POSITION DESCRIPTION

Contact: John Torgrimson
john@seedsavers.org

July 2010

Seed Savers Exchange

Executive Director

The mission of Seed Savers Exchange is to save the world's diverse but endangered garden heritage for future generations by building a network of people committed to collecting, conserving, and sharing heirloom seeds and plants. Seed Savers Exchange is also committed to educating people about the value of genetic and cultural diversity.

Seed Savers Exchange boasts a membership base of approximately twelve thousand, a budget of $4 million, and a full-time staff of 35. The Board is comprised of eight distinguished and dedicated individuals. In addition, sixteen advisors lend their expertise as needed. Seed Savers' Heritage Farm, based in Decorah, Iowa, is a living museum of historic vegetable and fruit varieties on 890 scenic acres.

Seed Savers Exchange (SSE) was founded in 1975 by Diane Ott Whealy and Kent Whealy with a gift of seeds from Diane's grandfather. 2010 marks SSE's 35th anniversary year. Since the organization's founding, SSE members have passed on approximately a million samples of rare garden seeds to other gardeners.

Facilities at Heritage Farm, include a complex of offices and seed storage facilities, an inspirational meeting area in the barn's cathedral-like loft, and a new visitors center. Collections of endangered food crops as well as rare poultry and livestock are maintained and displayed. Each summer, an estimated eighteen thousand visitors tour Heritage Farm's organic Preservation Gardens, Historic Orchard, and Twin Valley Farms.

http://www.seedsavers.org

BASIC FUNCTION

Reporting to and working closely with the Board of Directors, the Executive Director is responsible for implementing the strategic direction for the organization as determined by the Board. It is critically important that the Executive Director be able to act as a catalyst who can create excitement and energy among members, Board, and staff, and encourage others to support the organization's agenda and move it forward. The Executive Director is responsible for managing the Seed Savers day-to-day operations, staff, and all budget and fiscal matters. Additionally, the Executive Director will be expected to develop strategies to increase membership, alliances with like-minded organizations, visibility, and support.

PRIORITIES

The Executive Director's priorities during the first 12 to 18 months will be to:

- Thoroughly understand Seed Savers, its mission, membership, programs, operations, culture and environment; understand its streams of financial support and the overall funding requirements of the organization short- and long-term;

- In partnership with the Board and with feedback from membership and staff, review SSE's strengths and weaknesses as well as its overall strategy, focus and direction;

- Establish a strong working relationship with the Board and build their trust and confidence by infusing energy and a sense of strategic direction into the organization; forge relationships with Board members that will bring forth their best ideas and efforts to support and enhance SSE's services and membership recruitment and retention;

- Increase awareness of and visibility for SSE; serve as an effective and visible spokesperson/advocate with the media and the public and with the organization's various constituencies;

- Establish and maintain a strong working relationship with partners and sister organizations; continue to foster a positive relationship between SSE and Decorah; become familiar with the history between the organization and the city and get to know the local supporters;

- Work in partnership with the Board of Directors and staff to sustain and grow a sound funding base that supports current and future SSE projects; specifically, create strategies designed to increase and retain membership; thoroughly understand the program and services of Seed Savers; know how they are structured and funded, whom the organization is serving, how money is spent, and what it costs to deliver programs, products and services efficiently; seek additional partnerships or collaborative opportunities to expand SSE's visibility and enhance its impact on the field of biodiversity;

- Develop in cooperation with the Board a strategic plan, with an emphasis on identifying what makes Seed Savers distinct from like-minded organizations, and why members and others should support SSE.

ONGOING RESPONSIBILITIES

The Executive Director will also be expected to:

GENERAL MANAGEMENT, FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

- Understand and assess structures, processes and systems to ensure that day-to-day operations of Seed Savers are supported as well as smoothly and effectively administered; effectively manage communication across the organization;

- Manage in a fiscally sound manner; direct all financial operations, including the budget process, financial reporting to the Board, expenses, projected levels of funding and cash flow;

- Reach out to and connect with a dedicated staff; listen, acknowledge and champion their commitment and accomplishments.

MEMBERSHIP AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS

- Be an enthusiastic advocate for SSE's mission and programs, internally and externally; articulate a clear and compelling case for support of Seed Savers and actively communicate this message to a broadened base of supporters and partners;

- Assume a proactive, creative and entrepreneurial leadership role in the identification, cultivation and solicitation of new members; working with the Board and others as appropriate.

BOARD RELATIONS

- Determine ways to increase the engagement and involvement of Board members; regularly brief the Board on the status of the organization and relevant governance issues; develop creative and compelling ways to partner with the Board in strategic planning, visibility enhancement and resource development.

PROGRAM, PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

- Work closely with the Board to review existing programs, products and services, and to affirm their relevance to the goals of Seed Savers; cultivate mutually beneficial and collaborative relationships with other organizations and institutions; with feedback from membership and staff and in collaboration with the Board, develop and evaluate ideas for new services to further implement the organizational mission.

IDEAL EXPERIENCE

The ideal candidate will be a creative, entrepreneurial leader with the following experience and qualifications:

- An understanding and commitment to biodiversity and the Seed Savers Exchange mission;

- Proven managerial, problem-solving and fundraising experience in the not-for-profit, public or private sectors; previous experience with strategic planning and acting as a visionary and servant leader; successful at building consensus and creating an operational plan to meet strategic goals;

- Experience in the vegetable seed industry;

- Experience leading, developing and working with a membership constituency would be ideal; experience working with a board and other volunteers; an ability to work collaboratively with and inspire constituents with diverse interests and areas of expertise;

- A record of success setting priorities for staff and for an organization; adept at balancing internal management with external presence and relationships;

- An ability to communicate passionately, clearly and concisely, both in writing and verbally; comfortable with both formal and extemporaneous presentations;

- Demonstrated competence, ease and experience handling multiple revenue streams and budgets effectively; success and creativity in identifying and developing earned income opportunities.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

The successful candidate will be:

- Able to reach out to and connect with a dedicated staff, as well as listen, acknowledge and champion heir commitment and accomplishments;

- Committed to and enthusiastic about the mission and services of SSE;

- A leader with outstanding communication and interpersonal skills; diplomatic, outgoing, straightforward and self-possessed; one who shares information readily, listens well and respects the abilities of others – good “antennae”; able to engage individuals at all levels in a variety of settings;
- A self-starter who pairs innovation with practicality, strategic sense with expedience; confident, creative and entrepreneurial; “big picture” leader;

- Energetic and creative; able to envision the organization from the broadest of perspectives, map out its future, and act quickly to assess and create opportunities for strengthening and development;

- Emotionally mature with a sense of humor and the sensitivity to work with a group of diverse personalities; decisive and resourceful, with the organizational sensitivity to gain the support and confidence of the membership, Board and staff.

Seed Savers Exchange
July 2010