



The American Chestnut Foundation President & Chief Executive Officer

Position Specification

2025

Mission & Vision



The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization established in 1983 to restore the iconic American chestnut tree to its native range across the eastern United States. Through a unique blend of grassroots citizen science, traditional breeding, cutting-edge biotechnology, and focused research, TACF has led the global effort to bring this species back from functional extinction.

With offices in North Carolina, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut, TACF operates with an annual budget of approximately \$4 million and a committed staff of 25. It has a research and breeding facility in Meadowview, Virginia, and hundreds of other orchards operated by 16 state chapters in the eastern United States. With thousands of trees in various stages of testing and restoration, TACF is developing disease-resistant trees for large-scale forest reintroduction and ecological recovery.

TACF's mission is to return the iconic American chestnut to its native range and its vision is a robust eastern forest returned to its splendor.

The Team

[Board of Directors](#)

[Staff](#)

Annual Reports & Financials

[2024 Annual Report](#)

[2024 Financial Audit](#)

[2023 Form 990](#)



The Work



TACF's work spans research, restoration, and education.

Research

TACF's species-saving strategy is a powerful combination of traditional breeding and biotechnology. The primary goal of this scientific research is to develop American chestnut trees with sufficient resistance to two deadly diseases: chestnut blight and Phytophthora root rot.



Restoration

The goal of TACF's forest restoration work is to implement plantings of genetically diverse and disease-resistant American chestnut trees that are capable of sustained population growth across the native range in the ever-changing landscape of the Eastern hardwood forests.



Education

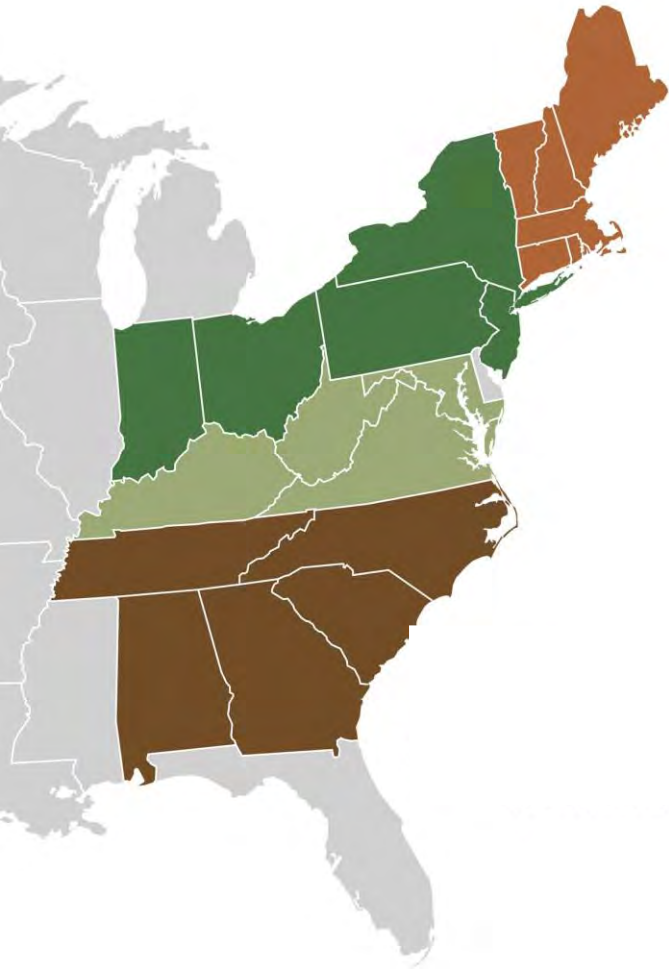
TACF is committed to raising awareness about the plight of the American chestnut and to fostering a new generation of conservation leaders through youth education, public talks, outreach activities, and demonstration plantings.



Chapters & Research Farms



TACF has 16 state chapters across the native range of the American chestnut tree covering 20 states. The dedicated volunteers who manage these chapters are the backbone of TACF's research and restoration efforts. Meadowview, VA is home to TACF's Research Farms. This property is used to preserve, study, and breed American chestnut trees for resistance to the blight fungus. Meadowview includes tens of thousands of trees at various stages of the breeding process, planted on more than 150 acres.



New England Region

- Connecticut
- Maine
- Massachusetts/Rhode Island
- Vermont/New Hampshire

North Central Region

- Indiana
- New York
- Ohio
- Pennsylvania/New Jersey

Mid-Atlantic Region

- Kentucky
- Maryland
- Virginia
- West Virginia

Southern Region

- Alabama
- North Carolina/South Carolina
- Georgia
- Tennessee

Meadowview Research Farms



The Position



Position	President & Chief Executive Officer
Reports To	Executive Committee of the National Board of Directors
Location	East Coast presence preferred
Position Summary	<p>The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) is working to reverse a human-made disaster of historic proportions – the near eradication of the iconic American chestnut tree from its native range by an accidentally introduced invasive fungus. Once a foundational species in the Appalachian hardwood forests, and a key part of the ecology and economy, the American chestnut is now functionally extinct in its native range, but still persists as isolated trees or understory shrubs that can form the basis of a restored population. TACF is seeking a new President & Chief Executive Officer to lead its efforts to bring this tree back.</p> <p>TACF seeks a dynamic and visionary President & CEO to lead the organization as it continues its research and development and prepares for restoration efforts in one of the most ambitious environmental conservation projects in American history. The ideal candidate is a compelling fundraiser and advocate, a skilled communicator, and an effective organizational leader. They will combine strategic acumen with operational discipline, while championing TACF's grassroots and science-based mission.</p> <p>The President & CEO must be passionate about environmental conservation and the role of community-driven citizen science in advancing ecological restoration. This individual will report to the Board of Directors and be responsible for a \$4M annual budget and a team of 25 committed professionals. They will collaborate with staff, volunteers, donors, scientific collaborators, and public stakeholders to execute, and build upon, TACF's <u>2025-2027 strategic plan</u> to return the iconic American chestnut to its native range and ensure the protection of the species for generations to come.</p>

Key Responsibilities



Visionary & Strategic Leadership

- Guide the implementation and periodic refinement of TACF's three-year strategic plan.
- Anticipate challenges and opportunities within conservation science, public policy, and nonprofit management, aligning resources accordingly.
- Work in close partnership with the Board of Directors to build strategic consensus, governance excellence, and long-term sustainability.
- Pursue new constituencies, partnerships, and audiences to broaden TACF's impact.

Fundraising, Advocacy, & External Engagement

- Serve as the primary fundraiser and ambassador for TACF, cultivating relationships with major donors, foundations, government agencies, and corporate partners.
- Lead development efforts for capital campaigns focused on scientific innovation, forest restoration, and organizational growth.
- Inspire and mobilize new and existing supporters by effectively articulating TACF's mission, vision, and value to the public.
- Strengthen TACF's national visibility through media appearances, conferences, public speaking engagements, and thought leadership.
- Bring a robust network of philanthropic and conservation contacts to accelerate donor and partner engagement.

Strategic Communication

- Serve as the chief storyteller and spokesperson for TACF, fostering public understanding and appreciation for the American chestnut and its restoration.
- Promote transparent and regular communication within the organization, as well as with external stakeholders including members, chapter leaders, and the broader conservation community.
- Communicate complex scientific topics to a diverse audience in compelling and accessible ways.

Key Responsibilities Cont.



Organizational Leadership & Management

- Provide unifying leadership across a geographically dispersed team, encouraging a culture of collaboration, professional development, and innovation.
- Lead the executive team in setting and achieving measurable goals aligned with the strategic plan and mission priorities.
- Oversee staffing, human resources, operational systems, and performance metrics to ensure effectiveness and accountability.
- Demonstrate experience in recruitment, staff development, performance management, and if necessary, corrective action or terminations.
- Delegate effectively and trust team leaders with execution responsibilities.

Grassroots Conservation & Chapter Engagement

- Cultivate meaningful relationships with state chapters and volunteers, recognizing their indispensable role in research, outreach, and public education.
- Nurture a strong sense of community, collaboration, and shared mission across the chapter network.
- Support citizen science initiatives and community-based conservation efforts that connect people to their local ecosystems.
- Actively support the recruitment of board members, volunteers, and future chapter leaders to maintain a leadership pipeline.

Financial Oversight & Resource Allocation

- Serve as TACF's chief fiduciary officer, responsible for the development and management of the annual operating budget.
- Ensure responsible, transparent, and mission-aligned stewardship of financial resources.
- Support financial reporting and audits, collaborating closely with the finance team and Board treasurer.

Science Leadership & Collaboration

- Engage with the scientific mission of TACF, supporting strategic investment in breeding, genomics, and restoration ecology.
- Serve as a liaison and convener for partnerships with universities, research institutions, and federal/state agencies.
- Advocate for science-based conservation policies and initiatives that advance the restoration of the American chestnut and protect native tree species from future threats.

The Person



Pivotal Experience & Expertise

Mission Orientation

10+ years in a nonprofit, public, or mission driven organization, with at least 3–5 years in executive leadership. Passion for environmental conservation, ecological restoration, and grassroots citizen engagement required. Background in conservation, forestry, natural resources, or environmental sciences, with an understanding of the potential for biotechnology to support the mission, strongly preferred.

Fundraising Acumen

Proven track record in fundraising and major donor development, ideally within a nonprofit or conservation context. Experience leading or participating in capital campaigns strongly preferred.

Management at Scale

Demonstrated success in staff leadership, change management, and organizational development. Knowledge of nonprofit financial management and budgeting principles.

Community Engagement

Outstanding verbal and written communication skills across diverse stakeholder groups. Familiarity with applied conservation science and its role in public policy and community engagement. Ideally brings an existing network in conservation and philanthropy.

Culture Impact

Emotional Intelligence

Culturally competent and attuned to the importance of diverse perspectives in conservation. Curious, intellectually agile, and open to innovation. Empathetic and inclusive leader with strong emotional intelligence.

Transparent & Collaborative

Transparent, trustworthy, and high integrity; a leader who others enjoy working for and learning from. Decisive and strategic, but also seeks to engage staff voices and encourage collaboration.

Visionary

Forward-looking executive who brings a high degree of foresight and vision, as well as the energy and mission connection to drive TACF forward.

Engagement Team



Abby Gorman
Principal, Social Impact
agorman@heidrick.com

Sara Szynal
Senior Associate, Social Impact
sszynal@heidrick.com

To apply, please submit a resume and a detailed cover letter explaining your interest in the role, relevant experience, and vision for leading TACF into its next chapter to: TACFCEO@heidrick.com. Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis until the position is filled.

TACF offers a competitive salary commensurate with experience and a comprehensive benefits package that includes health insurance, retirement contributions, and generous leave policies. Performance-based bonuses may be earned. Relocation support is available.

TACF is an Equal Opportunity Employer and is committed to providing an equal opportunity to all qualified individuals who are seeking employment, and to all current employees. TACF does not discriminate based on race, religion, color, sex, age, national origin, marital status, sexual or gender preference, veteran status, disability, pregnancy or related condition, ancestry, medical condition, physical handicap, or any other protected class or status. Offering an ethos of belonging is essential for building a welcoming environment and a unified workplace culture.

TACF is a certified living wage employer dedicated to a just and sustainable economy.