

# ASPEN LEADERSHIP GROUP

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CHIEF DEVELOPMENT OFFICER  
[DIAN FOSSEY GORILLA FUND](#)  
Location — Hybrid (Atlanta, Georgia)



The Aspen Leadership Group is proud to partner with the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund in the search for a Chief Development Officer.

The Chief Development Officer will develop, plan, manage, and evaluate all development programs supporting fundraising and communications initiatives, including the planning and execution of support systems for campaigns, annual fundraising, external outreach, and constituent engagement and recognition programs. The Chief Development Officer will oversee major, mid-level, and annual gifts, both individual and institutional, development services, and marketing and communications. The Chief Development Officer will integrate fundraising, marketing, and communications holistically and will serve as a strategic partner to the Chief Executive Officer, ensuring the successful leadership of an efficient, productive, and growing development program to support the aspirations of the organization.

In 1967, Dian Fossey established the Karisoke Research Center in the mountains of Rwanda to protect and study the endangered mountain gorillas. Over the next 10 years she studied the mountain gorillas in the region, learned of the danger poachers posed to the gorillas, and formed a particularly close bond with a young gorilla she named Digit. After Digit was killed by poachers in 1977, followed shortly by other members of his group, Dian set up The Digit Fund, which was later renamed the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund, to raise money and awareness for her *active conservation* and anti-poaching initiatives. This lasting legacy created by Fossey lives on today in the gorilla protection, science, education, and people programs of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund. A multinational staff, based in both the United States and Africa, continue the mission to save gorillas.

The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund is dedicated to the conservation, protection, and study of gorillas and their habitats in Africa. Its successful, integrated approach includes close collaboration with local governments and communities, as well as partners from around the world.

For 55 years the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund has successfully relied on a holistic model with four key pillars: protecting gorillas, conducting science, training conservationists, and helping communities. Successfully protecting gorillas has involved daily, direct protection and trackers and researchers being in the mountains with the gorillas every day, protecting and studying in collaboration with the Rwandan national park authorities. As the world's longest-running gorilla research site, conducting science goes beyond the gorillas. It involves research of the many unique animals and plants that share the gorillas' forest home, which is critical to the development of effective conservation strategies.

The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund believes that education is the key to empowering people. That is why the organization provides young African scientists with the skills they need to become future leaders in conservation, science, and education. This educational mission involves training for hundreds of university and graduate students each year, providing scholarships to staff to complete undergraduate and graduate degrees, providing professional internships, and building capacity of national park staff. The education efforts are working. Follow-up data shows that more than 85 percent of those who do senior thesis work with the Fossey Fund go into scientific or conservation related careers.

Beyond educating young scientists, the Fossey Fund also believes in the importance of helping communities. The involvement and engagement of local communities is essential to successful and sustainable conservation. *Helping people, saving gorillas* is Fossey Fund's motto. This is accomplished in many ways. The Fossey Fund's environmental education activities are diverse and designed for students of all age groups. Every year, more than 7,500 elementary school children from local primary schools are provided supplies and learning materials, courses, nature clubs, conservation camps, and teacher training. For secondary schools in Rwanda, the Citizen Science program provides environmental clubs, class work, and lectures on the scientific process, creates school gardens, and hosts conservation debates. Teacher training is also provided to schoolteachers, including workshops on conservation, gorillas, and biodiversity. An additional major focus of the Fossey Fund is improving the lives of people living near gorillas through addressing their basic needs while simultaneously reducing their reliance on the gorillas' forest home. This includes addressing food and water security and developing livelihood initiatives, thus *helping people, saving gorillas*.

The Fossey Fund strategically expanded its work to eastern DRC in 2000 to the next gorilla conservation frontier: saving the rapidly declining Grauer's gorilla. Over the last two decades, the organization has built relationships with local communities, using recently passed Congolese law to develop a 2,400 sq km (three times the size of NYC) community forest. This previously unprotected area is home to hundreds of species and sequesters an estimated 250 million tons of carbon, making it a vital area for both biodiversity conservation and mitigating climate change. The Fossey Fund has entered into a 25-year management agreement with the local communities and in addition is providing jobs, education, food security, and livelihood initiatives to support the community's commitment to conservation. It is currently pursuing validation on the carbon market, which would enable these important forests to generate revenue for the communities and conservation activities.

The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund is in a strong financial position, with year-over-year revenue growth for the past eight years alongside a \$15 million capital campaign and the recent establishment of an endowment. It has a large, loyal donor base, with individual and foundation support accounting for ~75% of annual funding. Corporate, organizational, and government support are also significant contributors and funds are raised primarily through major gift solicitations, proposals, and online and direct mail appeals.

### **THE ELLEN DEGENERES CAMPUS OF THE DIAN FOSSEY GORILLA FUND**

For 55 years, the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund has been working to help conserve wild gorilla populations and support the people who share their forest home. It all started with two tents that Dian Fossey erected in the forest in 1967. From there, it grew over the years, from one person to a staff of more than 300. Until recently, the organization worked out of a rented space with only a single classroom and a kitchen converted into a laboratory, far from the gorilla habitat and surrounding communities. A home that could support a growing team and workload was needed. In 2017, as the Fossey Fund celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, its leaders made a strategic decision to move forward on an ambitious, 20-year dream to create a purpose-built facility in Rwanda aimed at accelerating science and conservation work.

Within months of this decision, the Fossey Fund received a lead gift from global icon Ellen DeGeneres and her wife, Portia de Rossi. Since that time, thousands of donors, large and small, have supported the project and helped to create a state-of-the-art research and learning facility—the Fossey Funds’ first permanent home in Rwanda. The [Ellen DeGeneres Campus of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund](#) opened its doors in February 2022.

The multi-acre, eco-friendly facility adjacent to the Volcanoes National Park includes three main buildings—the Sandy and Harold Price Research Center, the Rob and Melani Walton Education Center, and the Cindy Broder Conservation Gallery—as well as housing for visiting students and researchers. The Ellen Campus serves as a gateway to conservation for the many stakeholders with whom the Fossey Fund works, helping to create the next generation of conservationists.

The Ellen Campus is the vision of the award-winning MASS Design Group and has been named one of Africa’s 10 most anticipated architectural projects and featured on [60 Minutes](#) and in [Architectural Digest](#).

Built with locally sourced materials and supplies, the facility embodies the Fossey Fund’s mission to conserve and limit its impact on the environment through rainwater harvesting, green roofs, the reforestation of former agricultural land, and a constructed wetland to treat wastewater and promote biodiversity. The project represented an investment of \$13.5 million in the Rwandan economy and provided 2,400 construction jobs for local community members.

#### **REPORTING RELATIONSHIPS**

The Chief Development Officer will report to the President, Chief Executive Officer, and Chief Scientific Officer, Tara Stoinski, Ph.D. The Chief Development Officer will oversee an immediate team of seven and help hire positions, particularly around growing major gifts.

#### **FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO**

*The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund is known for our work with gorillas—but we are so much more than that. Our mission is Helping People. Saving Gorillas. And our people-centered approach to conservation integrates boots-on-the-ground protection, science, education, training, employment, sustainable development, livelihood creation (the list goes on and on) into a holistic model that is recognized for its effectiveness in both saving a species and improving the lives of the people who share the gorillas’ forest home. We are honored to be part of one of the world’s all too rare conservation success stories—the bringing back of mountain gorillas from the brink of extinction—and our 300-member (and growing) team in Atlanta, Rwanda, and DR Congo are true heroes and serve as an inspiration to people from around the world.*

*The organization is at an amazing transformational moment—we just opened our first permanent home in Rwanda, the \$15 million Ellen DeGeneres Campus, which will expand and accelerate our work, especially around training the next generation of scientists in Africa. We have built a new conservation model in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, partnering with local communities to help them conserve their ancestral forests and the many endangered species which reside within them. And we are expanding our work with communities living near the gorillas to address issues critical to their well-being—from food and water security to livelihoods to education. As such, our work includes some of the most pressing issues facing our planet—climate change, the extinction crisis, gender and academic equity, and sustainable development.*

*I am often asked—with all the needs that exist in the world, many of them affecting our own species, why is conserving gorillas important? And I always answer with three reasons. First, they need us. Gorillas are among the most at risk of the one million species on the planet in danger of extinction. Second, we need them. Their forest home is the second largest standing rainforest on the planet and one of our best natural defenses against climate change—the literal lungs of the planet. And the gorillas are the gardeners of these forests, keeping them healthy. And so by saving gorillas, we are ultimately saving ourselves. And finally, they deserve it. They share 98% of our DNA and they share our humanity. Like us, they form life-long friendships, they take care of their most vulnerable, they mourn the loss of a family member. Being a part of ensuring these amazing animals a future is truly one of the best jobs I can imagine.*

—Tara Stoinski, Ph.D., President, Chief Executive Officer, and Chief Scientific Officer

### **DIAN FOSSEY GORILLA FUND'S COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION**

The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund is a women-led organization. The Chief Executive Officer, Chief Financial Officer, and 50% of upper-level positions across the organization are women. All but four of its approximately 290 staff in Africa are African. The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund's Board has a commitment to reach 30% racial diversity by the year 2025. For the building of its new campus, the Fossey Fund made a commitment to 25% of the construction workforce being female and 25% of leadership being female. Over 99% of the workforce was locally hired.

### **PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Chief Development Officer will

- lead all development and communications activities and a team of professionals in a coordinated and integrated manner;
- design and implement high-level strategic fundraising and brand management programs and initiatives for the organization;
- determine the fundraising and communications goals for each fiscal year in collaboration with the Chief Executive Officer and Chief Financial Officer;
- review budget and resourcing needs and align them with approved provisions;
- report on progress against plans and make any necessary “mid-period” corrections to enable achievement of objectives;
- carry a portfolio of major and mid-level gift prospects including the identification, cultivation, one-on-one solicitation, and stewardship of donors;
- aspire to develop six- and seven-figure gifts through a personal portfolio and that of the Chief Executive Officer;
- staff the Chief Executive Officer and Board of Directors members on principal gift level opportunities;
- maintain an aggressive schedule of face-to-face donor and prospect visits with qualified prospects;
- participate actively in the strategizing for and implementation of capital campaigns and future strategic plans;
- tailor annual fund development plans to donor strategies and leverage visibility from the campaign to build donor and sponsor interest in recurring support;

- develop new targeted and formalized programs that meet organizational objectives in corporate giving (by large multinationals), stewardship, and planned giving as a vital part of overall development initiatives, tracking progress and resource appropriately;
- oversee the Director of Donor Relations and Communications in the implementation of an aggressive and productive direct mail and digital solicitation program;
- serve as a public representative of the organization by effectively and strategically communicating its mission, purpose, and vision to the public, corporate donors, and sponsors as well as existing and new donor constituencies;
- develop metrics to measure impact and inspire performance, tracking and adjusting accordingly;
- guide the design of communications and public relations programs to directly support brand management and fund development strategies;
- evaluate how the organization's social media may be expanded to build interest and support;
- as primary liaison to the Development Committee, partner with the Chief Executive Officer to support the fulfillment of fundraising and communications goals and expansion of the fundraising base;
- engage with members of the Board to support their personal donations and their fundraising plans and activities;
- coordinate and facilitate opportunities for the Chief Executive Officer and Board members to develop relationships with those who can provide substantial financial support;
- effectively serve as the leader and mentor to the development team;
- recruit, develop, motivate, and retain key staff focused on the accomplishment of goals;
- support a culture of inclusivity, cooperation, and optimism;
- make certain that core knowledge and goals are clearly defined;
- define team responsibilities and performance metrics and ensure that accountability processes are in place and actively reviewed;
- build a development team culture that focuses on meeting goals, qualifying and advancing donor prospects, engaging a large range of constituencies through effective messaging, and accomplishing strategic objectives;
- oversee and develop analysis skills of the donor and data management team to enhance fundraising;
- ensure that data are appropriately incorporated into each aspect of the development strategy (prospect identification, discovery, cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship).

## **LEADERSHIP**

### **Tara Stoinski, Ph.D.**

#### **President, Chief Executive Officer, and Chief Scientific Officer**

Dr. Tara Stoinski serves as President, Chief Executive Officer, and Chief Scientific Officer for the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund. Prior to taking on the CEO role in 2014, she worked with the Fossey Fund for 13 years in a scientific capacity. Tara has studied gorillas for almost three decades and is the author of over 100 scientific publications and books. Her work has been featured in numerous press outlets, including *National Geographic Magazine*, CNN, and NPR. She holds degrees from Tufts University, University of Oxford, and the Georgia Institute of Technology and is an adjunct professor at Emory University. Tara also serves in a number of leadership positions within the conservation, primate, and academic communities.

**Marcie Beskind**  
**Chief Financial Officer**

Marcie Beskind serves as Chief Financial Officer for the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund. In this role, she is responsible for the accounting operations and financial reporting for the organization. She also provides support for human resources, information technology, and other administrative areas. Marcie began her career with Deloitte and held management positions at GE Capital, BellSouth, and Turner Broadcasting prior to shifting her focus and passion to the non-profit sector. Most recently, she was the Chief Financial Officer and Chief Administrative Officer at the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta. Marcie is an alumna of Emory University.

**PREFERRED COMPETENCIES AND QUALIFICATIONS**

The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund offers an accomplished development executive with a deep commitment to the Fossey Fund's mission—to conserve, protect, and study gorillas and their habitats in Africa through a successful, integrated approach that includes close collaboration with local governments and communities as well as partners from around the world—the opportunity to take on a senior leadership role at a healthy, highly regarded international institution at a propitious time in its history. With a strong Chief Executive Officer with deep science credentials and a compelling communications capability, a dedicated Board with the capacity to help expand the network of the organization's friends, and early donor response in a significant capital campaign, the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund is poised to extend its work saving an amazing primate species from extinction.

Furthermore, the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund seeks a Chief Development Officer with

- a history of achieving significant fundraising and communications goals while managing a dedicated team;
- superior management skills including expertise in strategic relationship building and enlisting the active participation of stakeholders;
- an understanding of best practices in non-profit marketing and communications;
- capital campaign experience;
- experience leading, managing, motivating, and mentoring a professional staff;
- an ability to build philanthropic relationships with individuals and organizations based upon a common vision;
- an ability to develop multi-year fundraising strategy across multiple channels;
- an ability to set expectations, establish priorities, and manage multiple projects;
- interpersonal effectiveness demonstrated through collaborative, trusting relationships with stakeholders including volunteers, staff, media, and external audiences;
- strong written communications skills in proposal preparation, communication with donors, and reports as well as oral communications skills for individual and group presentations;
- an ability to plan and organize, to think strategically, and build partnerships to efficiently and effectively achieve measurable goals; and
- a strong work ethic and problem-solving skills, a proactive and positive attitude with a focus on results, and unquestionable integrity and trustworthiness.

A bachelor's degree is required for this position as is at least five years of progressively responsible experience in senior level management in non-profit development.

## SALARY AND BENEFITS

The salary range for this position is \$150,000 to \$170,000 annually. The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund offers a comprehensive package of benefits.

## LOCATION

The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund is located in Atlanta, Georgia. The office headquarters currently functions on a hybrid schedule of three days onsite and two days remote. It is strongly preferred that the Chief Development Officer be based in Atlanta the majority of the time.

## APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

All applications must be accompanied by a cover letter and résumé. ***Cover letters should be responsive to the mission of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund as well as the responsibilities and qualifications presented in the prospectus.*** Review of applications will begin immediately and continue until the successful candidate has been selected.

To apply for this position, visit:

[Chief Development Officer, Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund.](#)

To nominate a candidate, please contact Patrick Key, [patrickkey@aspenleadershipgroup.com](mailto:patrickkey@aspenleadershipgroup.com) or Marianna DiVietro, [mariannadivietro@aspenleadershipgroup.com](mailto:mariannadivietro@aspenleadershipgroup.com).

*All inquiries will be held in confidence.*