

# Leadership Profile

Chief Administrative Officer

Charlottesville, Virginia

JULY 2026



## The Opportunity

For four decades, the Southern Environmental Law Center has built a reputation for impact and effectiveness as one of the nation's most powerful defenders of the environment. Known for tackling complex environmental issues and well-resourced opponents across its six-state region, SELC delivers nationally significant results through its place-based focus, its deep local presence, its strong network of partner organizations, and its effective mix of legal, strategic, and communications expertise. Its mission is straightforward: protect the basic right to clean air, clean water, and a livable climate; preserve the region's natural treasures and rich biodiversity; and provide a healthy environment for all.

The organization that pursues that mission has grown remarkably. Today SELC fields a staff of nearly 250 (including more than 100 attorneys) working from nine offices across six southern states and Washington, DC, supported by an annual budget of nearly \$64 million and an exceptionally loyal community of donors and partners. SELC has never pursued growth for its own sake, but sustained success has made it a larger, more complex enterprise than the one its systems were originally built to serve.

SELC's operational leadership is currently distributed: administrative and operational responsibilities have been carried in pieces by the Executive Director, the Deputy Director, Office Directors, and department heads. That model served a smaller organization well. It no longer matches the scale of the institution or the demands of the moment. As part of a Board-approved refresh of its leadership structure, SELC is hiring its first Chief Administrative Officer: a single executive accountable for the systems and teams that keep SELC running.

The CAO will lead and integrate five functions (Human Resources, Finance, Administration, Information Technology, and the General Counsel and risk-management functions) and build the technology, operational backbone, and management discipline that enable SELC to advance its mission. The CAO reports to the President and Executive Director and serves as a member of SELC's senior executive leadership.

## The Organization

SELC is place-based. Its commitment to Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia is deliberate and distinctive. SELC's staff are not just experts and advocates; they are residents of the communities they serve. Relationships to people and place are at the heart of who SELC is, and the hundreds of partner organizations SELC has represented over the years are central to its results.

SELC is people. SELC's staff of nearly 250 combines legal, policy, communications, and analytical expertise to make progress here in the South: attorneys who are substance experts and accomplished litigators; policy professionals, advocates, and lobbyists who secure and defend

environmental protections; communications professionals who build the public case for change; policy, scientific, and geospatial analysts; development professionals who sustain the funding relationships the mission requires; and the administrative, finance, and IT professionals who constitute the operational backbone the Chief Administrative Officer will lead.

SELC employs a matrix approach to management. Geographically, each office is led by an Office Director; programmatically, each primary issue area is led by a senior leader; administratively, centralized departments support the whole. In 2026, with Board approval, SELC refreshed its leadership and governance structure and created the CAO position to centralize operational leadership that is currently dispersed.

SELC is strategic. The organization has long prided itself on the long view, pursuing strategy-based funding rather than funding-based strategy. Its third ten-year strategic plan, ratified in 2020, has passed its midpoint, and its commitments, including becoming a national leader, building a more diverse organization, and advancing climate solutions and environmental justice across the region, continue to guide SELC's work and investments.

SELC is well governed and well led. A highly engaged Board of Trustees drawn from across all six states respects the line between governance and management. Culturally, SELC is one organization, not a collection of accomplished individuals: collaborative, respectful, and devoted to mission over credit.

## **The Mandate**

The Chief Administrative Officer joins SELC with a clear charge: centralize operational leadership across Human Resources, Finance, Administration, Information Technology, and the General Counsel and risk-management functions so they are coordinated, well run, and accountable to a single operations executive. Within that charge, several overlapping priorities stand out.

- Serve as a principal partner and advisor to the Executive Director on the management and operations of the organization, helping set organizational policies, staffing, priorities, and direction; with the Executive Director, set annual operations goals for the organization and report them to the Board. The CAO attends meetings of the Board of Trustees and serves as staff liaison to the Board Audit Committee.
- Assume administrative and operational responsibilities now carried by the Executive Director, the Deputy Director, and Office Directors, and set annual goals, with measures of success, for each supervised function, holding each accountable for delivering against them.
- Lead the modernization of SELC's technology. Guide a multi-year technology strategy that resolves accumulated technological debt; establish an ongoing roadmap and disciplined project-portfolio oversight; ensure responsible AI adoption through governance frameworks, policies, and training; maintain policies for cybersecurity, data governance, and system reliability across all nine offices; and build the IT team's structure, talent, and service culture.
- Oversee the Finance function, partnering with the Director of Finance on budgeting, financial planning, internal controls, audit, and compliance, and ensuring finance systems are efficient, well controlled, and integrated with SELC's broader operations.
- Oversee the Human Resources function, providing executive leadership for recruiting and retention, compensation and benefits, performance management, professional development,

and employee relations, while strengthening management and supervisory practices across the organization.

- Oversee the Administration function, ensuring facilities and day-to-day operations run smoothly and consistently across offices and supporting the planned shift of administrative responsibilities away from Office Directors as the function takes on expanded regional duties.
- Integrate the General Counsel and risk-management functions with operations, ensuring professional supervision of enterprise risk management, insurance, real estate, contract review, and records management.
- Raise SELC’s standard of project management and execution (shared practices, clear ownership, and reliable follow-through), and lead the supervised functions through change with the project planning and internal-communications discipline that make transitions successful.
- Lead with SELC’s values: impact-focused excellence, respectful candor and integrity, inclusion and consultation, sincere collaboration, and mission-driven initiative. Partner with the Key Committee and HR to advance SELC’s diversity, equity, and inclusion objectives, and recruit, mentor, and develop a strong operations leadership bench.

### **The Relationships**

<b>The Chief Administrative Officer reports to</b>	The President and Executive Director
<b>And serves as</b>	A member of SELC’s senior executive leadership team
<b>Leads and integrates the operational functions including</b>	Director of Finance Director of Human Resources Director of Administration General Counsel IT leadership
<b>And engages regularly with</b>	The Deputy Director, Chief of Staff, and Program Director The Chief Development Officer and Director of Communications Office Directors and their teams The Board of Trustees, including the Audit Committee Consultants, vendors, and peers in exemplary nonprofits

### **The Location**

Charlottesville, Virginia (SELC’s headquarters and home to most of the operations team and leadership) is the preferred base for the Chief Administrative Officer, and candidates based in one of SELC’s other offices will be considered. Charlottesville is regularly cited among the nation’s most livable communities: an intellectually rich university town set against the Blue Ridge Mountains, with Shenandoah National Park nearby and Richmond and Washington, DC within a two-hour drive.

## **The Candidate**

The candidate to become SELC's first Chief Administrative Officer will be a seasoned operations executive with a record of leading several of these functions (finance, human resources, technology, administration, legal and risk) at an organization of comparable scale and complexity, whether in the nonprofit, professional-services, public, or private sector. We do not expect contenders to be deep experts in all five functions. Rather, we seek an executive who leads experts well: one who sets clear goals, builds accountable teams, and brings professional discipline to cross-functional work.

Because SELC is a place-based organization rooted in the South, the most compelling contenders will demonstrate an affinity for the region, or the cultural adaptability to work, lead, and thrive there. Demonstrated interest in the environment is a clear asset, though expertise in environmental issues is not required.

Among the qualities and experiences of interest:

### **Competence: the ideal candidate will demonstrate...**

- Success leading a multi-function operations portfolio (or several of its component functions in succession) at a high-performing organization of comparable budget, headcount, and geographic spread
- A record of leading technology modernization and organizational change: setting strategy, sequencing investments, managing consultants, and bringing staff along, with attention to the bandwidth and training of the people the systems serve
- The financial fluency to partner with a Director of Finance on budgeting, controls, audit, and compliance, and brief a Board Audit Committee
- Experience professionalizing project management across departments
- The judgment and discretion to oversee sensitive functions (human resources, enterprise risk)
- The management range to set goals for experienced directors, hold them accountable, and develop them: leading through leaders rather than around them
- The discipline to prioritize, saying no to the good so SELC can achieve the great

### **Culture: SELC seeks a professional who...**

- Appreciates the essential role of operational teams in SELC's mission success
- Operates with transparency and humility, inviting rather than telling: a leader who combines collaboration with accountability in a professional community of mission-driven professionals who respect authentic leadership and thrive when trusted to exercise initiative and autonomy
- Practices respectful candor: high standards and hard truths delivered with care
- Fosters a welcoming, inclusive, and equitable workplace and brings a demonstrated commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Earns trust by giving it: listens actively and engages with ideas on their merit, not their source

**Character: SELC expects to appoint...**

- An executive of unquestioned integrity, suited to stewarding privileged, personnel, and risk matters
- A builder, energized by the chance to define a new position, integrate five functions, and create durable systems rather than administer inherited ones
- A decisive yet compassionate leader with excellent judgment balanced by humility, confident in their own decisions and ready to learn from their colleagues
- A professional who respects the South, embraces SELC's values and history, and leads change with courage, respect, and sensitivity

In sum, SELC seeks an experienced, adept operations executive who will give one of the nation's most effective environmental organizations the operational backbone its next chapter requires.