

Now Hiring: Executive Director

Elizabeth River Trail Foundation
Norfolk, Virginia
August 2026



About the Elizabeth River Trail and Elizabeth River Trail Foundation

For over 25 years the Elizabeth River Trail (ERT) has connected Norfolk's working waterfront with scenic routes past historic landmarks and vibrant neighborhoods. Today, the ERT is a public 10.5-mile, mixed-use urban trail linking 28 neighborhoods within a 5-minute walk, businesses, universities, recreational attractions, and historic destinations along Norfolk's waterfront. It is Norfolk's most popular urban trail and a source of local pride, drawing more than 1,000,000 users in the most recent 12-months, and holds a federally recognized National Recreation Trail designation.

Formed in 2016, the Elizabeth River Trail Foundation (ERTF) is the 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization focused on planning, fundraising, marketing, and activating the trail in close partnership with the City of Norfolk. The Foundation's mission is to plan, program, and advocate for the Elizabeth River Trail as it extends to connect Naval Station Norfolk to the Virginia Beach Trail. It's the Foundation's vision to become a global model of waterfront trail resilience and education that supports connected communities, inclusive infrastructure, and economic development as part of a regional trail system.

The Opportunity

Entering its 10th year, the Foundation seeks an Executive Director to lead its next chapter of growth. With an operating budget of \$475,000 and a concluded capital campaign of \$4,000,000, ahead lie larger capital campaigns for visionary enhancements including a visionary, large-scale railroad overpass and the extension of the trail east to the Virginia Beach Trail as part of a broader regional trail system. Operating from the Foundation's new Trailside Headquarters in the vibrant Chelsea neighborhood, we are seeking an Executive Director who is ready to build the capital, strong partnerships, and organizational capacity to lead staff and volunteers, nurture and expand the Foundation's benefactors, oversee community programs and events, and support the Board of Directors in advancing these goals.

Position Overview

Reporting to the Board of Directors, the Executive Director serves as the Foundation's chief executive and is responsible for organizational leadership, strategy implementation, fundraising, financial stewardship, staff management, and external partnerships. The Board provides governance, strategic oversight, fiduciary stewardship, and active support for fundraising and community relationships.

The Executive Director will have meaningful authority to implement strategy, allocate staff, manage projects and make operating decisions, and will oversee a full-time three-person staff along with part-time, volunteer, and contracted support. We are looking for a decisive, self-directed leader who takes ownership of outcomes, persists to sustain the strong collaborative partner and philanthropic relationships needed to achieve goals, and is comfortable setting direction with limited day-to-day Board involvement, while remaining accountable to the board-adopted strategic priorities, listed in rank order below:

- 1) Strengthen donor attraction and stewardship
- 2) Strengthen engagement with eastern extension connections
- 3) Execute priority projects identified by the Master Planning Committee to enhance and extend the trail
- 4) Deepen key community stakeholder relationships
- 5) Streamline programming and events to align with the above priorities

Roles and Responsibilities

Organizational & Board Leadership

- Direct staff and volunteer management — including job descriptions, recruitment, and supervision — to build and sustain an effective team with well-prioritized responsibilities and effective time management. .
- Provide leadership to ensure effective board meetings, strategic and financial planning, and board recruitment, orientation, and engagement.
- Own the execution of an updated ERT Strategic Plan in accordance with Board-adopted strategic priorities and committee recommendations.

Fundraising, Donor Stewardship & Financial Management

- Develop and execute an annual fundraising strategy encompassing individual, corporate, foundation, grant, and — when appropriate — capital campaign support, in active partnership with the Board and Fundraising Committee
- Lead donor stewardship and oversee accurate donor records, pledges, and donor recognition and benefits. (A new part-time Development Associate position is budgeted but not yet filled.)
- Oversee grant applications and administration, with contracted assistance.
- Manage the Foundation's annual board-adopted budget — and, as applicable, future capital campaign budgets — ensuring transparent, effective nonprofit financial management.

Community & Partner Engagement, with Focus on Eastern Extension

- Build strong, open, collaborative relationships with communities and partners relevant to eastern trail expansion, including Norfolk State University, neighborhoods, the City of Norfolk, Hampton Roads Transit, and the City of Virginia Beach.
- Share leadership responsibility with the Board for building trust and visibility — prioritizing listening, understanding concerns, and finding common ground to advance mutually inclusive goals
- Serve as the trail's primary spokesperson and advocate on trail-related issues, and prioritize programs and events that strengthen these relationships.

Trail Enhancement & Project Management

- Drive the implementation of priority projects and next steps identified by the Board's Master Planning Committee, including installation of trail amenities.
- Make public presentations as needed to civic leagues, review boards, and stakeholders.
- Serve as the Foundation's executive representative for priority capital and trail-enhancement projects, coordinating with the City, design and construction professionals, consultants, funders, and community stakeholders.
- Review and oversee contracts for design, construction, and maintenance, and their related budgets.

Key Stakeholder & City Partnership

- Maintain open, positive, regular communication with the City of Norfolk on both trail expansion/enhancement and day-to-day maintenance.
- Work with the Board and City of Norfolk to maintain an up-to-date Memorandum of Understanding that reflects both partners' needs and interests.
- Adhere to City-requested timelines for grant opportunities and requests, such as for letters of support.
- Strengthen partnerships with strategic stakeholders in government, academia, and private industry - including but not be limited to City of Norfolk, Norfolk State University, Old Dominion University, Norfolk Southern, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Navy, and other relevant parties.

Marketing, Communications & Streamlined Programming

- Oversee a streamlined, inclusive slate of programs and events supporting the Foundation's mission with effective time management and focus alignment with Board-adopted priorities.
- Support the Spinclusion program along with its contracted program manager and related events.
- Partner with the Programming & Marketing Committee to ensure effective marketing and external communications, and maintain a strong brand, including branded merchandise.

Knowledge, Skills & Abilities

The Executive Director will be committed to the Foundation's mission, with proven leadership, fundraising, and relationship management experience. The successful candidate will bring a blend of the following:

- At least 8+ years of professional management experience which could include tourism, parks and recreation, donor relations, economic development, regional development, or community development. Nonprofit management experience is preferred but not required.
- Excellence in organizational management, including setting and achieving strategic objectives, time management, personnel management and effective project management.
- Decisive, self-directed and resilient leadership style, with the ability to set clear direction and drive execution independently while remaining accountable to Board-adopted priorities.
- Experience and a track record of success in fundraising, donor stewardship, and instituting a culture of philanthropy.
- Proven ability to listen and find common ground with diverse partners and community stakeholders in order to advance shared objectives.
- Demonstrated passion for the mission of this Foundation..
- Comfort and experience with social media.
- Proficiency with electronic communication tools, Google Drive, and donor database systems.
- Strong written and verbal communication skills, with a persuasive, passionate communication style.
- Experience with writing, managing, and executing grants - both private and public.
- Experience in creating compelling marketing and public relations messaging is preferred.
- A bachelor's degree is preferred, but not required with experience.

Compensation and Terms of Employment

This is a full-time, in-person, salaried position reporting to the Board of Directors with a salary range of \$90,000 - \$110,000 depending on experience. Salary considerations will be reviewed annually and are eligible for performance-based increases based on established organization goals.

Employment includes a benefits package that covers 50% of employee health, vision, and dental insurance along with a 3% match up to 6% 401k contribution, and forty (40) hours of paid sick leave and vacation after each six (6) months of employment. The Executive Director will be expected to work some evening and weekend hours for meetings and/or events.

To Apply

Please send a letter of interest, resume and three (3) professional references to admin@elizabethrivertrail.org. Include your name and "ERT Foundation Executive Director" in the subject line, with all materials saved as a single PDF. Only electronic applications will be accepted and reviewed.

The Foundation is seeking an Executive Director who can start by Fall 2026. Applications received before September 14, 2026 will be given priority.

The Elizabeth River Trail Foundation is an Equal Opportunity Employer and encourages applications from qualified persons of every age, race, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, veteran or disability status.