



# CATHLEEN STONE ISLAND OUTWARD BOUND SCHOOL

Chief Advancement Officer  
Cathleen Stone Island Outward Bound School  
Boston, Massachusetts

*Changing lives through challenge and discovery*

## THE SEARCH

[Cathleen Stone Island Outward Bound School](#) (CSIOBS), formerly known as Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center, seeks a strategic, innovative, entrepreneurial, and results-oriented Chief Advancement Officer (CAO). A local and national treasure, CSIOBS is a beacon for experiential education with a mission to build stronger, more equitable school communities by delivering free programs that boost academic success and foster personal growth, empowering young people through outdoor education and exploration. CSIOBS is one of the nine [Outward Bound USA](#) schools dedicated to changing lives through challenge and discovery.

CSIOBS is a not-for-profit organization providing adventurous and challenging experiential learning programs that inspire character development, compassion, community service, environmental responsibility, and academic achievement. The organization serves adolescents from all economic and social communities of greater metropolitan Boston and the institutions and adults who support them. Many of the students CSIOBS serves attend Boston Public Schools, and CSIOBS has been associated with Boston Public Schools for over 50 years. CSIOBS firmly believes that access to green spaces and natural environments positively impacts children's mental health and well-being, laying a solid foundation for them to become lifelong learners.

Deeply embedded in CSIOBS's service model is the belief that practicing hands-on science in the Island's ecosystems enhances students' ability to question, observe, and spark their curiosity about the natural world. Tapping into challenge structures and participating in outdoor education courses help them build confidence, resilience, and a greater sense of possibility. This unique combination of field science and dynamic challenge profoundly impacts students' academic and social-emotional growth. CSIOBS intentionally includes STEM initiatives in its programming and takes responsibility for stewarding students to become environmentally conscious champions and advocates.

The 204-acre nature preserve 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 a CSIOBS ferry from downtown Boston, and serves as 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. See the Island and hear from students in this [short video highlighting CSIOBS](#) from WCVB Boston's *Chronicle*.

The next Chief Advancement Officer will have the opportunity to partner with an inspirational CEO and President as the organization embarks on its new strategic plan. (To learn more about the CEO and President, this [IM podcast](#) interview shares her background and vision.) In alignment with the organization's strategic plan, they will design and execute a comprehensive development strategy to propel CSIOBS into the future, fostering sustainable growth and impactful outcomes for Boston's youth. This will include assessing current development activities as well as team capacity and needs, and charting a course to grow the development operation to meet CSIOBS's ambitious goals.

As well as a top-notch strategist and team leader, the CAO will be a proven producer who will build and personally manage a portfolio of high-net-worth individual and institutional funders, clearly articulating and prioritizing the case for supporting CSIOBS's unique mission. Importantly, this individual will play a key role in galvanizing a new generation of funders while maintaining deep and meaningful ties with the organization's long-standing and most generous benefactors.

The CSIOBS Board of Trustees has appointed a search committee to conduct this search in partnership with Isaacson, Miller, a Boston-based international executive search firm. Confidential nominations, inquiries, and applications may be directed to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

## ABOUT CATHLEEN STONE ISLAND OUTWARD BOUND SCHOOL

### Programs, Services, and Partnerships

CSIOBS'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, Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, and the National Park Service strengthen CSIOBS's ability to empower young people and transform their relationship to the natural environment.

CSIOBS has three important student programs. [Connections](#) is a multi-year, school-year program that engages BPS school students in grades seven through nine (as well as some sixth graders) 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 Cathleen Stone Island, at partner schools, and online. *Connections* students also have opportunities to participate in summer learning programs on Cathleen Stone Island, including the *Summer Learning Expedition (SLE)*, a 6-14 day overnight expedition that combines academics, social-emotional learning, and Outward Bound-style adventure challenges, including climbing, backpacking, and kayaking.

The *Rites of Passage* program offers Boston Public School students nature-based learning opportunities at critical developmental and transitional periods during their K-12 experience. The program will provide a common set of experiences for 7th grade students that focuses on community building and leadership in an outdoor setting. Each Rites of Passage trip is a 2-day overnight program for 7th graders at either Cathleen Stone Island Outward Bound School, Mass Audubon Blue Hills, or Hale Education.

The *Crew* program works with students and teachers during the winter sessions.

[\*Green Ambassadors\*](#) is 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 CSIOBS's 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 challenges.

[\*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. CSIOBS's *Connections* program plays a [\*crucial role in closing this gap\*](#). Students who started with a low interest in science showed a 17% interest gain after CSIOBS. 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.

CSIOBS 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. Stone 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.

The organization also has a significant partnership with [Higher Ground of Boston](#) and is an active member of their Resilient Families Surround Care Coalition. This partnership is based on years of collaboration and is built on a strong foundation of mutual trust and shared goals and accomplishments.

Most recently, CSIOBS partnered with the [UMass Boston's School for the Environment](#), [Boston Harbor Now](#), [the City of Boston](#), [The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation](#), [The Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs](#), [The National Park Service](#), and the [James M. and Cathleen D. Stone Foundation](#) on the [Stone Living Lab Initiative](#). This innovative and collaborative initiative was established to test and scale up nature-based approaches to climate adaptation, coastal resilience, and ecological restoration in the high-energy environment of the Boston Harbor Islands National and State Park. Living Labs brings research out of the lab and into the real world by creating a user-centered, open, innovative ecosystem that engages scientists and the community in collaborative design and exploration.

## Island Facilities, Private Events, and Conferences

CSIOBS 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, a dining hall, classrooms, lab space, auditoriums, a gymnasium, outdoor challenge courses, and climbing towers.

Cathleen Stone 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 buildings and grounds, and event coordination. The robust business portfolio brings in over \$2.6 million in revenue and thousands of visitors each year. This important unit partially covers the cost of CSIOBS's experiential learning programs and services but also ensures safety for all who visit the Island.

## Governance and Finances

CSIOBS is a member of Outward Bound USA federation, with an annual budget of \$9.8 million. 52% of all revenue for CSIOBS is raised from philanthropy and events; 28% comes from weddings and conferences hosted on the Island venues; 13% comes from fee-for-service programs; and 7% comes from state and local government grants and an annual withdrawal from the organization's \$9 million endowment.

The organization is governed by a 21-member Board of Trustees comprised of diverse 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, change, culture and engagement(human resources), investment, asset management, and safety. CSIOBS also benefits from the support of a 47-member Board of Advisors.

The CAO reports directly to the CEO and leads a team that is currently comprised of 3 full-time and 1 part-time employees. Direct reports to the CAO include an Annual Fund Coordinator, Development Events Manager, a Development Manager, Major Gift Officers (to be hired), and contractors who provide grant writing and data management. This leader will have the opportunity to assess the current team structure and make additional hires to meet staffing needs in line with the organization's development goals.

## Recent History and Current Context

Founded in 1833, CSIOBS has continuously served as a site for innovative experiential learning programs that have profoundly influenced the lives of Boston's young people. In 1988, the Island became one of the nine Outward Bound schools in the U.S., infusing the organization with Outward Bound's unique approach to promoting compassion, leadership, and service. Today, CSIOBS continues to build upon this foundation by providing programming to reach historically marginalized, underserved, and excluded communities within BPS, with aspirations to expand into surrounding school districts.

In April of 2023, Sylvia Watts McKinney succeeded long-time CEO Arthur Pearson. Sylvia is the first woman and person of color to serve in this role. Under her leadership, the organization secured its largest donation of all time: a \$12 million gift from the James M. and Cathleen D. Stone Foundation. In December of 2023, the Board of Trustees voted to rename the organization from the Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center to the Cathleen Stone Island Outward Bound School, honoring Cathleen's legacy and her commitment to equity in outdoor education, climate resiliency, and environmental justice.

Finalized in October of 2024, [CSIOBS's 2025 strategic plan](#) focuses on the following set of initiatives through 2030:

- Deepening programming by continuing to serve more students through three signature programs: Connections, Green Ambassadors, and a newly created Train-the-Teacher model focused on Climate Resiliency and Leadership Development
- Cultivating partnerships
- Attracting, retaining, and developing a diverse staff, reflecting the students CSIOBS serves and ensuring they have a diversified and flexible financial model

With the Island as the main hub of activity and programming, CSIOBS will work to modernize the Island's campus by updating existing buildings, adding new buildings, and upgrading the Island infrastructure and the ferry to ensure the organization is meeting the growing demand for student-facing programs.

## ROLE OF THE CHIEF ADVANCEMENT OFFICER

The Chief Advancement Officer is responsible for setting and executing on CSIOBS's fundraising vision and strategy and encouraging a culture of philanthropy across the organization. They will work in collaboration with the President and CEO, along with other senior leaders, including the Board of Trustees and other key constituents, to build, guide, and lead an effective team to achieve development goals that support CSIOBS's mission and programs and align with the organization's strategic plan for expansion.

Historically, CSIOBS's development strategy has emphasized event-based fundraising. The CAO will be forward-thinking, crafting a vision for fundraising and donor engagement that honors and builds upon popular and effective flagship events while simultaneously developing a resource development strategy that broadens and diversifies funding sources, ultimately increasing overall philanthropic engagement and support. The CAO will evaluate the existing strategies and infrastructure, craft a new development strategic plan in alignment with the organization's overall strategic plan, and build out a best-in-class development operation to execute on these ambitious goals, including hiring key positions. They will establish a robust development infrastructure for the organization's future initiatives, introduce new organizational systems and frameworks, refine performance metrics, and harness data-driven insights to inform strategic decision-making. In addition to building out and managing the team, the CAO will lead by example, serving as the organization's chief fundraiser and building and carrying a portfolio of top donors.

All CSIOBS staff bring a commitment to the organization's mission of unleashing students to be challenged via discovery, as well as the ability to thrive in an environment that values excellence, gratitude, well-being, diversity, authenticity, and collaboration. All candidates should demonstrate leadership, coaching, relationship management experience, and substantial success in managing funder relationships.

## KEY OPPORTUNITES AND CHALLENGES

### **Forge and Implement a Strategic Roadmap for the Advancement Operation.**

As the visionary architect shaping a unified, strategic advancement operation, the CAO will conceive and executive a comprehensive fundraising strategy to propel CSIOBS into the future, fostering sustainable growth and impactful outcomes on a significant scale. Those who know the Island care deeply about its success, and the CAO will invest in and leverage these existing philanthropic strengths and relationships, while actively pursuing new engagement and giving opportunities, launching initiatives to identify, cultivate, solicit, and steward a strong pipeline of donors.

### **Develop, Manage, and Lead the CSIOBS Advancement Team.**

The incoming CAO will inherit a team of four to six professionals. This leader will work to build the team's overall capacity in a substantial and sustainable way that aligns with the 2025 Strategic Plan. This involves evaluating current capabilities, overseeing professional growth and ensuring retention, and strategizing for additional recruitment to meet ambitious goals. The CAO will establish and define clear roles and

responsibilities, fostering a culture of accountability and achievement. They will lead with fairness, openness, and empowerment, intentionally developing an environment of excellence, where every staff member is valued and acknowledged for their contributions. The CAO will encourage innovation, initiative, collaboration, and camaraderie – both within the team and across the organization as a whole. Importantly, the CAO will be a player-coach, leading by example and carrying a personal portfolio of prospects and donors.

### **Collaborate with and Support Executive Leadership in Development Initiatives.**

The CAO will collaborate closely with the CEO and other key leaders to spearhead advancement efforts, especially growing and diversifying funding revenues, targeting new donors, and aligning with emerging strategies. Additionally, the CAO will support the CEO and executive team in advancing their philanthropic priorities, acting as a mentor, coach, and strategic partner. As a key member of the senior leadership team, the CAO will bring an open, constructive, and highly collaborative approach that contributes to building a strong and inclusive culture across the senior team and the organization as a whole.

## **QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS**

While no candidate will bring all these experiences and traits, CSIOBS envisions that the CAO will have many of the following:

- Resonance with the mission and values of CSIOBS; authentic personal interest in the well-being of young people, a strong commitment to advancing equity, and an appreciation for the outdoors
- Adept at securing major and principal gifts, with a track record of revenue-generation success; depth of knowledge and best practices in all key areas of development
- Strong financial acumen and a keen focus on operational efficiency
- An entrepreneurial mindset with an ability to pioneer innovative fundraising approaches and engagement strategies; relentlessly focused on generating new opportunities with the ability to adapt to a quickly changing external landscape
- Proven track record of recruiting top talent; leading and mentoring high-performing, diverse teams; the ability to establish a team- and goal-oriented environment that empowers staff and builds confidence, promotes diversity of thought, and celebrates achievement
- Ability to engage and effectively leverage the CEO, senior leadership, board members, and other key stakeholders in the cultivation of key prospects
- Strategic planning experience and skills, with the ability to set a vision for the long term, translate the vision into clear goals, and build a plan to achieve them
- Data-driven decision-making; the ability to communicate metrics effectively to a broad audience
- Superior written and verbal communication skills; adept at aligning the passion of individuals with organizational objectives
- A flexible and adaptable style; a leader who can positively impact both strategic and tactical fundraising initiatives and work well with individuals from all backgrounds



## COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

Compensation for this position will be competitive and negotiated in good faith, with the range beginning at \$200,000. CSIOBS's 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. This hire will reside in the Boston area and work on the Island for eight months of the year; during the off-season, they will work at the local office in Boston's Seaport neighborhood.

## BENEFITS

CSIOBS is committed to staff learning, growth, and development. This holistic investment includes:

- Medical insurance with up to 80% employer contribution
- Dental, vision, FSA, life, and disability insurance plans
- 401 (K) and Employer Match
- Generous paid time off, including 17 vacation days, 20 personal days, and 13 organization-wide holidays
- Individual, local, regional, and national training
- A commitment to developing leaders from within the organization
- An organizational culture that supports staff well-being and holistic self-care
- Ample opportunities to connect with the students and communities CSIOBS serves

## COMMITMENT TO EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND BELONGING

Cathleen Stone Island Outward Bound School's staff and board care deeply about social justice, equity, and diverse perspectives and backgrounds, creating a rich work environment and enhancing their ability to pursue their mission. They hope you will join them as they continue to grow a diverse organization that fosters a work environment where people from all backgrounds are welcomed and valued.

## APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Confidential inquiries, nominations, referrals, and applications (including resumes and two- to three-page letters of interest responding to the opportunities and challenges outlined above) should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website: <https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/cathleen-stone-island-outward-bound-school/chief-advancement-officer>.

Kennedy Kearney-Fischer, Managing Associate  
Karson Freeman, Associate  
Rachel Banderob, Senior Search Coordinator  
Isaacson, Miller



*Cathleen Stone Island Outward Bound School is an equal opportunity employer and actively seeks staff that are as diverse as the communities they serve. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability status, protected veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by law. Cathleen Stone Island Outward Bound School has a zero-tolerance policy for incidents of child abuse and neglect. Protecting their minor students against abuse and neglect is of the highest priority.*