



THOMPSON ISLAND OUTWARD BOUND EDUCATION CENTER

Search for the President and Chief Executive Officer Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center Boston, MA

THE SEARCH

[Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center](#) (TIOBEC), a beacon for experiential education, empowering young people through outdoor education and exploration, seeks a seasoned, strategic, and entrepreneurial President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The CEO will take the reins of this nearly 200-year-old storied institution that continues to build and innovate on a legacy of serving young people and nurturing their love of learning and the outdoors.

TIOBEC's unique educational program model combines field science, socio-emotional learning, and outdoor challenges to promote positive character development. Funded by a combination of philanthropy and the Island's private events business, the majority of TIOBEC educational programs are offered at no cost to families. The 204-acre nature preserve, Thompson Island, is one of 34 islands and peninsulas that comprise the [Boston Harbor Islands National and State Park](#). This one-of-a-kind outdoor classroom is a mere 25 minutes by ferry from downtown Boston, an urban oasis to thousands of young people from [Boston's Public Schools](#) (BPS) and to guests who choose to host their special events on the grounds.

The CEO role calls for an inspiring individual who is passionate about equity and access in education and who will bring exceptional operational and financial acumen to the position, including proven skills in organizational leadership and staff management that is both collaborative and decisive. A track record of growing and diversifying revenues is required, whether through philanthropic fundraising or business development. A passion for the natural environment and youth development are also essential, expressed in professional, personal, or volunteer activities. A lived commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility is a must.

The TIOBEC Board of Trustees has appointed a seven-member committee to conduct this search in partnership with Kennedy Kearney-Fischer, Berlinda Mojica, and Katie Rockman of the Boston-based international executive search firm [Isaacson, Miller](#). Confidential nominations, inquiries, and applications may be directed to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center's core mission is to build stronger, more equitable communities by delivering free experiential learning programs that use the outdoors and adventure as a vehicle for learning, education, and personal growth. Deep collaborations with Boston Public Schools, Outward Bound USA, and the National Park Service strengthen TIOBEC's ability to empower young people and transform their relationship to the natural environment.

TIOBEC's central program, *Connections*, is a multi-year, school year program that engages BPS middle school students in a progressively challenging curriculum that integrates STEM and field science, outdoor challenge and adventure, and social-emotional learning. The research-based *Connections* curriculum is taught on Thompson Island, at eight partner schools, and online. *Connections* students also have opportunities to participate in summer learning programs on Thompson Island, including the *Summer Learning Expedition (SLE)*, a 21-day overnight expedition that combines academics, social-emotional learning, and Outward Bound-style adventure challenges, including climbing, backpacking, and kayaking.

Many *Connections* students go on to join *Green Ambassadors*, a three-year paid environmental job-readiness program for BPS high school students. Green Ambassadors participate in hands-on, team-oriented conservation, environmental stewardship, and climate responsiveness projects, receive college and career coaching, and engage in Outward Bound activities that help them build leadership, communication, and problem-solving skills.

The TIOBEC Discovery and Outward Bound Professional programs are tailored to schools and community-based organizations seeking fun and effective experiences to foster confidence and teamwork.

Discovery expedition trips serve youth in Boston of all physical levels, backgrounds, and experiences from 5th grade through college undergraduates. Young people are guided through challenging activities where they learn new skills, apply their learning, exercise leadership, and practice teamwork to accomplish individual and group goals. Just as important, groups have fun and learn the importance of supporting one another while experiencing the thrill of low and high ropes challenge course elements.

Outward Bound Professional programs increase effectiveness of newly forming and high-performance teams, cultivate a positive, supportive, and empowering culture, and form more trusting relationships among colleagues. All programs are custom designed to stimulate creativity, innovation, and effectiveness while incorporating a global perspective to meet the diverse challenges of today's organizations.

All young people deserve the opportunity to reach their full potential. National research shows that low-income urban middle school students are 6,000 hours behind their middle-income peers in opportunities to learn outside the classroom. TIOBEC's *Connections* program plays a [crucial role in closing this gap](#). Students who started with low interest in science showed a 17% interest gain after Thompson Island

expeditions in the spring and fall. Those same students who discovered their passion for science also made gains in critical life skills, showing a 17% increase in teamwork, 32% increase in perseverance, and 37% increase in critical thinking, according to an evaluation conducted by the PEAR Institute at Harvard Medical School and the National Institute on Out of School Time at the Wellesley Centers for Women.

TIOBEC is committed to ongoing evaluation of its programs and to continuous improvement, using well-established evaluation tools, including the National Institute on Out-of-School Survey of Academic and Youth Outcomes (SAYO-Y) tool, the Common Instrument Suite (CIS), and Outward Bound's Domains of Thriving tool. Thompson Island also partners with researchers and educators at [Harvard Medical School](#), [Wellesley College](#), [UC Berkeley Lawrence Hall of Science](#), [Boston Public Schools](#), the [National Park Service](#), and [Boston After School and Beyond](#) to measure the efficacy of its programs.

ISLAND FACILITIES, PRIVATE EVENTS, AND CONFERENCES

Thompson Island is one of the largest, most accessible, and most ecologically diverse islands in the [Boston Harbor Islands National and State Park](#). With 204 acres of undeveloped property, the island has mature forests, meadows, freshwater and marine wetlands, salt marshes, and a variety of important geological features. Amenities include a formal school campus complete with dormitories, dining hall, classrooms, lab space, auditoriums, gymnasium, outdoor challenge courses, and climbing towers.

Thompson Island's six sites and venues can accommodate private ceremonies, receptions, corporate events, and more. The event operations business unit includes full-service catering, maintenance of building and grounds, and event coordination. The robust business portfolio brings in over \$2 million in revenue and thousands of visitors each year. This important unit not only helps cover the cost of TIOBEC's experiential learning programs and services but ensures safety and accessibility for all who visit the island.

Thompson Island is owned by Thompson Island Education Center (TIEC), an affiliated entity. TIEC also owns and operates a private ferry that facilitates transportation to and from the Boston waterfront. The docks on the island are maintained by TIEC as well.

GOVERNANCE AND FINANCE

Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center is a 501c3 nonprofit organization, and a chartered member of [Outward Bound USA](#), with an annual budget of \$8.23 million. Nearly half of all revenue for TIOBEC is raised from philanthropy; a quarter from events and conferences hosted on the island venues; an eighth from fee-for-service programs; government grants and an annual withdrawal from the organization's \$7.5 million endowment contributes an average of \$450K to the annual operating budget. The organization is governed by a 22-member Board of Trustees, a diverse group of professionals with a wide range of expertise in community development, education, health, law, real estate, and finance. The board provides guidance to the organization through established committees including education,

development, finance and audit, investment, asset management, safety, and enterprise. TIOBEC also benefits from the support of a 47-member Board of Advisors.

The President and CEO reports directly to the Board of Trustees and oversees about 140 full-time and seasonal employees as well as the operations and physical assets of the organization. Direct reports to the CEO include a Vice President of Human Resources and Administration, Chief Development and Communications Officer, Vice President of Island Operations, Chief Education Officer, and retained Chief Financial Officer services provided by [eCratchit](#).

RECENT HISTORY AND CONTEXT

Recognizing the urgent need to address the opportunity gap for historically underserved and under-resourced youth, in 2018 TIOBEC launched an ambitious commitment to increase the scale of its programs to have greater systemic impact. Scaling and broadening access was aggressively defined as serving 2,600 students, or 15% of BPS middle school students, by the end of 2023. TIOBEC surpassed their intended year one goal of serving 1,200 students and expanded their *Connections* program to 1,632 middle school students across nine BPS schools. The expansion of programs, including additional staffing with school site instructors across BPS, was supported by a robust operating budget of \$7.9 million, of which philanthropy and events revenue contributed more than \$6 million (close to evenly split).

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted this ambitious plan, as TIOBEC was forced to pause many of its operations and faced significant financial challenges. The events business unit was unable to safely continue operating and did not generate any revenue for fiscal year 2020, and the organization had to lay off a significant number of staff. A dedicated philanthropic community, as well as government assistance programs that provided significant aid to the organization, enabled TIOBEC to bring staff back on, and in fiscal year 2021, a slow and managed reopening of event operations generated almost \$700,000. The enterprise is once again fully operational, and building back in fiscal year 2022, the events business unit is budgeted to bring in \$2.1 million. Throughout this challenging time for young people and families, the high-quality programs team continued to serve and innovate across the partner schools.

The next CEO will evaluate TIOBEC's current operational framework and progress shifting back from pandemic-related government support to a fully self-sustaining budget, and towards the scale plan goals, mapping out an ambitious and achievable path to continue working towards these critical objectives.

ROLE OF THE PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Building upon the organization's impactful program model, TIOBEC's next CEO will inspire and develop its staff, sustain and strengthen its operations, and fundraise effectively for the youth TIOBEC serves. This leader will be well-versed in youth development and nonprofit operations, with experience managing complex enterprises.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Working closely with the Board of Trustees and senior leadership team, key challenges and opportunities ahead for the next CEO include the following:

Amplify and elevate TIOBEC's programs, services, and impact

TIOBEC, in particular its experiential education programs, prides itself on exceptional delivery and measurable outcomes for young people at a pivotal moment in their development. The savvy and entrepreneurial CEO will assess the organization's current capacity and develop a comprehensive strategic plan to reactivate the scale plan and expand access to TIOBEC's programs to greater numbers of middle school students across Boston Public Schools.

Looking ahead, the CEO will identify opportunities to strengthen partnerships across and at the periphery of Boston's education ecosystem to expand access to TIOBEC's experiential learning model. Alongside the dedicated team of professionals and board of trustees, the CEO will drive this important work and communicate the impressive impact and value of TIOBEC's programs and establish it as the premier outdoor classroom nationally. They will serve as a leader at the national level advocating for greater investment and resources in out-of-school programs that compliment in-school instruction and learning.

Model and provide strong internal managerial leadership, with effective communication across all units and levels of the enterprise

The new CEO must be an astute and collaborative thinker with the ability to translate ideas into a unifying vision and plan. They will oversee a dynamic and complex portfolio that includes educational programming, facilities management across land and sea, event operations, fundraising and external partnerships, and staff with varying levels of skill and expertise. TIOBEC has an extremely dedicated, creative, and hardworking staff, accustomed to operating within the logistical constraints of an island environment. The CEO will be an advocate for their staff—a people-first leader with strong emotional intelligence and intercultural competence. They will provide steady and unifying managerial leadership to ensure that these disparate units are connected and working synchronously to deliver an equitable and safe program experience to young people and guests. To this end, the CEO must instill confidence in their decision-making and exercise good judgement.

Recruit and retain a talented, diverse workforce; prioritize and actively demonstrate an authentic and lived commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility

In order to best meet the current and future needs of TIOBEC, the next CEO will need to evaluate the organizational structure, ensuring that the teams are well defined, well-staffed, and well-supported across locations. This individual will dedicate time and resources to hire and retain an exceptional workforce that mirrors the communities served by TIOBEC. By reconfiguring their staffing models to prioritize full-year

positions and competitive compensation, TIOBEC has been striving to develop greater inclusion and accessibility in their workforce. In tandem with furthering these initiatives, the CEO will promote a positive, inclusive, and thriving organizational culture, where staff have space to engage in critical conversations about identity and equity, clear systems for advancement, and are energized about the possibilities for TIOBEC's future.

Grow and diversify TIOBEC's funding bases and partners; represent TIOBEC externally across a wide array of stakeholders

The successful stewardship of financial resources is imperative for the next CEO of TIOBEC. The CEO will need to be financially adept to assess the current financial condition and implement a business plan that strategically aligns with the short- and long-term goals of the organization. The future sustainability of the organization requires a CEO who will be an engaged external leader, nurturing existing relationships with donors and other supporters as well as securing a broader base of financial support that exemplifies its commitment to and valuing of the diverse community of young people served. The next CEO will work closely with the board of trustees to grow and diversify contributions from government, grant-making agencies, private foundations, and individual donors.

TIOBEC's enduring success has greatly depended on strong relationships and partnerships with the Boston Public Schools, City of Boston, National Park Service, and Outward Bound USA. The new CEO will deepen these existing relationships in service of TIOBEC's mission. More broadly, the CEO will need to have an influential presence and meaningful ties locally and nationally to outline areas of opportunity that will strengthen and extend the collective voice of organizations serving young people. In an increasingly competitive landscape for youth development organizations, TIOBEC is poised to be a convener and model of high-quality program delivery and experience for young people.

Work collaboratively with the board and build out systems for board development and engagement

The board of trustees is a key partner to the CEO in all of the above work and more, and will expect the new leader to map out a clear and well-researched path forward. Part of this work should include cultivating strong relationships with existing board members, establishing clear guidelines around participation, and developing strategies for ongoing board recruitment and board involvement in donor engagement. The new CEO will keep the board of trustees well informed and create opportunities for them to be effective ambassadors for the organization, particularly as it relates to recruiting trustees who reflect the lived experience of the young people TIOBEC serves.

KEY QUALIFICATIONS, CHARACTERISTICS, AND EXPERIENCES

While no candidate will bring all of these experiences and traits, Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center envisions that its next President and CEO will have many of the following traits:

- Resonance with the mission and values of Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center
- Authentic personal interest in the well-being of young people and appreciation for the outdoors
- Commitment to building diverse teams and to fostering a culture that prioritizes diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility organization-wide
- Strong business acumen and instincts, and a track record of identifying and expanding multiple innovative revenue streams
- A track record of fundraising success, with both aptitude and appetite for this critical dimension of the role; the ability to think creatively and outside-the-box in partnering with government, private, and corporate funders
- Experience working effectively with elected and appointed state and local officials as well as business and civic leaders; political astuteness
- Excellent judgement, and a successful record of risk and crisis management
- A galvanizing and clear communication style in diverse settings; the ability to listen well and lead decisively
- Exceptional relationship-building skills
- The highest integrity, wisdom, humor, emotional intelligence, and a can-do attitude; adept at conflict management; even-keeled and calm when leading through challenges

Location

The Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center main campus is on the Island. Year round and seasonal workers are also co-located on the mainland in offices in Boston's Waterfront District and/or remotely. The CEO must be located in the Boston metro area.

Applications, Inquiries, and Nominations

Confidential inquiries, nominations/referrals, and applications (including resumes and one- to three-page letters of interest responding to the opportunities and challenges outlined above) should be sent electronically to the Isaacson, Miller executive search team via the link below.

Kennedy Kearney-Fischer, *Managing Associate*

Katie Rockman, *Partner*

Berlinda Mojica, *Senior Associate*

Alaine Small, *Senior Search Coordinator*

Isaacson, Miller

<http://www.imsearch.com/8745>

Thompson Island Outward Bound is an equal opportunity employer and actively seeks staff as diverse as the communities it serves. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, dis/ability status, protected veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by law.