

Executive Leadership Opportunity

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Mpala Research Centre
Laikipia County, Kenya

About Mpala Research Centre

Mpala Research Centre is one of the world's premier field-based research and training institutions, situated on 48,000 acres in the Laikipia ecosystem of central Kenya. Known as Africa's Living Laboratory, Mpala provides an unparalleled setting for scientific discovery, education, and innovation. Established in 1994 as a partnership among the Kenya Wildlife Service, the National Museums of Kenya, the Kenyan Wildlife Research and Training Institute (WRTI), the Smithsonian Institution, and Princeton University, Mpala was created to advance research, teaching, conservation, and community engagement in one of Africa's most ecologically important and biologically diverse landscapes. Since 2018, Princeton University has served as Mpala's managing partner, providing strategic leadership, management of fundraising and communications, and operational oversight on behalf of the partnership.

For more than three decades, Mpala has provided an exceptional platform for interdisciplinary research and education spanning biodiversity, ecology, climate change, genomics, one health, wildlife conservation, and human–wildlife interactions. Each year, the Centre and research institutions in Kenya, across Africa, and around the world.

Supporting this globally scientific hub, is a workforce of more than 230 employees across research support, conservation, hospitality, finance, security, infrastructure and administration. Together, these multidisciplinary teams lead the delivery of Mpala's research mission.

Mpala is committed to advancing discovery, developing the next generation of scientists, strengthening partnerships with Kenyan and international institutions, and engaging constructively with neighboring communities. Its unique combination of protected habitats, working rangelands, livestock operations, world-class research infrastructure, and long-term ecological datasets enables research at scale that is difficult to replicate elsewhere.

Guided by a five-year (2024-2029) strategic plan that focuses on three pillars of Purpose, People and Place, Mpala is entering an ambitious new phase of expanded institutional impact. The Centre is improving its research capacity, increasing opportunities for African researchers and students, investing in research and essential campus infrastructure, strengthening strategic partnerships, and building a financially sustainable future to support its mission for decades to come.

About the Position

The Executive Director (ED) provides visionary leadership and overall executive management of Mpala Research Centre, ensuring the successful delivery of its mission while positioning the Centre for long-term scientific excellence, organizational sustainability, national and international impact.

The Executive Director reports to the Chair of the Board of Directors, who is an executive leader at Princeton University where he serves as Vice Provost for International Affairs.

The Executive Director will work in close partnership with Mpala's inaugural Chief Scientist (upcoming role), who will be responsible for Mpala's research strategy, research excellence, and global research partnerships development. Both the ED and the Chief Scientist will report to the Chair of the Board. Together, these complementary leadership roles will continue to strengthen Mpala's position as a globally recognized centre for research, education, conservation, and community engagement.

The Ideal Candidate

The successful candidate will be an accomplished executive leader with a demonstrated ability to manage complex organizations through growth and change while fostering a high-performing, values-driven organizational culture.

They will bring a genuine commitment to advancing scientific research, conservation, education, and community engagement in Kenya while recognizing the importance of building strong partnerships that enhance Mpala's national and global impact.

They will possess exceptional strategic, financial, and operational leadership skills, complemented by outstanding interpersonal abilities and a collaborative leadership style. The successful candidate will have the credibility and confidence to engage effectively with Boards, government leaders, researchers, donors, communities, universities, conservation partners, and staff at every level of the organization.

Key Responsibilities

Organizational Leadership and Operations

- Provide leadership and oversight of the management of research and teaching functions for domestic and international scientists, scholars, and students.
- Build, mentor and inspire executive leadership team and entire organization in creating a culture of accountability and collaboration.
- Oversee the effective management of operations and staffing in line with the strategy and established budget
- Ensure the safety and security and well-being of Mpala's staff, researchers, students, visitors, and wildlife.

- Ensure implementation of policies, structures, and systems to effect good management and governance. Engage, as needed, to resolve conflicts and crises.
- Oversee organizational risk management, business continuity, legal compliance, and institutional resilience.
- Oversee conservation and rangeland management and other potential land uses (e.g. tourism, rewilding efforts) in a way that maintains the primacy of Mpala's research and teaching mission.
- Uphold the highest standards of ethical leadership, accountability, compliance, and organizational integrity.

Financial Performance and Institutional Sustainability

- Provide overall leadership for financial planning, budgeting, forecasting, and resource allocation, ensuring responsible stewardship of organizational assets.
- Develop and implement strategies that strengthen Mpala's long-term financial sustainability through diversified revenue generation, earned income, strategic partnerships, and philanthropic support.
- Identify opportunities to expand mission-aligned income streams while preserving the integrity of Mpala's research, teaching, and conservation objectives.
- Oversee financial performance, ensuring sound fiscal management, robust internal controls, and compliance with statutory, donor, and governance requirements.
- Support the development of philanthropic partnerships within Kenya while working closely with the Board Chair and international partners to strengthen Mpala's broader philanthropic investment strategy.

External Stakeholder Relations and Communication

- Serve as Mpala's principal spokesperson within Kenya, working collaboratively with the Board Chair and communications partners to ensure consistent institutional messaging internationally.
- Build and maintain trusted relationships and deep engagement with county and national government agencies, non-governmental organizations, institutions of higher education, policy makers, and other stakeholders.
- Facilitate deep connections with neighboring communities, conservancies, and other organizations in Laikipia County to advance research and position Mpala as a regional hub for research in the region.
- Represent Mpala nationally and regionally, promoting its scientific contributions, conservation leadership, educational programmes, and societal impact.
- Promote Mpala as a trusted centre of excellence that contributes meaningfully to Kenya's scientific, conservation, educational, and socio-economic development.

Board Relations and Governance

- Build a strong and productive partnership with the Board Chair and Board of Directors based on trust, transparency, and shared strategic objectives.
- Provide the Board with timely, accurate, and relevant information to support effective governance and informed decision-making.
- Support the Board in fulfilling its governance, fiduciary, and strategic oversight responsibilities.
- Ensure the implementation of Board decisions and regularly report on organizational performance, strategic progress, institutional risks, and emerging opportunities.

Qualifications

Education and Professional Qualifications

- A postgraduate degree from a recognized university in Business Administration, Finance, Law, Environmental Science, Conservation, Natural Resource Management, Organizational Leadership, or a related discipline. A doctoral degree or other advanced qualification is an added advantage.
- Significant executive leadership, governance, and management qualifications.

Experience and Skills

- Proven experience of executive leadership, ideally as a CEO, Executive Director or in an equivalent senior leadership role within a complex organization with a record of achieving operational excellence.
- At least 10 years of progressive senior leadership experience with responsibility in organizational strategy, operations, finance, governance, legal people leadership.
- Demonstrated executive leadership experience within a complex scientific, research, conservation, or other knowledge-intensive organization of significant operational scale and complexity. Experience should include leading the overall management of an organization, beyond academic teaching or faculty leadership and experience overseeing science programs.
- Outstanding leadership, organizational, and delegation abilities. Ability to handle unexpected challenges and manage multiple, evolving, and competing priorities and expectations.
- Demonstrated ability to lead complex organizations operating in dynamic, resource-constrained, and geographically dispersed environments while balancing competing priorities and making sound strategic decisions.
- Proven experience developing and implementing strategic plans, translating organizational vision into measurable outcomes and long-term institutional impact.
- Capacity for innovative and entrepreneurial approaches to solve complex problems.
- Exposure and experience working with international teams and dealing in a culturally appropriate manner with a range of stakeholders, from high level government officials to community members. Ability to develop and sustain authentic relationships with key stakeholders.

- Strong negotiation, diplomacy, and influencing skills, with the ability to build consensus across diverse stakeholder groups and navigate complex organizational environments.
- Excellent written, verbal, presentation, and interpersonal communication skills in English. Working knowledge of Kiswahili.

Attributes

- Commitment to the highest ethical and professional standards; personal and professional integrity above reproach.
- Deep commitment to research, teaching, and learning and to advancing science, conservation, and community engagement in Kenya.
- Strong customer-centric and stakeholder engagement orientation, dedication to assuring a productive and congenial experience.
- Capacity to be both adaptable and tenacious in navigating complex environments.
- Demonstrated commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and cross-cultural engagement.
- Keen diplomatic and political instincts. An accessible and engaging style; the ability to circulate, listen, and learn; a commitment to consult extensively, coupled with a willingness to act decisively; a bias for action and an orientation towards results.
- An authentic and emotionally intelligent leader who demonstrates curiosity, humility, resilience, professional maturity, self-awareness, optimism, and sound judgement.
- A willingness to reside and actively engage in a remote rural setting lacking the amenities of an urban area, while embracing the unique opportunities associated with leading a renowned field research institution.

Eligibility

- Applicants must be legally authorized to work in Kenya and, if appointed, provide valid documentation demonstrating their eligibility to work in accordance with Kenyan immigration and employment laws.
- The Mpala Research Centre is committed to attracting and appointing exceptional talent through a fair, transparent, and merit-based recruitment process. We welcome applications from qualified candidates of all backgrounds who are committed to advancing the Centre's mission, values, and strategic objectives.

Terms of Appointment

- This is a full-time executive leadership position based at the Mpala Research Centre in Laikipia County, Kenya.
- The successful candidate will be expected to reside at Mpala Research Centre and actively engage with staff, researchers, students, partners, neighboring communities, and other stakeholders. The role requires regular travel within Kenya and occasional international travel.
- A competitive executive remuneration package, including benefits appropriate to the responsibilities of the position, will be offered to the successful candidate.

The Search Process

The appointment of the Executive Director will be conducted and overseen by a Search Committee appointed by the Chair of the Board.

Following the application closing date, all applications will be reviewed by the Search Committee against the published selection criteria.

Shortlisted candidates will progress through a structured selection process that will include screening interviews via Zoom, assessments, reference and background checks, and interviews with the Search Committee and other key stakeholders.

The Board reserves the right not to make an appointment should no candidate sufficiently meet the requirements of the position.

Interested candidates are invited to submit the following:

- A Letter of Interest of no more than two (2) pages, outlining the candidate's motivation for applying and demonstrating how their experience, leadership capabilities, and professional background align with the requirements of the role.
- A current Curriculum Vitae (CV) of no more than six (6) pages, highlighting relevant professional experience, leadership responsibilities, qualifications, and key achievements.
- Contact details for three professional referees, preferably individuals who can speak to the candidate's executive leadership, organizational management, and professional performance. Referees will not be contacted without the candidate's prior consent.

Applications should clearly demonstrate the candidate's experience in leading organizations of comparable scale and complexity, including responsibility for strategy, operations, governance, and organizational performance.

Applications should be submitted electronically to recruitment@mpala.org with the subject line "Executive Director – Application".

Application Deadline:

Applications must be submitted by **Wednesday 9th September 2026**.

Applications received after the closing date will not be considered. Please note that only shortlisted candidates will be contacted.