



Job Description

Chief Operating Officer

Reports to:	Chief Executive
Responsible for:	Overall responsibility for operations including finance, HR, project management and governance. Supporting the CEO and Board in strategic leadership and managing change to grow the scale and impact of the organisation.
Location:	Hybrid working – with a minimum of two days per month in the office based in Leatherhead.

About us

We are SERT, the river restoration charity for the South East of England. Our vision is that rivers across the South East are clean, healthy and rich in biodiversity. Our mission is to restore and protect rivers and their catchments against multiple threats and a dramatically changing climate. We do this by:

- delivering evidence-based and nature-based solutions on land and in rivers;
- inspiring and empowering more people to protect rivers for the future.

Working at SERT is rewarding, fulfilling and busy. We work collaboratively and with passion, and this is reflected in our core values of: delivering high quality work, using expertise and scientific understanding, building good and effective relationships, and bringing positive energy to all we do. With rivers and catchments needing serious action to survive, our aims are growth and impact – so you'll be comfortable with challenges and excited by change. If this sounds like an environment that you would thrive in, we would love to hear from you.

The role

This role will lead the core operations of an ambitious environmental charity. You will lead two experienced teams: Finance and Operations, and Restoring Rivers and Catchments (our main restoration project delivery team), with a focus on enhancing effectiveness and creating an environment where our teams can thrive. Key responsibilities include strengthening health and safety and project management, supporting strategic growth, securing funding, and enhancing governance through collaboration with the Board. This position will suit a strong leader and collaborator who can manage change while inspiring those around them. You'll be rewarded by delivering the solid foundation we need to make the greatest possible impact in a critically important area of environmental concern.

Team Leadership

You will lead the core operational teams and functions of the organisation. With our refreshed vision, mission and 3 Year Plan in place, you will support your team to deliver their strategic objectives including a focus on how we optimise our resources to ensure we can deliver our growing pipeline of work. This means increasing our capacity and designing systems and processes that maximise our efficiency, while creating an infrastructure that supports innovation and wellbeing too.

Your executive portfolio includes two teams:

- Finance and Operations: this highly experienced and established team includes HR, finance, administration, IT, governance and facility management functions.
- Restoring Rivers and Catchments: this highly skilled project team designs and delivers a wide range of nature-based restoration and enhancement projects across the region – from opening up fish passage in urban chalk streams, to creating new wetlands.

You will also embed new roles in health and safety and project management into the organisation, making our teams and our organisation stronger than ever. You will be committed to the development of your own team, supporting them in maintaining relevant knowledge, training and areas of expertise.

Organisational Leadership

You will work alongside the CEO and as part of the Leadership Team to deliver the strategic objectives in our 3 Year Plan. You will be responsible for scoping key funding opportunities and grants. As a senior and trusted member of the Executive Team, you will effectively deputise for the CEO in their absence. You will role model the attitude and behaviours that will help us drive consistently high standards in all we do, champion our commitment to being an inclusive organisation and ensure that we encompass wellbeing and high performance as we develop talent within SERT.

SERT works on ~60 projects at different stages at any one time and we want to grow this number, so driving the development of excellent project management will be an important focus for you. Through improved contract, procurement and project management frameworks, you will deliver a more consistent approach to quality, cost control and the optimisation of project benefits. While the role is not responsible for the organisation's scientific data or most external stakeholder relationships, you will build a solid understanding of the industries and agencies that we work with to support your team's tactical approach to contracts, grants and programme management.

You will help ensure the good governance of the charity by working closely with the SERT Board and its sub committees on a number of priorities including staff retention, risk management, income optimisation and compliance. Supported by the wider Leadership Team you will generate timely, accessible and accurate reports and improve Annual Reporting to support the strategic objective of showcasing SERT's work to raise our profile and reputation.

Key Duties and Responsibilities

1. Oversight of core operations

- 1.1. Lead the financial management of the charity and its trading subsidiary to support a diverse portfolio of restricted, unrestricted and investment income.
- 1.2. Lead the continued development and growth of a professional HR and organisational development function, ensuring fit for purpose policies, staff satisfaction and retention, and a creative approach to recruiting a strong and diverse pipeline of talent.
- 1.3. Responsible for compliant and secure IT and data systems.
- 1.4. Responsible for integrating an accredited Health and Safety function into the organisation.
- 1.5. Responsible for integrating a professional Project Management function and framework into the organisation.

- 1.6. Manage the organisation's Risk Register, collaborating with Board's Finance, Risk and Audit Committee (FRAC), and the Leadership Team to ensure appropriate mitigations are identified and implemented.
- 1.7. Responsible for supporting the CEO and Board in ensuring good and compliant governance and reporting of the organisation.

2. Oversight of project delivery

- 2.1. Bring together project delivery, programme management, health & safety and finance teams to consistently deliver well resourced, high quality, cost effective, timely projects across the region to grow overall impact on rivers and catchments.
- 2.2. Drive the strategic objective for flagship project sites across the region, to raise the profile of organisation and of nature-based solutions.
- 2.3. Build procurement expertise and systems into the organisation including best practice contracting and sub-contracting.
- 2.4. Identify and support opportunities for innovation in project delivery and methodology.
- 2.5. Create capacity and ways of working that support collaboration between project delivery and other teams, providing a reliable and responsive 'in-house' project delivery service and expertise.

3. Strategic leadership and support

- 3.1. Support the CEO in leading change and growth in the organisation.
- 3.2. Identify, scope and lead core funding bids to support the growth and resilience of the organisation.
- 3.3. Lead internal comms relating to the core areas of the organisation – ensuring that any strategic organisational changes to project management, finance, HR, IT and health and safety are successfully implemented through high levels of engagement and understanding from all teams.
- 3.4. Monitor contracts, grants agreements and project budgeting to ensure full cost recovery including organisational development costs, and to ensure SERT and its trading subsidiary has limited exposure to liability and risk.
- 3.5. Support priorities in cross team collaboration by identifying and operationalising effective ways of working including reviewing hybrid working and other policies.
- 3.6. Work with peers across the Rivers Trust movement and wider sector to share ideas and best practice in your areas.
- 3.7. Grow own knowledge and understanding of SERT's areas of work and opportunity.
- 3.8. Any other duties required to develop the role, team, and wider organisation.

4. Team leadership and development

- 4.1. Lead and develop your own team, ensuring:
 - 4.1.1. That training, qualifications and development opportunities are provided;
 - 4.1.2. An inclusive and supportive team culture;
 - 4.1.3. That you and your team model SERT's values;
 - 4.1.4. That the team is resourced proportionally to the needs of the wider organisation.
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Person specification

Please keep this person specification in mind, as well as the Trust's core values when completing your application. Knowledge, experience, skills, and attitudes will be assessed through both the application process and at interview.

If you do not meet every criteria below we are still interested in hearing from you. If you are unsure if your experience is sufficient, we can arrange a call with a member of the team to discuss and support your application.

Requirements	Essential	Desirable
Training and Experience		
Senior leadership with experience in a similar role including oversight of finance and HR functions.	X	
Experience in the charity sector, preferably within an environmental organisation.		X
Experience in strategic development that delivers growth of impact aligned with organisational objectives.	X	
Experience of leading and communicating change with a wide range of teams.	X	
Experience in the management of organisational risk.	X	
Knowledge and Understanding		
Comprehensive understanding of operations within the charity sector.	X	
A good understanding of the VAT status of different types of charitable and service-based activities.		X
Good understanding of contracts.		X
Good understanding of health and safety best practice.	X	
Strong understanding of project management frameworks, software and methodologies.	X	
Strong understanding of HR and organisational development methodology and practice.	X	
Relevant finance, HR, health and safety and project management qualifications.		X
Excellent grasp of the challenges and opportunities in growing restricted and unrestricted funding across a diverse range of income streams.		X
Skills & Personal Attributes		
Adaptable, calm and resilient – can thrive in a busy role.	X	
Can work effectively both as part of a team and when working independently on specific tasks.	X	
Effective and empathetic communicator across a wide range of channels.	X	
Personal attributes aligned with SERT's core values	X	
Miscellaneous		
Understands and is committed to the importance of making a positive difference in areas of equity, diversity and inclusion.	X	
A suitable home working environment.	X	
Right to work in the UK.	X	
Willing and able to travel across the region to meetings and site visits	X	
Ability to work occasional evenings and weekend if required.	X	