

Executive Director Champlain Area Trails Westport, NY



Opportunity to lead a growing organization making trails and protecting land in the beautiful Lake Champlain Region of New York's Adirondack Park

Champlain Area Trails (CATS) seeks an experienced Executive Director to champion its mission to make trails and save land in New York's Champlain Valley. This is a rare opportunity to lead an organization that is, on the one hand, young and nimble and, at the same time, has a solid support base of trail makers, land conservationists, nature lovers, and outdoor enthusiasts. CATS is highly regarded locally and nationally for its commitment to providing meaningful connections with nature for residents and visitors of the Lake Champlain region. As the founder transitions to retirement, the new Executive Director will write the next chapter for CATS in concert with the staff, board, and supporters.

CATS seeks an innovator, entrepreneur, and community networker to lead the only environmental organization dedicated to trails and land conservation in New York's Champlain Valley and the six-million-acre Adirondack Park. The Board of Directors seeks a leader to work with a talented and dedicated staff to continue its exceptional work engaging outdoor enthusiasts in experiences of our natural world. CATS brings to life a sense of place, time, and purpose to ignite interest in nature and inspire its diverse audiences to learn about and care for our world. CATS' programs and initiatives are recognized broadly for their environmental vision and access to outdoor enthusiasts of all abilities. With the upcoming retirement of founding Executive Director Chris Maron, CATS will turn its sights on the next phase of its growth, strategic initiatives, and regional community impact.

About Champlain Area Trails: Champlain Area Trails (CATS), a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation, began in 2009 when its founders acted on a long-held dream of establishing a network of trails in the Champlain Valley with the mission of making trails, saving land, connecting people with nature, and promoting economic vitality. Since its founding, CATS has developed 98 miles of trails and, through its many partnerships, promotes 88 additional hiking trails in this Lake Champlain Region of the Adirondack Park. CATS has protected 992 acres for natural habitat, wildlife migration, and sustainable farming. Every year, area residents and regional, national, and international visitors enjoy enriching experiences in this outdoor wonderland. CATS is a fully accredited land trust that follows best practices for stewardship, has sound finances, practices ethical conduct and responsible governance, and is dedicated to ensuring lasting connections with nature.

CATS has an annual operating budget of approximately \$630,000 and 5 full-time staff plus seasonal staff and volunteers. The Board comprises 15 directors. In addition to annual support for operations, CATS raises money to acquire land and conservation easements, trail easements, land and trail management, an endowment, and other initiatives. Over the past five years, more than 1,000 donors have supported CATS financially. Several grantors, including the State of New York, consistently approve our funding proposals. The vast majority of CATS' funds are from individual contributions. CATS hosts many public events and education programs to achieve its mission and build on a growing support base. To learn more: [Visit Champlain Area Trails Website.](#)



Summary of Responsibilities

Working with the Board of Directors and staff, the Executive Director advances the strategic goals and objectives of Champlain Area Trails' mission and vision. The Executive Director is responsible for the management and sustainability of the organization as it seeks to broaden impact, strengthen town-to-town connectivity through trails, and conserve the lands of the Lake Champlain region to protect its biodiversity and habitat connections with the Adirondack Mountains. The Executive Director will be an outward-facing community connector and natural relationship builder. Fundraising is an essential responsibility grounded in best practices of cultivation first, which leads to financial support. While experience in the environmental sector and land trusts is important, an experienced leader in other relevant non-profit sectors or with relevant management and program development experience will be considered. More than any other trait, the Executive Director must be relationship-centered, dedicated to the mission, and tireless in efforts to achieve its goals by connecting to people and connecting people to nature.

Primary Responsibilities

Planning

Preparing for the future is essential. Working with the staff, board and community, the Executive Director will develop strategies for CATS' future and build an understanding of the vision, mission, goals and their impact.

- Develop and facilitate a collaborative and active strategic and annual planning process with the Board, staff, and other stakeholders.
- Set and manage organizational goals and ensure outcomes consistent with the mission and

vision.

- Oversee the development of programs and initiatives.
- Embrace the leadership role and be knowledgeable about trends in the conservation and trails industry. Network and collaborate nationally to remain current in standards and best practices.



Administration

The Executive Director is responsible for the organization's day-to-day operations and works with staff to develop, maintain, and use systems and resources that facilitate its effective operation.

- Develop, review, and administer operational policies and procedures
- Oversee all programs and activities to ensure objectives are met
- Manage the staff responsible for the components of the organization and oversee proper hiring and evaluation procedures.
- Lead with a guiding-hand philosophy, clear expectations, and personal and professional growth opportunities.
- Provide adequate supervision and evaluation of staff and volunteers.

Financial Management

The Executive Director's role is to see that the organization's strategic plan and goals serve as the basis for fiscal planning, resulting in sound financial management. Accordingly, the new executive director is expected to ensure that solid budgeting and accounting systems are in place, appropriate financial controls and risk-management strategies protect the organization's assets, and that resources are used wisely.

- Oversee contributed and earned revenue development to enhance the financial picture.
- Develop, recommend, and monitor annual and special project budgets
- Approve expenditures and manage resources to balance budgets and strengthen reserves
- Provide accurate and transparent fiscal record-keeping and reporting to the board for evaluation of fiscal health, activities, and impact
- Oversee and review all contracts, office lease agreements, annual insurance, and other contractual obligations
- Serve as an exemplary steward of the organization's fiscal and human resources

Fundraising

The Executive Director collaborates with the Director of Development and Communications, staff, and Board to create and implement fundraising plans and initiatives. This collaboration is essential to devising strategies and processes that ensure the organization meets its financial goals and carries out its programs and operations. Relationship building, networking, and regular presence in the community are critical components of the job.

- With the Director of Development and Communications, lead the fundraising effort as the chief relationship cultivator and networker of CATS.
- Work with the Development and Communications Director and Board to develop the annual fundraising plan, which should include aggressive but realistic goals and tactics for achieving those goals.
- Collaborate with staff, board, and others to cultivate relationships and raise funds in the community and beyond
- Expand current grant and funding opportunities
- Oversee and submit grant applications and funding proposals as appropriate
- Spearhead a planned giving program to grow the endowment supporting operational sustainability, trail, and conservation efforts
- Network with state, regional, and local civic leaders to develop support for CATS, its mission, and its impact.

Conservation and Trails

The Executive Director will coordinate projects to conserve land and develop trail agreements, which includes developing conservation and trail plan priorities, landowner outreach, negotiations, and working through the process to complete and record legal agreements (please note that the next staff person we plan to add is a conservation director who will take on many of these responsibilities).

- Develop, update, and refine conservation and trail plans.
- Build and maintain relationships with landowners to implement conservation and trail goals and respond to inquiries about conservation and trail projects.
- Ensure best practices as an accredited land trust to legally protect land and establish trails.

Board Relations

The Executive Director and Board of Directors form the organization's leadership team, drawing upon each other's strengths and abilities. They have joint responsibility for developing and maintaining a strong working relationship and a system for sharing information that enables the board to carry out its governance role effectively.

- Take a leadership role in working with the board on the strategic direction of CATS.
- Develop and maintain consistent and transparent communication with the board chair, executive committee, and board of directors.
- Assist the board chair in planning the agenda and materials for board meetings.
- Identify and assist in developing policy recommendations
- Identify and assist in setting priorities for the organization
- Facilitate the orientation and development of new Board Members
- Participate in and support board committees

Communications & Public Relations

The Executive Director serves as the organization's primary spokesperson. This role has three major

components: effectively promoting the organization, advocating for its mission and work, and building relationships with constituent and stakeholder groups critical to its success and support.

- As the face of the organization in the community, engage, interact, and coordinate representing CATS to audiences and stakeholder groups, legislative bodies (cities, counties, states, federal government), and other stakeholder groups and influencers
- Maintain and enhance ongoing relations with other non-profits, business and education groups, and community leaders.
- Ensure appropriate representation of CATS by all employees and board members as ambassadors to the community.

Desired Education and Experience

The board realizes that qualifications vary individually and are met through combinations of formal training, on-the-job responsibilities, and real-life experiences. Experiences other than in the environmental sector or nonprofits may be relevant to this position. In general, these are the desired qualifications and experience.

- Master's degree in an appropriate field relevant to the requirements and responsibilities or equivalent combination of education and experience
- At a minimum, Five years' experience in a senior leadership role with similar staff management, budget, and fundraising responsibilities
- Direct accountability for P&L with budget creation and oversight experience
- Financial acumen and ability to make sound budget decisions
- Experience with land trusts, land conservation, and the legal processes associated with land transactions is a plus.
- Strong organizational and leadership abilities and the ability to write, speak, and listen effectively
- Entrepreneurial, creative, realistic, and persuasive
- Demonstrated successful fundraising experience, including working with donors, sponsors, foundations, etc.
- Demonstrated effective public speaking and presentation skills
- Community relations and community involvement, collaborations, partnerships, and networking
- Non-profit leadership experience or service on non-profit boards
- Experience working for a land trust, outdoor education facility, or similar nature-based organization is a plus
- Ability to work independently and collaboratively in a mutually supportive environment
- Exceptional relationship building and interpersonal skills, clear communicator, empathetic but strong leader
- Outstanding time management and organizational skills with attention to detail
- Passion for the mission, a champion of the organization, and desire to propel Champlain Area Trails to the next level

Compensation

The anticipated salary is \$85,000 annually, commensurate with experience, plus a benefits package including 100% paid medical insurance for employees with opt-in dental and vision plans, paid time off, including sick and vacation, employer-sponsored and matched retirement plans, and relocation expenses. Applicants must be able to relocate to New York's central Champlain Valley (towns include Westport, Essex, Willsboro, Elizabethtown/Lewis, Port Henry, and others), be eligible to work in the United States, and successfully pass background checks. CATS fosters a flexible work environment. The organization also takes an all-hands-on-deck approach to projects to build a strong team culture.

For More Information/How to Apply

To apply, submit a cover letter, résumé/CV by August 12, 2024, to Dan Keegan, Chair of the Search Committee, dankeegan2249@gmail.com.

Diversity and Inclusion

Champlain Area Trails values inclusion and equity in all forms and actively encourages candidates with diverse backgrounds to apply.

About Westport, NY and the Champlain Valley

The Town of Westport, where the CATS office is located, is one of many scenic and historic lake communities in New York's Champlain Valley. The region is situated where the Adirondack Mountains meet Lake Champlain, offers a calm, laid-back, and fun-filled quality of life for residents and tourists, and is only a few hour's driving distance from major metropolitan areas. It is located on the eastern edge of the Adirondack Park, a unique 6-million-acre mix of public and private lands protected by state law that promotes a "forever-wild" natural environment. Along with nearby Lake Placid and the Adirondacks' High Peaks region, the Champlain Valley offers year-round outdoor recreation enjoyment. Vermont is across Lake Champlain and is easily accessible by ferry or driving. Montreal is 90 minutes north, and New York City is 4.5 hours south by car. Amtrak stops at Westport's historic train station on its run between New York City and Montreal. National and international access is available through airports in Burlington, VT, Albany, and Montreal. The region is rich in American and indigenous people's history. The beauty of the region, along with its accessibility, affordability, lakes, mountains, and friendly people, make this a rare opportunity to lead an organization that has a lasting impact by making trails, protecting land, connecting people with nature, and promoting economic vitality in a place unlike any other. To learn more, click here to visit the local chamber of commerce pages: [Visit Westport, NY](#), and here to learn more about the [Lake Champlain Region](#).



Aerial view of Westport, New York, looking west toward the Adirondack Mountains

