finance, and the ability to think strategically and holistically about the interplay among operations, business processes, human resources, and institutional planning; to extract and analyze data to make effective, efficient decisions about strategy and process; to set attainable goals, establish priorities, and work with and inspire others to high levels of collaboration and creative performance in support of OSI's mission.
- A track record of success as a COO, VP Operations or similar roles in a complex organization comparable, at a minimum, to the size, scope and operations of OSI.



- A thorough understanding of business-process improvement and operations management, with proven administrative, managerial, problem-solving, and planning experience within a complex nonprofit environment. Experience serving a nonprofit organization with diverse program offerings.
- Proven experience in a multi-faceted, organization and understanding of complex transactions involving multiple players, intricate financial arrangements, and obligations.
- Experience in proactively identifying and addressing organizational risks related to strategy, operations, or compliance.
- Outstanding organizational skills, with the ability to effectively implement and complete projects on a timely basis and to manage multiple priorities. A self-starter who is intellectually curious and possesses a strong work ethic, and the ability to adeptly navigate a complex environment.

SEARCH TEAM

Diversified Search Group has been retained by Open Space Institute to assist in this recruitment process. Applications, nominations, and further inquiries should be submitted electronically and in confidence to: osicoo@divsearch.com.

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OSI is committed to workplace diversity and inclusion. We recognize that our conservation mission is best advanced by the leadership and contributions of people of all genders, diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and cultures. We encourage applicants from all cultures, races, colors, religions, sexes, national or regional origins, ages, disability status, sexual orientation, gender identity, military, protected veteran status, or any other status protected by law.