



NOLS

Search for President

ABOUT NOLS

NOLS is a global, non-profit wilderness educational institution driven by its mission to be the leading source and teacher of wilderness and leadership skills. By leveraging its distinctive expertise and passion for the wild, NOLS endeavors to provide transformative experiences to a diverse body of students. Founded in 1965 as the National Outdoor Leadership School by Paul Petzoldt to teach wilderness skills through extended expeditions, NOLS has greatly expanded the breadth and reach of its exceptionally high-quality wilderness and leadership education programs and has emerged as the global leader in the field. The founder's vision of nurturing leaders who know how to live responsibly in the wilderness and are capable of teaching others to do the same endures today and comes to life through a diverse and passionate community of "NOLSies." NOLS staff, students, trustees, and alumni share a commitment to wilderness, education, leadership, safety, community, inclusivity, and excellence that guides the organization's modern vision. Its new president will build on this legacy and utilize the broad scope of NOLS' expertise to inspire its community and to continue innovating programs that attract and engage students, whether in classrooms close to home or in remote wilderness areas around the world.

NOLS is headquartered in Lander, a small community in central Wyoming, nestled at the edge of Shoshone National Forest, where NOLS also holds the forest's largest land use permit. Although based in Lander, NOLS is a global organization in its expertise, outlook, and influence. It has 17 unique operational locations worldwide, operates in all 50 states and in dozens of countries, and employs nearly 1,400 individuals as full-time and part-time staff. NOLS enrolls more than 28,000 students annually and has more than 360,000 active alumni. The school has an annual budget of approximately \$40 million and an endowment approaching \$45 million.

NOLS stands at an exciting inflection point. Its mission of connecting a global audience with wilderness experiences and developing leadership skills has never been more relevant. The school has matured as an organization and grown significantly, expanding its mission, global reach, and programmatic offerings. Outgoing President John Gans led this evolution over his 24-year tenure as president. His impact on NOLS has been extraordinary and will be enduring. The organization is poised to welcome a leader who will build on past achievements and expand NOLS' unwavering commitment to leadership development, transformative impact, diversity, and sustainability in addition to stewardship of its wilderness classrooms. The incoming president has the opportunity to lead the next phase of NOLS' vision, ethos, and culture, while also refining its value proposition in the increasingly competitive world of wilderness education.

NOLS Pillars

NOLS develops the next generation of leaders and cultivates new and diverse audiences through its core pillars in Expeditions, Wilderness Medicine, Custom Education, and Risk Services. With an innovative curriculum, powerful pedagogy, and world-class instructors, NOLS courses focus on building interpersonal and outdoor skills that transform lives and prepare students for success in school, careers, and beyond. Wherever students travel or learn with NOLS, they emerge with a leadership framework and

“expedition behavior” that emphasizes these values: competence, communication, judgment, teamwork, respect for others, self-awareness, optimism, vision and action, and tolerance for adversity.

Expeditions

NOLS began by leading wilderness expeditions, and expeditions remain a critical part of the school’s identity and mission. Alumni of NOLS Expedition courses feel a particular passion and conviction about the school and describe profound experiences on these fully immersive, demanding courses. On NOLS Expeditions, students spend anywhere from one week to several months in the wilderness at one of the school’s 17 locations, learning outdoor skills like backpacking, rock climbing, kayaking, and more. Students experience a rigorous leadership progression and build confidence as they practice leading in real-life situations. Expeditions maintain an average instructor-to-student ratio of 1:4, meaning students benefit from personalized education with the best instructors in the industry. In recent years, demand for expeditions has softened, especially for extended, semester-long courses. In this digital age, to overcome the headwinds posed by interest in shorter courses, the Expeditions program must clearly articulate the unique value of leadership and personal development granted by extended wilderness experiences. Looking ahead, there will be an opportunity for Expeditions to reach a new, broader audience and further strengthen enrollment through program innovation and enhanced marketing, while embracing the strengths that make an Expedition a singular, transformative experience. <https://www.nols.edu/en/about/expeditions/>

Wilderness Medicine

In 1999, NOLS acquired the Wilderness Medicine Institute, the nation’s leading provider of wilderness first aid and wilderness first responder courses. The addition of Wilderness Medicine curriculum naturally complemented NOLS’ legacy expedition offerings. NOLS Wilderness Medicine has grown steadily and today provides industry-recognized wilderness medicine credentials to 23,500 students annually, both directly and through partnerships with organizations such as REI, Landmark Learning, and over 400 sponsor organizations. Courses operate in all 50 states and more than 40 countries, and can last from a 2-day wilderness first aid introduction in an urban environment for those with no previous medical experience, to a month-long Wilderness EMT course on NOLS’ Wyss Campus outside Lander, or a 28-day traverse of the Gila Wilderness for senior medical students, team-taught with Harvard Emergency Medicine faculty. Rapidly-expanding student demand over the years has made Wilderness Medicine a large and consequential driver of the school’s mission. In addition, Wilderness Medicine has expanded access to NOLS and has been an important bridge to introduce a more diverse audience to the full range of NOLS programs. <https://www.nols.edu/en/about/wilderness-medicine/>

Custom Education

NOLS created Custom Education in 1999 to serve corporate and group markets. Custom Education provides personalized leadership training to organizations as varied as NASA, Google, business schools, youth pathway programs, four-year federal military service institutions, and secondary schools. Custom Expedition offerings provide a 7- to 30-day wilderness expedition, where groups travel, live, and learn in the backcountry. NOLS also offers the Leadership Navigation Challenge, which is a 1- to 3-day course that blends classroom and experiential learning. NOLS has successfully leveraged the strategic partnerships developed through Custom Education to introduce a broader audience to the school. <https://www.nols.edu/en/about/custom-education/>

Risk Services

Careful risk management has been the foundation on which NOLS students have thrived as the school has offered decades of educational experiences, which by definition are under demanding conditions. Through careful leadership, the NOLS risk management team pioneered a practice of data-gathering and analysis to discern patterns underlying student and instructor 'near-misses,' injuries, and illnesses. Then, importantly, it began to disseminate lessons learned from this process as best-practices. This helped drive a culture at NOLS of continuous improvement where safety is recognized as measureable and a critical professional metric. This NOLS-grown process and culture has continuously raised the bar for student health and safety and led to a safety database and risk mitigation expertise without parallel in the outdoor education universe.

These successes led to the creation of NOLS Risk Services. This team provides risk management reviews, custom designed training, and consultations to organizations with outdoor education programs and interests. It also provides experiential classroom trainings on how to identify hazards and manage risk in the outdoors. NOLS Risk Services serves as a founder and legacy partner of the national Wilderness Risk Management Conference, now in its 25th year. <https://www.nols.edu/en/about/risk-services/>

Staff and Students

NOLS accomplishes its mission through an extraordinary team of faculty and 'in-town' professionals: whether it is engaging a prospective student on their first call to Admissions or helping a multi-course graduate winnow their best options for an Alumni Trip. NOLS thrives because of the hard work and expertise of 150 administrative staff located in NOLS headquarters in Lander and 225 staff overseeing operations of the school's 17 domestic and international locations. NOLS instructors are gifted educators without parallel. Each year, over 1,150 instructors share their talents as wilderness and leadership experts and world-class risk managers who create transformative student experiences. Some teach full-time and many in more than one of the school's pillars. The school's operations are led by a team of accomplished outdoor professionals who are wholly committed to the NOLS mission. NOLS' organizational culture seeks to mirror the leadership philosophy taught in the field, and accordingly community, transparency, and independence are highly valued in the staff. As NOLS has grown to become a complex global institution, it has worked to build a cohesive culture among its diverse staff dispersed across remote locations around the world.

There is no one prototypical NOLS student. Courses are offered to students ranging in age from early teens to mature adults. Age and ability requirements are course dependent. NOLS supports students by providing more financial aid than any organization in the industry, awarding nearly \$1.9 million in scholarships in FY 2018. Each year, the Gateway Partner Scholarship Program provides opportunities for approximately 150 youth from up to 30 official partner organizations to expand their leadership and wilderness skills at one of NOLS' seven domestic operating locations.

Locations

The construction of the NOLS headquarters (HQ) in Lander, Wyoming in 2001 solidified the school's place in and commitment to the surrounding community. Across the street from HQ is the historic Noble Hotel, which NOLS owns and renovated in 2005. The Noble provides a comfortable and welcoming first introduction for many NOLS students and a "home base" for many instructors. Additionally, the Wyss Wilderness Medicine Campus (20 minutes outside of Lander) was completed in 2012. It is the first LEED Platinum project in Lander and the fifth in the state of Wyoming. The campus, home to the growing NOLS Wilderness Medicine Wilderness EMT program, includes classrooms, housing, and kitchen and dining facilities.

Current NOLS locations include: Alaska, East Africa, India, Mexico, New Zealand, Northeast, Pacific Northwest, Patagonia, River Base, Rocky Mountain, Scandinavia, Southwest, Teton Valley, Three Peaks Ranch, Wyss Campus, and Yukon.

With a significant portion of its operations by permit on public lands, NOLS relies on positive, supportive relations with public lands and government partners for its outdoor classrooms. Increasing constraints on use in these wild spaces and changing government regulations present ongoing challenges for the school. From its founding, NOLS has promoted the protection of its wilderness classrooms through environmental education and stewardship and will engage selectively in environmental advocacy work in areas where the organization has unique and credible interests and knowledge.

Finance

NOLS' financial position has strengthened considerably over the last decade, and the school has a healthy foundation for growth and long-term sustainability. NOLS' annual operating budget is \$40 million. In FY 2019, 90% of revenue came from tuition and other program income; 6% from philanthropy; and 4% from the endowment. Approximately 65% of tuition revenue comes from NOLS Expedition programs, 22% from the Wilderness Medicine program, and 13% from Custom Education and Risk Services. Total endowments currently stand at \$45 million. It is important to highlight that NOLS has had notable recent successes in major and annual giving through its *Step Forward* capital campaign and is on track to meet its \$30 million goal by the end of 2020.

THE PRESIDENT

The NOLS president must share the community's passion for the mission and embrace the school's core values on a deep level. The president reports to the NOLS Board of Trustees and maintains overall responsibility for the school's activities, including communications, development, finance, and operations. The president also serves as NOLS' primary spokesperson and representative in a wide variety of external contexts, including meeting regularly with donors, grantees, and industry and government partners across the globe. The president directs the organization's administration and supervises five administrative directors in development and alumni, faculty and studies, finance and investments, marketing, and operations.

NOLS recognizes that risk is inherent in wilderness experiences, and it embraces thoughtful acceptance that risk is a core element of the school's curriculum and pedagogy. While a meticulous risk management consciousness pervades and guides every aspect of NOLS' operations, there are no simple solutions for complex emergency situations. To this end, the president must understand risk and crisis management and fully appreciate the grave responsibility that comes with oversight of faculty and students in the field. Receiving and valuing feedback is a critical aspect of assuming the responsibility and accountability associated with NOLS' operations. The president must have the ability to lead with integrity, respect for others, wisdom, grace, humanity, and empathy in the face of adversity.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The NOLS community has enormous respect for all that has been accomplished over its 54-year history to establish the institution as the international leader in wilderness education. Simultaneously, it recognizes that NOLS must continue to evolve to meet the changing needs and demands of its global context and will welcome a new leader's perspectives to guide the school's exciting next chapters. The president will succeed by creating a compelling narrative that tells the story of the school's distinguished history through to its current multifaceted identity and by balancing its mission and traditions with the need to

nimbly adapt to overcome future challenges. While the next leader is expected to embrace the core values and rich history of NOLS, they are also expected to bring fresh perspectives to the organization as it expands its reach and impact. Specific opportunities and challenges include:

Enhance reach, visibility, and impact

NOLS has the capacity to dramatically expand its impact through its diverse programmatic strengths, global reach, and innovative educators. The range of offerings is a distinguishing feature and competitive strength of the school. However, it also creates a challenge for brand identity, marketing, and focus. The president will foster more connections across the pillars and leverage all of the school's strengths and assets to engage all stakeholders and increase visibility in new markets. NOLS has relied heavily on word of mouth marketing. It is respected and cherished by those who know it, and its alumni body increasingly helps to spread the word about the school's transformational impact on their lives and careers. In the years ahead, articulating to new audiences NOLS' relevance and value will be critical for expanding its mission and its financial performance.

Create a more inclusive, responsive, and diverse organization

NOLS is committed to extending the reach of its mission to a broader audience, providing students with the best experiences possible, and expanding alumni engagement in the work of the school. Achieving these three goals demands that the school weave diversity and inclusion into the fabric of its culture. To date, much work has been done to advance equity and inclusion, but there must be deeper conversation, structure, and action. The president will be expected to lead an ongoing, institution-wide commitment to diversity, inclusion, and access within NOLS. Specific aspects of this work will be to ensure that the NOLS experience is available and welcoming to diverse audiences, particularly to a global audience and those with historically-limited access to the distinctive transformative experience in the wild that NOLS offers, and that NOLS students and staff encounter and embrace a culture of inclusivity, respect, and belonging in the community. Continuing to recruit staff and board members who bring a wide range of perspectives and experiences will enrich the organization and advance these conversations. It is critical that the president promotes equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts at each global site, appreciating each site's distinct context and rich opportunities.

Lead strategic planning

NOLS has undergone significant growth and transformation in its short existence and the next president will enter at another key moment in its trajectory. The president will lead a school that is larger, more globally engaged, more diverse in its programs, and more complex operationally. NOLS also faces a dramatically different and dynamic external environment. As the school looks ahead, the president will engage the NOLS community in creating a strategic plan that is responsive to current market and fiscal demands while still keeping wilderness at its core. Tapping into the creativity and expertise of the community and inspiring NOLS to achieve greater impact will be important priorities. The president will serve as a compelling and unifying voice, bringing people all across the NOLS community together around shared goals and adoption of this plan while respecting the school's distinguished past and honoring the deep commitments and relationships that various NOLS constituents have with the school.

Ensure financial stability

The president should focus on developing a robust, sustainable business model that relies on multiple forms of revenue and leads the organization toward long-term financial health and vibrancy. Program and course revenue are a key driver in the NOLS financial model. The next president must be keenly aware of enrollment trends and projections and ensure effective management of revenue-generating programs and

the strategic use of financial aid. At the same time, the school must focus on growing revenues from diverse sources, including individual donors, organizational funders, and corporate or government partners. This will enable NOLS to explore ways to improve staff compensation and invest in new programming. The president serves as the lead fundraiser and will collaborate with NOLS' development team – and stakeholders across the organization – to position NOLS to achieve a broad base of philanthropic support.

Improve operations and infrastructure

As NOLS moves forward into its next era, it will be critical that the organization is forward-looking, flexible, nimble, and efficient. As a high-growth organization with dispersed teams and disparate programmatic needs, NOLS developed independent systems and processes to meet its needs. Now, as a more mature and sophisticated organization, there is a need to implement technology and operational solutions that will further unify the school, increase effectiveness, and support staff around the world. The president will need to understand the ways in which technology can support efficient business practices and organizational effectiveness and prioritize investment in new administrative systems and processes. The school has achieved a size and scale that merit an overall review of the organizational chart, staffing structures, and professional development opportunities.

THE SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE

For this important role, NOLS seeks an exceptional leader who is passionate about the school's mission, committed to its longstanding values and standards of excellence, supportive of its culture, and farsighted about its future potential. While no single candidate will have all the ideal qualifications, the successful candidate should possess many of the following qualifications and characteristics:

- A deep appreciation for and commitment to wilderness and leadership education; an ability and desire to lead a discussion—both within the NOLS community and externally on national and global levels—about the value of wilderness education for individuals and institutions in a time of unprecedented global opportunities and challenges.
- An ability to work with stakeholders to develop a strategic vision based on an understanding of what makes NOLS distinctive; the management savvy to execute that vision in a practical and inspiring way.
- Experience in a global organization and a high degree of cultural fluency and competency required to work effectively with international teams and locals; multilingual competency is a plus.
- An inventive and entrepreneurial mindset and a willingness to take calculated risks to enhance NOLS' identity and course delivery.
- A talent for leading fundraising and an ability to passionately communicate to prospective donors NOLS' vision and relevance today.
- Proven skill in working with a governing board and external advisory board; experience in building and maintaining an engaged and supportive board.
- A demonstrated successful track record of risk and crisis management.
- A commitment to the NOLS' core values of diversity, equity, and inclusion, demonstrated by real experience and engagement in one's own life and work.
- A demonstrated track record in responding successfully to broad market trends.
- An inspirational and transparent communication style in diverse settings, ranging from large groups to one-on-one conversations; a capacity to connect with and relate to members of the NOLS community on a personal level.
- Self-awareness and the tendency to respond to dissonance with curiosity and inquiry.

- A record of outstanding organizational management and as an excellent listener who can build strong relationships and maintain open, accessible lines of communication with students, faculty, staff members, alumni/ae, and parents.
- A record of building and maintaining external relations and advancing an organization's profile and reputation regionally, nationally, and internationally.
- An appreciation of the utility of new technologies and social media.

APPLICATIONS, NOMINATIONS, AND INQUIRIES

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be submitted via electronic mail to:

www.imsearch.com/6971

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