



SEARCH FOR THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

AMERICAN ALPINE CLUB
Golden, CO

THE SEARCH

The American Alpine Club (AAC), America's premiere climbing organization, is seeking an experienced, mission-driven leader to be their next Executive Director. Reporting to, and working closely with, the Board and senior leadership team, the new ED will join this historic and community-driven organization as it embarks on an ambitious effort to meet the needs of today's growing and diverse climbing community as it faces a shifting landscape of environmental, societal and political factors impacting access and engagement.

Founded in 1902 by the nation's leading climbers and conservationists to promote and preserve the climbing way of life, AAC's mission is to "share and support our passion for climbing and respect for the places we climb".

The world of climbing has expanded well beyond alpine climbing to include rock climbing, gym climbing, bouldering, ice climbing, competitive climbing, mountaineering, backcountry skiing, and other activities. AAC has made it a priority to embrace and support the evolution of climbing and, as climate change threatens the wilderness in new ways, to more clearly align its efforts to support the preservation of the climbing environment and the outdoors in general and ensure future generations can continue to experience the wonder of the outdoors.

The AAC stands at an exciting inflection point. The organization's membership has grown steadily, and its mission of supporting climbers and protecting the wilderness – both front country and backcountry – has never been more relevant. The organization is poised to welcome a leader who will build on the Club's achievements and commitment to serving an ever-expanding audience of climbers and outdoor enthusiasts. The incoming ED will lead the effort to define the next phase of AAC's vision, ethos, and culture, while also refining its value proposition and role within the greater climbing community.

The successful candidate must have a passion and a deep appreciation for the AAC's history and mission to inspire members, volunteers, donors, elected officials, partner organizations, and sponsors to continue to support the climbing community writ large. The successful candidate will be a collaborative, strategic

leader who understands how to execute a vision to drive the strategic planning process to ensure the Club fulfills its ambitious mission to serve the changing needs of the climbing community and create programs to meet those needs. As the leader of the AAC's operations, the ED will be an accessible and supportive manager, modeling a culture of creativity, flexibility, shared accountability, and motivating staff to provide a high level of service across the organization. The American Alpine Club has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in conducting this important search. All inquiries, applications, and nominations for this opportunity should be directed to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

THE AAC TODAY

Beginning as a social club for elite adventurers located on the East Coast the AAC has grown into an organization that actively participates in international dialogue about environmental policy, high altitude safety and medicine, innovation in alpine tools, clothing, and survival technologies, sponsors expeditions, and investigates controversies in the world of exploration. Today, it has more than 24,000 members and is united by its vision to create "a united community of competent climbers and healthy climbing landscapes." Based in Golden, Colorado, AAC has 75-chapter organizations that connects climbers in their communities by organizing social functions, planning climbing outings, and local educational events, funding grants, and gathering for service projects in their communities.

Since its founding in 1902, the AAC has been committed to supporting the environment and is associated with a broad range of American and international environmental organizations, including the Appalachian Mountain Club, Sierra Club, Explorer's Club, Canadian Alpine Club, and Alpine Club of Britain.

Currently, the AAC is committed to serving its members through a variety of activities, including:

Education

The AAC is known and respected for its publications which provide authoritative climbing information for current and future climbers and for its community outreach which provides a wide range of opportunities for climbers of all ages and abilities to connect with and learn from one another. It has two flagship publications that appear annually: *Accidents in North American Climbing* (published since 1948) which focuses on governing principles and safety standards associated with climbing; and the *American Alpine Journal* (published since 1929) which includes first-person reports about new climbing routes, and significant mountain exploration worldwide. The AAC publishes year-round a variety of additional articles and special reports. It also produces two monthly podcasts: *The Sharp End* and *The Cutting Edge*. In addition, AAC's publications archives, which contains more than 25,000 articles and photos, topos, maps, and other resources that have never appeared in print, can be searched online. AAC also offers volunteer resources in training and instructor certification and maintains the world's leading climbing library, and the country's leading mountaineering museum and the organization routinely holds annual events nationwide.

Policy and Advocacy

Since its founding, the AAC has been a force in helping safeguard our country's wild landscapes and natural treasures. Working alongside members and partners, the AAC focuses on critical issues facing climbers and outdoor recreation nationally, such as keeping public lands pristine, wild, and open to human-powered recreation to ensure the outdoor community is sustained by healthy mountains and climbing landscapes for generations to come.

High on the list of concerns is climate change. Data collected from over 5,000 climbers in the AAC's Annual Climbers' survey found that 94 percent of climbers believe climate change poses a serious risk to climbing and outdoor recreation venues. In partnership with the Access Fund, the AAC coordinates an annual "Climb the Hill" lobbying event in Washington, DC; organizes "Hill to Crag" events that get elected policymakers out to climb in threatened areas; and leads coalitions, including the Alpine 5 and the Climbing Alliance. The AAC also publishes policy briefs annually.

As part of its advocacy programming, the AAC has spearheaded the Climbers' Advocacy Network (CAN) to better resource the grassroots advocacy initiatives cropping up within AAC chapters across the country and is currently supporting advocacy campaigns in California, Colorado, D.C., Georgia, New England, Utah, and Washington.

Climb United

As one of AAC's community-building initiatives, Climb United aims to elevate traditionally marginalized voices in the climbing community. Among Climb United's many activities, the Affiliate Support Network serves as a resource to provide fiscal sponsorship for newly established and emerging affinity groups. AAC also hosts a database of climbing photographers and guides who identify as members of under-represented communities.

Events

The AAC has created several events to bring climbers together both nationally and in local communities, including:

Craggin Classics brings climbers to world-class climbing destinations, to celebrate, learn and develop new skills, and to give back to the crag. Through films, parties, presentations, vendor villages, local food, and craft beer, the event brings both seasoned and new, local, and visiting climbers to strengthen and celebrate the bonds within the community. Clinics, led by professional athletes and local guides, help attendees build the skills necessary to improve their climbing skills.

Annual Benefit Gala is a weekend-long event that brings climbers together to celebrate the climbing community. Activities include climbing, discussion, celebration, and festivity to raise funds vital to the Club's work. At the Gala, the AAC recognizes outstanding achievements in conservation, climbing, and service to the climbing community.

Section and chapter events leverage AAC as a co-sponsor, partner, and leader for a variety of localized community and education opportunities such as climbing education clinics, mentorship, film screenings, stewardship events, and climber meet-ups.

Lodging Facilities

In 1970, the AAC developed its first lodging facility. Today, the AAC network includes six lodging venues across the country, in addition to the AAC's headquarters in Golden. Annually, over 10,000 individuals make use of these facilities. In addition, members enjoy access to a worldwide network of lodging options and receive discounts at partner facilities, including hut systems operated by the Alpine Club of Canada.

Grants

Today, with more than \$150,000 in annual grant awards, the organization continues to support these endeavors and is proud to stand behind the individuals and their projects which seek the betterment of the climbing community and climbing landscapes.

To learn more about the AAC, please visit their website at www.americanalpineclub.org

THE ROLE

The AAC is seeking an experienced leader with a passion for our community and the places we climb to be their next ED. Reporting to, and working closely with, the Board of Directors, the ED will be part of the AAC's senior leadership team and oversee four direct reports: the Programs Officer, the Chief Advancement Officer, the Chief Operations & Finance Officer, and the Chief Marketing Officer and a total staff of approximately 45. The ED will oversee an annual operating budget of approximately \$4.5 million. As the AAC's primary spokesperson, the ED must be a skilled communicator, climbing cultural ambassador, and relationship builder who is genuinely invested in building a strong rapport with staff, donors, volunteers, partner organizations, policymakers, and all members of the climbing community.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The AAC community has enormous respect for all that has been accomplished over its 120-year history. Simultaneously, it recognizes that AAC must continue to evolve to meet the changing demands of the climbing world today and will welcome a new leader's perspectives to guide the AAC's exciting next chapters. The ED will succeed by creating a compelling narrative that tells the story of AAC's distinguished history, its current multifaceted identity, and explains why AAC must nimbly adapt to overcome future challenges. While the next leader is expected to embrace the core values and rich history of AAC, they are also expected to bring fresh perspectives to the organization as it expands its reach and impact. Specific opportunities and challenges include:

Enhance reach, visibility, and impact

The AAC is respected and cherished by those who know it. However, many people involved in newer forms of climbing are not involved in the organization. In the years ahead, articulating AAC's relevance and value, writ large to new audiences, will be critical for expanding its mission and its financial performance. The ED will lead the effort to foster more connections across the AAC's programmatic pillars and leverage its strengths and assets to identify new ways to actively engage all stakeholders. They will be the catalyst to

help AAC to create new, innovative programs and increase the organization's visibility and expand its impact.

Create a more inclusive, responsive, and diverse organization

The AAC is committed to extending the reach of its mission to a broader audience, providing those interested in all forms of climbing, hiking, skiing, and other outdoor activities with the best support possible. Achieving this goal demands that the organization make diversity and inclusion part of the fabric of its culture. To date, much work has been done to advance equity and inclusion, but there must be a deeper conversation, to ensure both that the climbing experience is made accessible more broadly and that our community exists for all "climbers". The ED will be expected to lead an ongoing, institution-wide strategic and tactical commitment to promoting the value of diversity within the AAC. Specific aspects of this work will be particularly important to those with historically limited access to the distinctive transformative experience of being in an outdoor climbing environment or adapting to the indoor climbing environs as more and more facilities become part of everyday life for climbers and boulderers. It is also critical that members and staff encounter a culture of inclusivity, respect, and belonging in the organization. Continuing to recruit staff and board members who bring diverse perspectives and experiences will enrich the organization and advance these conversations.

Lead strategic planning

The AAC has undergone significant growth and transformation in its short existence and the next ED will enter another key moment in its trajectory. The next ED will lead an organization that is larger, more diverse in its programs, and more complex operationally. The AAC also faces an external environment that is changing dramatically. As the organization looks ahead, the ED will work with the Board to develop a strategic plan that is responsive to the changing world of climbing and the need to protect the climbing environment at its core while respecting the AAC's distinguished past and honoring the deep commitments and relationships of various constituents. Tapping into the creativity and expertise of the community and inspiring AAC to achieve greater impact will be important priorities. The ED will serve as a compelling and unifying voice, bringing people across the community together around shared goals and the adoption of this plan.

Improve operations and infrastructure

As the AAC moves into its next era, it will be critical that the organization is forward-looking, flexible, nimble, and efficient. With a wide range of programming, the ED will need to develop operational solutions that will further unify the organization, increase effectiveness, and support staff. This will include setting financial and programmatic goals and analyzing facility, technology, and workplace design to ensure the staff has the tools they need to be efficient and productive.

Ensure financial stability

The ED will work closely with the CFO to ensure that the AAC continues to have a robust, sustainable business model that relies on multiple forms of revenue and ensures the organization's long-term financial health and vibrancy. Membership has been the key driver in the AAC's financial model. The next ED must be keenly aware of membership trends and projections and ensure effective management resources. As the Club's external spokesperson and chief fundraiser, the ED will work with the Club's development team

to broaden AAC's philanthropic base by growing revenues from new sources, including individual donors, organizational funders, and corporate partners.

Lead and mentor staff

The ED will be a natural leader who has the capacity to foster a culture of transparency and accountability. They will be committed to developing all levels of staff by ensuring there are structures in place for growth and learning and will be purposeful about creating a culture centered around the values of equity, inclusion, and diversity. A creative problem solver, the ED will work collaboratively with the team and be able to listen and evaluate to make and build support for decisions.

THE SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE

For this important role, AAC seeks an exceptional leader who is passionate about the AAC's mission, committed to its longstanding values and standards of excellence, supportive of its culture, and visionary about its future potential. While no single candidate will have all the ideal qualifications, the successful candidate should possess many of the following qualifications and characteristics:

- A track record of outstanding organizational and operational management.
- An ability to inspire and lead and mentor a diverse staff and volunteers.
- An ability to develop a strategic vision based on an understanding of what makes AAC distinctive; the management savvy to execute that vision in a practical and inspiring way.
- The ability to anticipate changing needs and develop programs and services to meet those changing needs.
- A gifted and effective communicator in diverse settings, ranging from large groups to one-on-one conversations; a capacity to connect with and relate to AAC members and members of the broader climbing community on a personal level.
- A deep understanding of, and commitment to, the climbing community and the spaces they recreate in.
- A commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, demonstrated by real experience and engagement in one's own life and work.
- Demonstrated experience meeting ambitious growth goals, specifically overseeing capital campaigns and securing large gifts from a range of sources.
- Self-awareness and the tendency to respond to dissonance with curiosity and inquiry.
- An excellent listener who can build strong relationships and maintain open, accessible lines of communication with AAC's diverse stakeholders.

- A record of building and maintaining external relations and advancing an organization's profile and reputation regionally, nationally, and internationally.
- An appreciation of the utility of new technologies.
- Proven skill in working with a nonprofit governing board and external advisory board; experience in building and maintaining an engaged and supportive board.

TO APPLY

Confidential inquiries, nominations/referrals, and applications (including resumes and 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.

Dan Rodas, Partner
Gail Gregory Managing Associate
Isaacson, Miller

<http://www.imsearch.com/8731>