

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OPPORTUNITY, DISCOVER LIFE IN AMERICA MATERIALS DUE BY AUGUST 28, 2026 AT 5:00 PM ET

To apply for the position, please submit the following via search@dlia.org:

- ☐ Resume
- ☐ Letter of interest
- ☐ Response to either Prompt A or Prompt B (250 words or fewer), below:
 - ☐ Prompt A: Identify one major shift over the next five years (e.g., technology, equity, funding models, or community engagement) that will force a change in DLiA's strategy and initiatives. List specific actions a new Executive Director could take in their first year to position DLiA ahead of that shift?
 - ☐ Prompt B: DLiA emphasizes biodiversity work that can inform conservation initiatives, climate resilience, and sustainable resource management. How might an Executive Director develop funder investments that support those outcomes? Share a concrete example that informs your perspective.

Deadline: August 28, 2026 at 5:00 PM Eastern. DLiA's partner supporting the search, Thrivner, may be in contact for rolling follow-up and/or interview invitations.

Questions: Reach search@dlia.org with questions.

Notice: Candidates must be authorized to work in the United States; DLiA complies with all state and federal E-Verify requirements. This position may require the successful completion of a public records check, consistent with applicable state and federal laws.

01 OVERVIEW

Title: Executive Director, Discover Life in America (DLiA)

Hours: Full-time, noting that the position occasionally requires work outside of the normal working hours of 9:00 AM-5:00 PM ET to accommodate events such as bioblitzes, fundraisers, retreats, and conferences.

Reports to: Board of Directors.

Location: Hybrid when appropriate, with the expectation that the Executive Director will work from Great Smoky Mountains National Park (1316 Cherokee Orchard Rd, Gatlinburg, TN 37738) several days per week.

Annual Salary Range: \$80,000–\$95,000 (FLSA-exempt), commensurate with experience, and future opportunities for salary increases, commensurate with results.

02 POSITION SUMMARY

Based in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Discover Life in America (DLiA) serves as the park's nonprofit science partner, leading the effort to document life in the Smokies and Southern Appalachia while raising awareness of biodiversity's essential role in conservation. Since 1998, the organization has connected scientists, park partners, educators, and volunteers as they explore biodiversity, spark curiosity, and deepen connections to the natural world.

DLiA is now seeking an Executive Director to lead the next chapter of science-based conservation and partnership work in Great Smoky Mountains National Park and Southern Appalachia—to ensure that research, education, citizen science, and partnerships work in concert and that biodiversity knowledge not only advances science but also reaches the public and informs conservation decisions.

The Executive Director leadership opportunity comes at an important moment for DLiA. Across decades, the organization has established an excellent reputation; a flagship partnership with the most visited national park in the United States; and a scientific framework for species discovery that informs conservation. The current strategy emphasizes advancing the All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory, studying species and ecosystem shifts over time, funding the future through annual giving and endowment growth, and accelerating outcomes by transforming operations, partnerships, education, outreach, and communications. The next Executive Director must translate decades of biodiversity data and community trust into stronger scientific relevance, broader public reach, and durable financial support.

For the right candidate, this role offers the chance to lead a respected 501(c)(3) with a distinctive national profile in biodiversity discovery and conservation. The role combines nonprofit leadership, scientific partnership-building, public storytelling, educational impact, fundraising, and stewardship of relationships across park, research, donor, and volunteer communities. The position is well suited to a leader motivated by the opportunity to turn scientific knowledge into conservation and long-term ecological impacts.

03 ORGANIZATION

Discover Life in America (DLiA) is a nonprofit partner of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, leading efforts to document life in the park while raising awareness of biodiversity's role in conservation. Since 1998, DLiA has connected scientists, park partners, educators, volunteers, and the public through discovery, learning, and conservation-focused engagement.

03.1 History and Park Partnership

History. DLIa was established in 1998 to support an ambitious biodiversity effort in the Smokies and has served as the administrative and nonprofit engine behind the All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory (ATBI), its flagship initiative. The ATBI, developed in partnership with Great Smoky Mountains National Park, is a concentrated effort to identify and catalog every species living in the park and is a model for biodiversity censuses throughout the world.

Park Partnership. This partnership with Great Smoky Mountains National Park remains central to DLIa's identity and influence. DLIa operates as a bridge among the park, scientists, universities, volunteers, educators, donors, and community participants, helping translate biodiversity science into conservation value and public understanding.

03.2 Strategic Priorities

DLIa's 2026–2028 strategic plan commits to four initiatives based on foundational strengths in biodiversity research and long- partnerships:

Initiative #1: Advancing the All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory, in which DLIa commits to extending work throughout Southern Appalachia, while continuing the taxonomic research within Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Initiative #2: Studying species and ecosystem shifts over time, in which DLIa commits to integrating, analyzing, and sharing the taxonomic data gathered across the decades, and including temporal elements in future studies.

Initiative #3: Funding the future, in which DLIa commits to the simultaneous expansion of the annual fund and the establishment of an endowment.

Initiative #4: Accelerating outcomes, in which DLIa commits to transforming operations and partnerships while also fusing education, outreach, and communications into scientific and taxonomic work.

04 OPPORTUNITY

DLIa is seeking a strategic, mission-driven Executive Director to guide the organization at an important moment of evolution.

04.1 Candidate Profile

DLIa seeks a leader who is:

Proactive and decisive, willing to move initiatives forward while exercising sound judgment and respect for partners and staff.

Strategic and context-aware, able to see DLIa's role within the broader conservation and science landscape, understand the political and institutional context of working with a national park, and position the organization for thoughtful growth.

Grounded yet growth-oriented, capable of expanding DLiA's reach and relevance beyond the park while staying rooted in its Smokies-based mission, long-standing partnerships, and local communities.

People-centered, investing in staff development, supporting a small team with care and clarity, and building internal capacity while transforming a historically resource-constrained environment.

A strong communicator and storyteller, skilled at translating biodiversity science into compelling narratives for general audiences, donors, media, and partners, and able to represent DLiA's work in accessible, inspiring ways.

A public-facing ambassador, comfortable serving as the face of the organization, engaging with press and public forums, and generating visibility, enthusiasm, and trust for DLiA's mission.

A collaborative partner-builder, intentional about deepening relationships with Great Smoky Mountains National Park, existing collaborators, and new allies across the Southern Appalachians and beyond.

Committed to programmatic excellence, eager to maintain and strengthen core programs—such as research collaborations, education, citizen science, and events—while positioning them for broader conservation and public impact.

Passionate about public engagement, especially in making science accessible and exciting for general audiences, youth, and diverse communities, and in using programs and stories to foster lasting connections to the natural world.

Financially and operationally savvy, able to align budgets, fundraising, and staffing with strategic priorities and to navigate evolving funding landscapes.

04.2 Core Responsibilities

Strategic Leadership & Vision. The Executive Director provides overall strategic leadership for DLiA, developing and implementing a clear, forward-looking plan with measurable short- and long-term goals. The role ensures that the organization's full portfolio of programs and projects aligns with DLiA's mission and vision, translates biodiversity science into actionable programs and public value, and identifies growth opportunities that build on the organization's strengths and partnerships.

Board Relations. The Executive Director works closely with the Board of Directors, especially the Chair and Executive Committee, to ensure alignment among governance, staff, and strategic priorities. The role carries out organizational operations under board oversight, serves as a consistent liaison between staff and board, communicates organizational and staff performance clearly, supports board development, and maintains effective communication.

Fundraising. The Executive Director leads fundraising across grants, major gifts, and strategic partnerships, working closely with the board to strengthen philanthropic

support. The role builds and maintains relationships with donors, foundations, agencies, and collaborators while continually assessing new opportunities to diversify and expand revenue.

Organizational Management. The Executive Director oversees day-to-day operations, staff management, and program execution across the organization. The role fosters a collaborative, people-centered workplace, supports clear written and verbal communication, and strengthens internal systems and tools that improve coordination, accountability, and document and task management.

Financial Oversight. The Executive Director is responsible for budget oversight, financial planning, and fiscal accountability. The role communicates financial performance to the board and other key stakeholders and works with board leadership to align financial strategy with DLiA's long-term goals and sustainability needs.

Partnerships and Community Engagement. The Executive Director serves as the public face of DLiA and strengthens relationships with scientific, regional, and community stakeholders. The role maintains and expands partnerships with Great Smoky Mountains National Park and other collaborators, provides data-informed conservation recommendations, and deepens DLiA's role as a connector across research, education, and conservation in the Southern Appalachian region and beyond.

04.3 Qualifications and Requirements

Education. A master's degree is preferred, particularly in life sciences, nonprofit management, science communication, or a related field that combines scientific understanding with organizational leadership.

Demonstrated Competencies

- Scientific literacy sufficient to engage credibly with biodiversity, ecology, and related scientific domains.
- Experience leading or managing a nonprofit organization, small enterprise, or similarly complex operation, including personnel supervision, conflict management, root-cause problem solving, and setting and supporting clear performance expectations.
- A proven ability to manage and support a small, diverse staff team.
- Outstanding written and verbal communication skills, with demonstrated experience communicating scientific concepts to varied audiences.
- A communication style that is candid and direct when appropriate, while consistently grounded in professionalism, respect, and emotional self-regulation, even in politically charged contexts.
- Demonstrated strategic-thinking capacity and experience in vision setting, strategic planning, and execution.

- Financial and operational management experience, including comfort operating within evolving and sometimes uncertain funding environments.
- A strong record of developing and sustaining cross-sector partnerships.
- Documented fundraising experience, including success in securing and managing multiple, diversified funding sources.
- Proficiency with basic office applications and cloud-based tools for word processing, spreadsheets, data entry, project management, and shared document workflows (e.g., Monday, Microsoft, Google Docs).
- Demonstrated ability to use social media platforms effectively for engagement, marketing, fundraising, and storytelling.
- The physical capacity to perform essential functions of the job, including lifting up to 40 pounds (e.g., field equipment).

Desired Qualifications

- Nonprofit leaders in environmental or conservation organizations.
- Scientists or science communicators with management and fundraising experience.
- Directors of small research institutes, field programs, or place-based NGOs.
- Professionals with hybrid experience across science, education, and nonprofit leadership.
- Regional awareness (Southern Appalachia) is a strong advantage, though not required.