



Search for the Chief Operating Officer
Woodwell Climate Research Center
Woods Hole, Massachusetts

THE SEARCH

The Woodwell Climate Research Center (Woodwell) seeks a strategic and visionary leader to serve as its next Chief Operating Officer (COO). Woodwell is a non-profit climate science research center internationally recognized as a leading authority in shaping climate policy and pioneering innovative research collaborations across the globe. The center is home to renowned scientific minds leading the charge for transformative research and the translation of knowledge into meaningful action. As Woodwell increases its reach and impact, the next COO will be a transformational leader, driving operational excellence across a rapidly growing organization.

Originally founded in 1985 as the Woods Hole Research Center by renowned ecologist Dr. George Woodwell, the center has evolved into a leading nonprofit research organization dedicated to addressing climate change through science and policy. As part of the Woods Hole scientific community in Massachusetts, the center was established to bridge the gap between scientific research and actionable climate solutions. Over the decades, it has expanded its global reach, conducting fieldwork in critical ecosystems such as the Arctic, Amazon, and Congo Basin. In 2020, it was renamed to honor its founder and reaffirm its mission to advance science-based strategies for a sustainable and equitable future. Woodwell works in partnership with over 20 countries in climate-critical landscapes, including international organizations, national governments, Indigenous peoples, and local communities, to provide solutions and safeguard against climate risks.

Woodwell has been in a phase of rapid expansion in both its staff and operations to meet the increased challenges of the climate crisis. The organization is in the early phase of implementing a new scientific impact framework, including an organizational restructuring of its senior leadership team, to position the COO to lead Woodwell's strategic business decisions and manage the day-to-day operations of the center. The COO will ensure accountability across teams and collaborate with leadership on exploring new high-impact opportunities. Reporting to the President & CEO, the incoming COO will be instrumental in the effort to scale operations, diversify revenue streams, and strengthen Woodwell's reputation as a leader in climate research and policy impact.

The outstanding candidate will have a proven track record in driving strategic planning and change management, translating vision to operational reality, ensuring operational excellence and oversight, demonstrated experience in exercising financial leadership, and expanding new revenue streams. They will have excellent communication skills with the ability to build relationships with diverse stakeholders and partners, and they will bring a passion for environmental issues and an appreciation for scientific research and mission-driven organizations.

THE WOODWELL CLIMATE RESEARCH CENTER

History

The Woodwell Climate Research Center, originally founded in 1985 as the Woods Hole Research Center by ecologist [Dr. George Woodwell](#), was established to address the emerging global concern of climate change. Located in Falmouth, Massachusetts, the center was one of the first organizations dedicated to translating climate science into actionable policy. Dr. Woodwell, a prominent figure in environmental science, testified before the U.S. Congress in 1986 about the dangers of global warming and sea level rise. The center played a foundational role in drafting the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in the late 1980s, positioning itself as a leader in climate policy and scientific influence.

Over the years, the center expanded its research globally, conducting global-scale analyses and fieldwork in regions such as the Arctic, the Amazon, the Congo Basin, and all across the continental U.S. It employs a multidisciplinary approach that integrates field and laboratory science, remote sensing, and computer modeling to understand the interactions between human activity and natural systems. The organization collaborates with governments, Indigenous communities, and international institutions to ensure its findings inform real-world decisions. [In 2020, the center was renamed the Woodwell Climate Research Center to](#) honor its founder and emphasize its mission-driven focus on climate change.

Today, Woodwell is home to more than 120 staff members and a research infrastructure that can be found working across some of the world's most climate-critical landscapes. Its scientists have contributed to every major National Climate Assessment and were part of the team awarded the Nobel Peace Prize alongside the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 2007 for their efforts to build up and disseminate greater knowledge about man-made climate change. The center continues to be a leading force in climate science, policy, and education, advocating for urgent action through partnerships, public engagement, and policy influence. Its work remains focused on turning rigorous scientific research into solutions that promote a sustainable and equitable future.

Research

Woodwell operates a robust research infrastructure from its energy-neutral [Gilman Ordway Campus](#) near Woods Hole, Massachusetts. The campus was designed with sustainability at its core, using renewable energy sources and environmentally conscious building practices. Center research focuses on curbing climate change and coping with climate change, all while prioritizing equity and climate justice. The

center's research conducts science for solutions at the nexus of climate, people, and nature, further advancing efforts to protect and restore Earth's climate-critical ecosystems, manage agriculture for climate-smart outcomes, and better safeguard people and places from climate risks.

Woodwell's initiatives are deeply rooted in translating science into action. Through its impact programming, the center collaborates with stakeholders in over 20 countries to inform policy, support climate adaptation, and empower communities. Locally, its [Massachusetts-based research](#) includes climate risk assessments for towns across the Commonwealth, river monitoring through the Cape Cod Rivers Observatory, and long-term coastal ecosystem studies. The center also engages in public education and advocacy, providing expert testimony, policy briefs, and visual storytelling to drive climate awareness and solutions. Its mission is to ensure that climate science leads to meaningful, equitable, and scalable change.

Areas of Impact

Woodwell has a profound global impact by turning climate science into real-world solutions that shape policy, guide risk management, educate communities, and foster strategic partnerships. Its interdisciplinary approach and commitment to equity ensure that climate data and insights are accessible and actionable for governments, businesses, and vulnerable populations. Through collaborations in over 20 countries, Woodwell empowers decision-makers with the tools and knowledge needed to address the climate crisis effectively and equitably.

- [Policy](#): Woodwell Climate influences policy at local, national, and international levels by providing expert testimony, policy briefs, and direct engagement with lawmakers. Its science-based insights help shape climate legislation and inform decisions that promote sustainability and resilience.
- [Risk Assessments](#): The center translates climate threats into socioeconomic terms through risk assessments, economic valuations, and cost-benefit analyses. These tools help governments, investors, and communities understand and prepare for climate-related hazards like flooding, drought, and extreme heat.
- [Partnerships](#): Woodwell collaborates with a number of organizations and institutions, from [education and training with the United Nations](#) to producing publicly accessible climate maps with [Probable Futures](#), a non-profit climate literacy initiative. Woodwell also partners with entities like [Wellington Management](#), amplifying the center's impact by embedding climate science into corporate strategy, investment practices, and global sustainability efforts.

Funding

In recent years, the Woodwell has secured several major funding awards to advance its climate science initiatives, most notably a [\\$41.2 million grant from The Audacious Project](#). This funding supports *Permafrost Pathways*, a six-year initiative aimed at monitoring and modeling carbon emissions from

thawing Arctic permafrost—an underrepresented but critical factor in global climate models. The project integrates scientific research with policy engagement and Indigenous collaboration to inform climate mitigation strategies and community adaptation efforts. In addition to the Audacious grant, Woodwell has raised [over \\$10 million to support its internal Fund for Climate Solutions \(FCS\)](#), which has funded 79 cross-disciplinary research projects since 2018. These include studies on Arctic carbon risk, Amazonian emissions, and drought prediction in the Congo. Woodwell has also received significant foundation support to back projects in tropical forest conservation and Arctic carbon monitoring.. In October 2025, Woodwell announced the receipt of a \$10 million unrestricted gift from renowned philanthropist MacKenzie Scott. Building upon previous support from Ms. Scott in funding Woodwell’s *Permafrost Pathways* initiative, this new gift makes it possible for the center to leverage critical funds throughout Woodwell’s work across the globe.

In early 2025, Woodwell launched a \$115 million campaign to fund scientific solutions in curbing climate change and to help people and communities cope with the impacts. The campaign is centered on three funding priorities: Climate Science for Solutions (\$75M) to support science and policy leaders, the Fund for Climate Solutions (\$25M) to quickly support urgent climate challenges, and Infrastructure & Technology (\$15M) to ensure new technologies and equipment allow for solutions to be brought to scale. This campaign seeks to raise new funding to catalyze strategic science progress, fuel innovation, and equip Woodwell’s teams with the tech and logistical resources vital to creating real impact.

In fiscal year 2025, Woodwell’s operating expenses were \$36.5 million, and corresponding revenue was \$34.7 million. During the fiscal year, Woodwell received \$5.5 million in federal grants, \$6.4 million in foundation grants, and \$3.8 million in contract revenue. Woodwell’s endowment is currently valued at \$14.4 million.

ROLE OF THE CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

The Chief Operating Officer (COO) is responsible for overseeing all internal operations and driving operational excellence across our rapidly growing organization. The COO will report to the [President & CEO](#), and will manage a team of Vice Presidents across the areas of Science, Finance, Marketing and Communications, Philanthropy, Policy and Government Relations, and People, Culture, and Operations, while also overseeing strategic partnerships and new business development initiatives.

This role is central to Woodwell’s **strategic plan**, translating the scientific vision into operational reality while ensuring sustainable growth, financial stewardship, and workplace excellence. The COO will serve as the primary internal-facing executive, allowing Woodwell’s CEO to focus on external engagement, fundraising, and mission advancement.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

To succeed in this role, the Chief Operating Officer will build upon the many strengths of Woodwell and better define the future. The COO will address several key opportunities and challenges, including but not limited to:

- **Implementing Woodwell’s Strategic Plan:** The COO will partner with the CEO, senior scientists, staff, and Board to execute Woodwell’s current strategic plan through 2027, translating broad goals into actionable operational objectives across departments. The next COO will lead future complex strategic planning processes while ensuring alignment and measurable progress toward Woodwell’s vision and ambitious growth targets, all while championing a culture of operational and workplace excellence.
- **Operational Oversight and Excellence:** The next COO will be managing multiple senior leaders and integrating scientific and administrative functions, designing scalable systems and processes that support continued growth without sacrificing internal cross-collaboration. Additionally, they will be overseeing hybrid work models that require balancing efficiency with flexibility to maintain seamless operations. The COO will implement and refine robust systems for tracking and reporting progress toward Woodwell’s strategic priorities and benchmarks, institute programs that reward excellence and motivate the team to advance their mission, and coach senior leaders while ensuring they have the resources to execute the strategic plan and serve Woodwell’s mission of operational excellence.
- **Financial Stewardship and Revenue Generation:** The COO will be responsible for overseeing a \$32.6M annual budget and \$66.4M in assets, demanding rigorous financial stewardship, including compliance with federal grants and nonprofit regulations. There is a new and significant opportunity to diversify revenue by developing strategic partnerships and commercializing Woodwell’s intellectual property, data, and research capabilities, which involves navigating new business development and negotiation complexities. The COO will work collaboratively with Woodwell’s CEO and senior management to evaluate and identify opportunities for business development and strategic investment.
- **Board Relations and Stakeholder Engagement:** The next COO will serve as the primary liaison to the Board for operations, financial reporting, and strategic planning. The COO will partner with the CEO to engage with external stakeholders and explore opportunities to strengthen governance, enhance fundraising efforts, and elevate Woodwell’s profile through effective communication and partnership-building.
- **Foster Organizational Culture and Empower Staff:** The next COO will foster a diverse, inclusive, and supportive work environment that is essential for staff retention and engagement, presenting ongoing solutions in maintaining work-life balance and equity initiatives. The COO will ensure that staff understand their roles and feel supported in their work, and will maintain an energizing, values-driven workplace.

- **Effectively Model and Promote Woodwell’s Mission:** Woodwell is widely respected for its leadership in climate science, policy engagement, and global partnerships. It is recognized not only for its cutting-edge research but also for its commitment to equity, education, and policy impact. The COO must set a standard by intellectually and emotionally engaging people at all levels in the mission and impact of the center— from internal staff to external constituents ranging from local community members to corporate funders – and doing so in a wide range of settings and through a variety of mediums.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

While few candidates will possess all the qualifications and characteristics the search committee is seeking, the ideal candidate for the Chief Operating Officer role will bring many of the following professional qualities and experiences:

Minimum Requirements

- Minimum 8 years of experience as Chief Operating Officer, Chief Administrative Officer, or Director of Operations at a nonprofit organization of comparable size and complexity
- Master of Business Administration (MBA) from an accredited institution
- Deep passion for environmental issues and/or scientific research with understanding of the climate crisis and scientific research processes
- Knowledge of research institutions, scientific organizations, or mission-driven nonprofits
- Commitment to working in Woods Hole, MA office minimum 4 days per week

Essential Experience & Leadership Skills

- Proven track record managing complex operations across multiple departments and geographic locations
- Demonstrated expertise in nonprofit financial management, including federal grant compliance, audit processes, and board financial reporting
- Experience with strategic planning, organizational change management, and scaling operations during periods of growth
- Outstanding leadership and communication skills with experience managing senior-level executives
- Proven ability to build and maintain effective relationships with diverse stakeholders, including board members, scientists, government officials, and community partners
- Strong project management skills and ability to execute complex initiatives across multiple departments

Technical & Professional Skills

- Understanding of nonprofit accounting principles (GAAP) and financial management systems

- Experience with federal grant management and compliance requirements
- Familiarity with information technology systems and infrastructure for distributed organizations
- Understanding of intellectual property, technology transfer, and product development processes (preferred)
- Experience with environmental, sustainability, or ESG initiatives (preferred)

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

The salary range for this position is \$300,000 - \$325,000, commensurate with experience and qualifications.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website for the search: <https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/woodwell-climate-research-center/chief-operating-officer>. Electronic submission of materials is strongly encouraged.

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