



Rainforest Foundation US

Senior Director of Strategic Philanthropy and External Affairs Rainforest Foundation US Remote

“From deforestation and environmental crime to shifting political landscapes and an increasingly warming climate, Indigenous peoples across the Amazon and beyond have continued to confront intensifying pressures. Yet, they’ve also continued to demonstrate what decades of scientific evidence has made clear: Indigenous peoples are the most effective stewards of the world’s tropical forests.”

- Suzanne Pelletier, Executive Director

THE SEARCH

Rainforest Foundation US (RFUS) seeks an entrepreneurial, strategic, and innovative development and communications leader to serve as its inaugural Senior Director of Strategic Philanthropy and External Affairs. Reporting to Executive Director Suzanne Pelletier and serving as a key member of the senior management team, this newly elevated and reconfigured role presents a unique opportunity to help shape the next chapter of growth for one of the leading organizations advancing Indigenous rights and tropical forest protection throughout Central and South America.

At a pivotal moment for the Amazon, Indigenous communities, and global climate efforts, RFUS has committed itself to an ambitious vision for the years ahead. Recognizing the urgency of the challenges facing tropical forests and the communities who steward them, the organization has adopted a bold strategy designed not simply to build incrementally upon past successes, but to significantly expand the scale and impact of its work. Achieving that vision will require corresponding growth in philanthropic investment, organizational visibility, and strategic external engagement.

Over the past decade, RFUS has developed a strong and growing philanthropic foundation, particularly among institutional funders. The organization has successfully cultivated a loyal base of foundation and philanthropic partners while also building a broad grassroots donor community. However, as RFUS looks toward its long-term revenue ambitions, leadership recognizes the need to expand beyond its traditional fundraising approaches and significantly strengthen engagement with high-net-worth individuals and family offices capable of making transformational investments in Indigenous-led conservation and forest protection.

To that end, the Senior Director of Strategic Philanthropy and External Affairs (Senior Director) will play a central role in that effort. This leader will develop and execute strategies to identify, cultivate, solicit, and steward major philanthropic investments while helping position RFUS more prominently within the influential climate and environmental networks. Working in close partnership with the Executive Director, Board of Directors, and senior management team, the Senior Director will serve as both strategist and frontline fundraiser, building relationships with donors capable of supporting RFUS at the highest levels and helping establish the organization as a leading philanthropic partner within the climate, conservation, and Indigenous rights sectors. With oversight for a team of ten development and communications professionals, four of whom are direct reports, the Senior Director will lead the continued evolution of both functions, building the capacity, culture, and operational discipline needed to support transformational growth.

As RFUS has grown in complexity and ambition, the organization recognizes the need for a senior leader who can provide dedicated vision, expertise, and management across philanthropy and external affairs. The successful candidate will have the opportunity to shape the future of these functions, elevating the integration of communications and fundraising strategies and building systems and approaches capable of supporting substantial long-term growth. The ideal candidate will bring a demonstrated record of securing and stewarding significant philanthropic investments, including major and principal gifts from high-net-worth individuals, family foundations, and other mission-aligned donors. Equally important, they will possess the creativity, confidence, and entrepreneurial mindset necessary to open doors to philanthropic circles where RFUS has historically had limited visibility. The organization seeks a leader who is energized by building, willing to challenge conventional approaches, and comfortable serving as both strategist and practitioner in a dynamic and evolving environment.

Beyond fundraising expertise, the Senior Director will possess the credibility and communication skills to serve as a compelling ambassador for RFUS's mission and impact. This individual will become a trusted partner to the Executive Director, capable of representing the organization with donors, philanthropic intermediaries, sector leaders, and other external audiences. They will be an effective collaborator who can build strong relationships across teams, support and mentor staff, and help align communications and fundraising efforts around a shared vision for organizational growth and impact. The successful candidate will join a highly collaborative and mission-driven leadership team characterized by mutual trust, collegiality, and a shared commitment to strategic thinking. As this moment requires bold ideas and deliberate action, the Senior Director will have an extraordinary opportunity to help shape the future of RFUS while mobilizing critical resources to support Indigenous communities whose leadership is essential to protecting the world's tropical forests.

Rainforest Foundation US has retained Rachel Ellenport and Nicole Poe of the national executive search firm Isaacson, Miller to conduct this important recruitment. Confidential inquiries, nominations, and applications may be directed to the search firm as indicated at the end of this posting.

ABOUT RAINFOREST FOUNDATION US

For nearly 40 years, [Rainforest Foundation US](#) has worked to address climate change and safeguard biodiversity by promoting the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities and supporting their efforts to protect and defend their rainforests. Science shows that forests managed by Indigenous peoples are healthier, suffer less deforestation, capture more carbon, and contain more biodiversity than forests managed by private or public entities – including nationally protected areas. Furthermore, scientists assert that protecting forests is as important as reducing greenhouse emissions if we hope to stem the tide of ecological collapse.

RFUS works in partnership with Indigenous and local communities and their representative organizations to protect tropical rainforests by supporting their efforts to secure rights to their lands, strengthen monitoring and land security, influence laws and policies that protect their resources, and build strong and sustainable community leadership. By investing directly in Indigenous and local communities, RFUS connects the people rooted in the lands with the tools, training, and resources to be effective advocates and protectors of the forests they call home. RFUS currently operates four country programs in Brazil, Guyana, Panama, and Peru, and hosts a number of regional and global partnerships in Central America, the Amazon Basin, and across the tropical belt.

Protecting Rainforests, Protecting Our Future: 2025-2030 Strategic Plan

The next five years will undoubtedly decide the future of the world's tropical rainforests and the stability of our global climate. As RFUS envisions a world where the rights of Indigenous peoples are respected and rainforests flourish, the [2025-2030 Strategic Plan](#) is a blueprint for achieving that vision, scaling Indigenous-led forest protection across Central and South America so that people, forests, and the climate can thrive together, now and for generations to come. Strategic objectives include:

- Advance and defend Indigenous peoples' land rights across nearly 14 million acres.
- Support community-led monitoring over 91 million acres and effective management of 43 million acres.
- Strengthen 67 Indigenous and local community organizations to scale impact and access long-term funding.

Critical to RFUS's success are its longstanding partnerships with Indigenous organizations, relationships built on trust, respect, and shared purpose. This partner-driven model ensures that resources reach those best equipped to protect rainforests.

Leadership and Governance

RFUS is governed by a dedicated [Board of Directors](#), comprised of nine leaders with expertise spanning Indigenous and community land rights, community-led climate action, finance and investments, and philanthropy. The Board is led by **Jenny Springer**, Director of Equator Group, an independent advisory service.

Suzanne Pelletier has served as the Executive Director of RFUS since 2009. Formerly, Pelletier was the Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations at the National Audubon Society. She holds a master's in business administration from Columbia Business School and a master's of environmental studies from the Yale School of Forestry.

Fundraising and Financial Overview

In Fiscal Year 2025, RFUS secured approximately \$9.2 million in revenue and support. Of this figure, 65 percent came from foundations, 25 percent from individual contributions, nine percent from government grants, and one percent from other sources. While the organization has built a strong and diversified fundraising foundation, a central strategic priority in the years ahead is to significantly expand individual philanthropy, particularly through deeper engagement with high-net-worth individuals, family offices, and other donors capable of making significant investments in Indigenous-led conservation and forest protection. Please visit the [2025 Annual Report](#) for additional details.

ROLE OF THE SENIOR DIRECTOR

The Senior Director of Strategic Philanthropy and External Affairs is a senior leadership position responsible for leading and integrating the organization's fundraising, communications, and strategic partnerships. This newly created role provides the strategic vision and operational oversight needed to enable RFUS to reach its ambitious 2030 goals. Reporting to the Executive Director, the Senior Director will develop and execute comprehensive strategies to increase philanthropic revenue, strengthen organizational visibility, deepen constituent engagement, and advance the organization's purpose and impact. They will collaborate with the Program Director and other senior management colleagues to ensure that RFUS's revenue is sufficient to fuel the organization's long-term programmatic goals.

The Senior Director will also serve as a strategic thought partner to the Executive Director and the Board of Directors, overseeing the fundraising and communications teams while ensuring alignment among revenue generation, organizational messaging, and audience engagement. The ideal candidate is a collaborative, results-oriented leader with demonstrated success in nonprofit fundraising, donor stewardship, strategic communications, brand management, and team leadership.

Strategic and Executive Leadership

- Serve as a key member of the senior management team, contributing to organizational strategy and planning, resource allocation, and decision-making in support of RFUS's long-term growth and impact.
- Partner closely with the Executive Director and Board of Directors to advance organizational priorities, strengthen philanthropic engagement, and align external affairs strategies with the organization's strategic vision and 2030 goals.
- Develop and lead an integrated external affairs strategy that advances fundraising, communications, organizational visibility, and constituent engagement in service of RFUS's mission.
- Establish clear strategic objectives, performance metrics, and accountability frameworks across philanthropy, communications, and external engagement functions.
- Identify emerging opportunities, trends, and partnerships within the philanthropic, climate, conservation, and Indigenous rights sectors that can accelerate organizational growth and influence.

Strategic Philanthropy and Revenue Growth

- Design and execute a comprehensive philanthropic strategy focused on significantly expanding philanthropic revenue, with particular emphasis on securing major and principal gifts from ultra-high-net-worth individuals, family offices, and institutional partners.
- Build and personally manage a portfolio of high-capacity prospects and donors, cultivating relationships that lead to transformational philanthropic investments and sustained engagement.
- Partner with the Executive Director to develop and implement sophisticated cultivation, solicitation, stewardship, and donor engagement strategies for the organization's most significant funding opportunities.
- Expand RFUS's visibility and credibility within key philanthropic networks, serving as a senior ambassador to donors, philanthropic intermediaries, wealth advisors, and mission-aligned influencers.
- Drive a culture of strategic relationship management and fundraising excellence by overseeing prospect identification, pipeline development, donor segmentation, and moves management strategies.

- Provide leadership and strategic direction to individual and institutional giving programs, ensuring alignment of fundraising activities with organizational priorities and long-term revenue objectives.

Communications, Brand, and Organizational Positioning

- Provide strategic leadership for communications and external affairs, ensuring RFUS's voice, visibility, and reputation reflect its leadership in Indigenous rights, climate action, and tropical forest protection.
- Oversee the development and execution of integrated communications strategies that strengthen donor engagement, elevate organizational profile, clarify brand awareness, and advance strategic objectives.
- Shape organizational messaging, thought leadership, and narrative development to effectively communicate RFUS's impact, distinct value proposition, and vision for change to current and prospective donor audiences.
- Ensure consistency, quality, and effectiveness across all communications channels, platforms, storytelling efforts, and brand assets.
- Guide the development of compelling content and engagement strategies that translate programmatic impact into meaningful philanthropic and public support.
- Partner with programmatic and leadership teams to identify opportunities to elevate RFUS's expertise and influence across key external audiences.

Team Leadership and Management

- Lead, mentor, and inspire a high-performing team of ten (four direct reports) across development and communications while fostering a culture of collaboration, accountability, innovation, and continuous improvement.
- Build organizational capacity by establishing clear priorities, performance expectations, and professional development pathways for team members.
- Promote strong cross-functional collaboration between development, communications, programs, finance, and operations to ensure coordinated execution of organizational priorities.
- Champion an inclusive and mission-driven team culture that reflects RFUS's values and commitment to partnership, respect, and shared success.
- Lead organizational growth within the department through strategic talent recruitment, onboarding, retention, and staff development.

Budgetary Oversight and Operations

- Oversee the development and management of annual departmental budgets, revenue forecasts, and strategic workplans across fundraising and communications functions.
- Ensure the organization has the systems, infrastructure, and operational discipline necessary to support ambitious philanthropic growth and enhanced constituent engagement.
- Partner with Development Operations leadership to strengthen fundraising systems, data integrity, prospect management, reporting, and performance analytics.
- Monitor fundraising performance and revenue forecasts, using data and analysis to inform strategic decision-making and resource allocation.
- Develop and implement policies, processes, and operational best practices that support scalability, efficiency, and long-term sustainability.
- Establish and evaluate key performance indicators to measure progress toward fundraising, communications, engagement, and organizational growth objectives.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The successful candidate will possess many of the following qualifications, skills, and characteristics:

- At least a decade of progressive development and communications experience, with at least three years in a senior leadership role.
- Strong experience in philanthropy, external affairs, strategic partnerships, or related fields.
- Demonstrated management experience leading high-performing teams.
- Proven success securing and stewarding six- and seven-figure gifts from individual and institutional funders.
- Experience working with ultra-high-net-worth individuals, family offices, and institutional funders.
- A track record of developing and executing comprehensive fundraising strategies.
- Strong background in nonprofit communications, marketing, branding, and storytelling is preferred.
- Experience managing donor and constituent relationships at senior levels.

- The ability to seamlessly navigate relationships across diverse audiences, executive boards, and community constituents.
- Outstanding written and verbal storytelling, presentation, and public speaking skills, with the ability to summarize complex issues into urgent, clear pitches for support.
- Strong financial management, budgeting, and forecasting skills.
- The ability to prioritize strategically, handle conflicting deadlines, and manage cross-departmental workflows simultaneously.
- Experience working in environmental conservation, climate, human rights, Indigenous rights, international development, or social justice organizations.
- Experience working with nonprofit boards and senior leadership teams.
- Basic Spanish communication skills to engage with staff, partners, and allies are preferred. Portuguese is an added plus.
- Experience managing media relations and public-facing communications and campaigns.
- Deep knowledge of donor databases/CRM systems, digital fundraising platforms, and digital media tools.
- Academic degree or equivalent professional experience in fundraising, communications, marketing, public relations, nonprofit management, or similar.

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

The salary range for this position is \$150,000 to \$175,000. The position is remotely based, ideally near a major airport to accommodate donor visits and other travel needs on behalf of the organization. In addition to compensation and the flexibility of remote work, RFUS offers a comprehensive benefits package, including:

- Medical, dental, and vision insurance
- 401k retirement plan access
- Generous time off through vacation, sick, and personal leave, as well as holidays, summer Fridays, and an extended winter break office closure
- Life insurance, flexible, spending accounts, and an Employee Assistance Program

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:

[Senior Director of Strategic Philanthropy and External Affairs](#)

Rachel Ellenport, Partner
Nicole Poe, Managing Associate
Noa Boonin, Senior Associate
Rebecca Lyons, Senior Search Coordinator
Isaacson, Miller

Rainforest Foundation US is an equal opportunity employer, and employment is based upon qualifications and competency. RFUS does not and shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion (creed), age, national origin (ancestry), disability, marital status, sex, military status, or any other protected status under federal, state, or local laws, in any of its activities or operations.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by Rainforest Foundation US. The material presented in this leadership profile should be relied on for informational purposes only. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information, the original source documents and information provided by RFUS would supersede any conflicting information in this document.