Executive Director

The Opportunity

Whitebark Institute seeks an Executive Director to lead meaningful climate resilience work rooted in the extraordinary landscapes and communities of California's Eastern Sierra.

Here, the connections among forest health, wildfire, water, and community well-being are immediate, tangible, and growing. Whitebark brings together scientific expertise, community knowledge, and trusted partnerships to turn shared priorities into action. Our work creates real-world examples of how communities and land managers can collectively respond to a changing climate, along with practical experience that can inform decisions well beyond our region.

With a talented multidisciplinary staff, established partnerships, and an ambitious five-year strategic plan, Whitebark offers its next Executive Director a distinctive opportunity: to advance timely and consequential work on the ground while bringing the Eastern Sierra's experience into local, state, and federal policy and funding conversations.

We seek a leader who builds trust, empowers accomplished professionals, and turns relationships into shared results. The successful candidate will combine strategic judgment, organizational leadership, and fundraising ability with a deep commitment to this place and its people. Having grown rapidly in recent years, Whitebark is entering a new chapter focused on strengthening its organizational foundation, deepening regional partnerships, and expanding its impact with intention. The next Executive Director will play a central role in translating the organization's five-year strategic vision into sustainable growth, clear priorities, and lasting results.

About Whitebark

Whitebark Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to improving the wildfire resilience and health of Eastern Sierra ecosystems and the communities within them by applying evidence-based solutions and collaborative partnerships. We envision a future in which the connected landscapes and communities of the Eastern Sierra are resilient to wildfires and climate change.

We work across public and private lands with Tribal governments, land management agencies, local governments, researchers, utilities, businesses, nonprofits, and community members. Our work connects project development, environmental planning, landscape-scale implementation, community engagement, and research and monitoring to move projects from shared ideas to long-term adaptive stewardship.

Our major landscape initiatives include the Eastern Sierra Climate and Communities Resilience Project (ESCCRP) and the West Mono Basin Project. Alongside these efforts, we support community resilience projects and regional collaborations that address gaps in capacity, funding, and implementation in communities across the region.

Our core values (Place-Based Impact, Collaboration, Action-Oriented, Adaptive, and Integrity) guide how we work with one another and with our partners.

Position Overview

The Executive Director provides strategic leadership and executive accountability for Whitebark's mission, people, financial health, and impact. Working with the Board and Whitebark's leadership team, the Executive Director translates the strategic plan into clear priorities, aligns resources with commitments, and guides thoughtful organizational development.

As Whitebark's principal executive representative, the Executive Director builds influential relationships with agency leaders, elected officials, Tribal governments, funders, and collaborative partners. This role also leads Whitebark's fundraising strategy and is accountable for the organization's long-term financial sustainability, including a more diverse and predictable funding base with stronger unrestricted support. The role ensures Whitebark has the Board leadership, organizational structure, and staff capacity to deliver on its commitments across all of its programs.

The Executive Director leads through an experienced team, providing direction, support, and accountability while leveraging in-house program expertise and delegated authority. The Finance and Operations Director leads day-to-day internal management, working closely with the Executive Director to ensure sound operations and responsible stewardship.

Key Responsibilities

Strategic Leadership and Impact

- Lead implementation of Whitebark's strategic plan with the Board and staff, establishing clear priorities, measures of progress, and achievable commitments.
- Connect work across programs so planning, implementation, research, community engagement, and fundraising reinforce shared goals.
- Evaluate opportunities against mission, community and landscape needs, financial sustainability, and staff capacity.
- Identify and resolve barriers requiring executive judgment, negotiation, or engagement.
- Use project outcomes, staff expertise, and partner feedback to guide decisions and strengthen Whitebark's contribution to the region.

Policy Leadership and Strategic Partnerships

- Represent Whitebark effectively in local, state, and federal policy and funding discussions affecting wildfire resilience, forest health, and landscape stewardship.
- Build and sustain relationships with senior agency officials, elected representatives and their staff, Tribal leaders, funders, and other decision makers.

- Work with staff and partners to identify policy, funding, and administrative barriers and advance practical solutions.
- Translate technical knowledge and implementation experience into clear recommendations, briefings, presentations, and other contributions to public decision-making.
- Guide Whitebark's policy engagement within Board-approved strategy, drawing on staff expertise and regional priorities.
- Advance regional collaborations, including the Eastern Sierra Wildfire Alliance, with clear purposes, commitments, and outcomes.
- Approach Tribal partnerships with respect for sovereignty, priorities, knowledge, and capacity, supporting early and sustained engagement.

Fundraising and Financial Sustainability

- Lead a coordinated development strategy that supports both program delivery and the organization's long-term health.
- Cultivate and steward relationships with major funders, donors, public agencies, corporate partners, and beneficiaries of landscape resilience work.
- Lead significant funding requests and negotiate durable investment partnerships.
- Work with the Board and staff to diversify revenue, grow unrestricted support, and secure predictable funding across programs.
- Assess major funding opportunities for strategic fit, full costs, delivery capacity, and long-term obligations.
- Partner with the Finance and Operations Director on budgets, cash flow, financial performance, cost recovery, and material financial risks.
- Ensure the Board receives timely financial information and clear recommendations.

Staff Leadership and Organizational Health

- Lead an accomplished multidisciplinary team through clear expectations, thoughtful delegation, constructive feedback, and consistent follow-through.
- Support and develop senior staff leaders, respecting their expertise while maintaining accountability for organizational priorities and results.
- Foster a workplace grounded in trust, transparency, collaboration, respect, and professional growth, supported by clear internal communication across programs.
- Encourage candid discussion and address disagreements and consequential decisions promptly.
- Work with the Finance and Operations Director and program directors to align staffing, systems, and resources with funded commitments and strategic priorities.
- Maintain executive oversight of organizational risk, personnel practices, compliance, and internal controls.

Communications and Community Relationships

- Serve as Whitebark's principal spokesperson and a credible, accessible representative of its mission and work.

- Leverage expertise of staff and partners to communicate complex scientific and policy issues clearly to community members, funders, elected bodies, agencies, and the media.
- Work with staff to demonstrate results, explain tradeoffs, recognize partners, and build public understanding.
- Delegates communication responsibilities to staff in alignment with their expertise, highlighting the depth and capabilities of Whitebark's growing professional team.
- Maintain an active regional presence through partner meetings, community conversations, field visits, and staff engagement.
- Bring local experience into broader conversations while remaining responsive and accountable to the communities Whitebark serves.
- Foster meaningful relationships with Eastern Sierra communities, ensuring that local knowledge, concerns, and priorities inform organizational decisions, project development, and regional collaboration.

Board Partnership and Governance

- Build a productive, transparent relationship with the Board that supports effective governance and informed decisions.
- Provide timely reporting on strategic progress, finances, organizational health, opportunities, and material risks.
- Partner with the Board Chair on meeting agendas, executive recommendations, and follow-through.
- Support Board development, recruitment, and engagement, including fundraising and relationship building with staff and partners.
- Operate within the Board-approved budget, policies, and delegation of authority, and work with the Board to keep approval thresholds and signature authority current as Whitebark grows.

What You Bring

We seek evidence of achievement in the following areas:

- **Strategic leadership:** Experience guiding an organization, substantial program, or collaborative initiative through complex priorities and consequential decisions.
- **Policy and institutional influence:** Demonstrated success working with government agencies, elected officials, or other decision makers to influence policy, secure resources, or resolve implementation barriers.
- **Partnership results:** A record of building trust across organizations and interests, negotiating commitments, and turning collaboration into measurable accomplishments.
- **Financial resource development:** Success securing significant funding or investment and sustaining productive relationships with funders, donors, or public funding partners.
- **Leadership of expert teams:** Experience empowering accomplished professionals, developing leaders, addressing conflict, and sustaining a healthy and accountable workplace.
- **Financial judgment:** The ability to interpret financial information, assess risk, align resources with priorities, and oversee responsible organizational management.
- **Communication:** The ability to synthesize complex information, listen carefully, and communicate persuasively with technical, public, and policy audiences.

- **Mission commitment:** An understanding of the connections between climate resilience, ecosystem health, and community well-being, and a commitment to building lasting relationships in the Eastern Sierra.

Relevant experience may come from nonprofit leadership, government, Tribal organizations, conservation, natural resource management, public policy, or comparable settings. Candidates should demonstrate an understanding of nonprofit governance and the ability to lead fundraising and organizational stewardship initiatives.

A relevant degree or an equivalent combination of professional experience and education is welcome. We value demonstrated accomplishments, judgment, and leadership.

Experience That Would Strengthen Your Candidacy

- Familiarity with California wildfire resilience, forestry, conservation, or climate policy and funding.
- Experience working with federal land management agencies, state agencies, rural communities, or Tribal governments.
- Knowledge of environmental planning and the practical challenges of moving restoration projects into implementation.
- Experience with public grants and contracts, collaborative funding arrangements, major gifts, or beneficiary investments.
- Experience partnering with a nonprofit board or equivalent.
- Knowledge of the Eastern Sierra or a demonstrated ability to become an engaged and trusted member of the region's rural communities.

Working in the Eastern Sierra

This role requires sustained engagement with the people and landscapes Whitebark serves, including regular presence in Mammoth Lakes and communities throughout the region. Travel beyond the region supports agency relationships, fundraising, partnerships, and state and federal engagement. Some evening and weekend commitments are expected.

Compensation and Benefits

This is a full-time, year-round position with a competitive salary of $135,000–$155,000, commensurate with experience and qualifications.

Benefits include Health Insurance: 75% employer-paid medical, plus 100% employer-paid dental, vision, and life insurance; Employer-contributed retirement program; Generous vacation policy and 11 paid holidays per year.

How to Apply

Submit a résumé and a letter of interest to administrator@whitebarkinstitute.org with subject line Executive Director by December 20, 2026 for first consideration. Position will remain open until filled.

In your letter, describe why this opportunity interests you and provide examples of how you have:

- Turned a complex partnership or policy opportunity into a tangible result.
- Supported an experienced team in delivering consequential work.
- Secured resources or commitments that advanced a mission.

Whitebark Institute is an Equal Opportunity Employer. We celebrate diversity and are committed to creating an inclusive work environment for all employees.