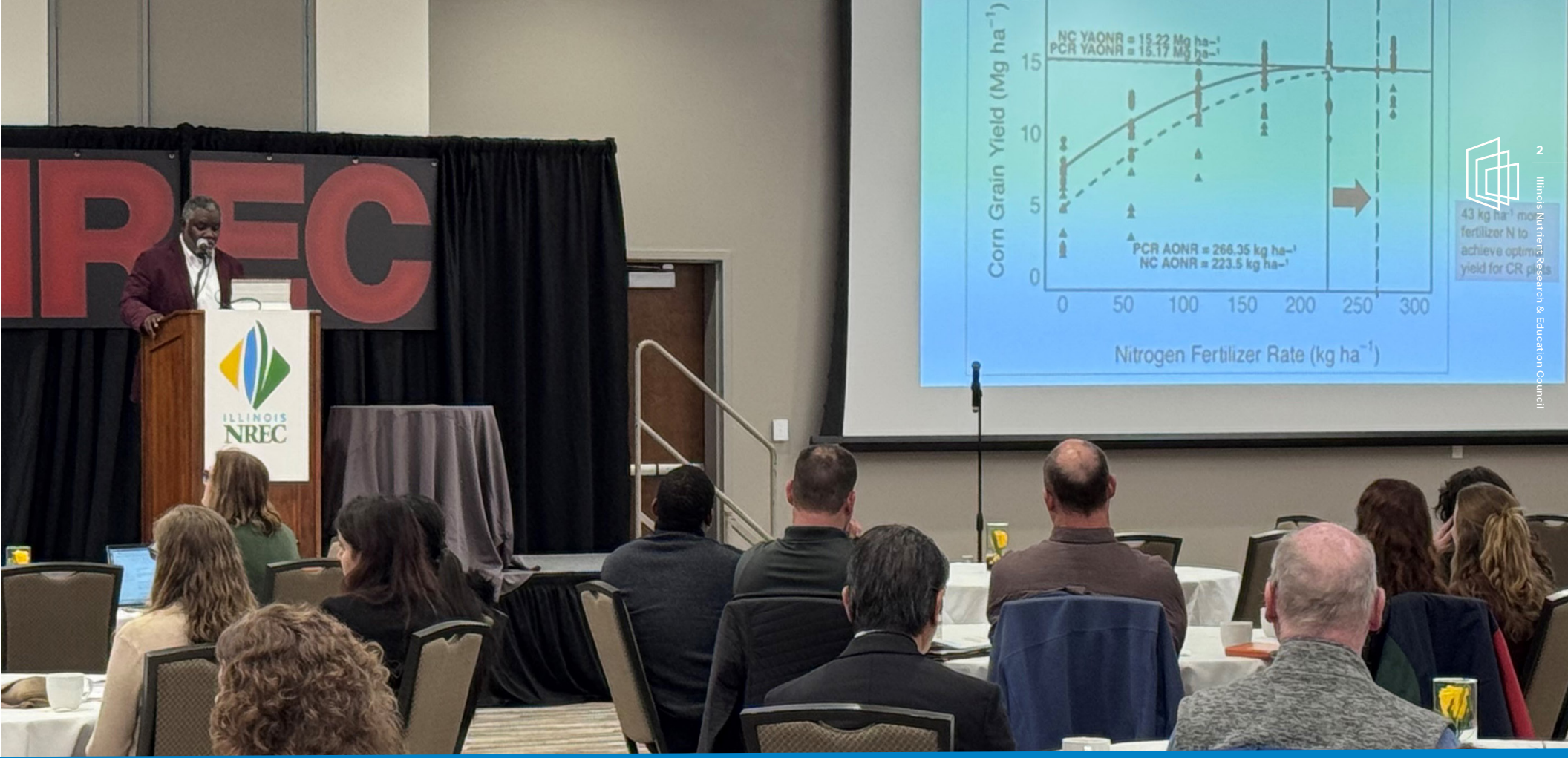


# Opportunity & Position Guide

**ILLINOIS NUTRITION RESEARCH & EDUCATION COUNCIL**  
Position: Executive Director  
Reports to: Board of Directors





The mission of the Illinois Nutrient Research & Education Council (NREC) is to fund science-based research and educational programs that optimize nutrient use efficiency, improve soil fertility, and protect water quality. Created to support the state's Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy, NREC connects agriculture with environmental stewardship to ensure farmers can maximize yields while minimizing environmental impacts.



# Background

NREC, a statewide organization established by the Illinois Fertilizer Act in 2012, is Illinois agriculture's commitment to enhance nutrient utilization, increase crop production and protect water quality. Funded through a fertilizer tonnage assessment, the organization has invested approximately \$43M to date into research projects supporting the state's Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy and promoting sustainable farming practices. Without this funding, the industry would be without critical research into maximizing the efficiency of agricultural nutrients while minimizing any possible negative impacts to the environment.

NREC is managed by a Council of representatives from farm organizations, commercial fertilizers, specialty fertilizer companies, certified crop advisors, Illinois Department of Agriculture, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, the agricultural experiment station and members of environmental organizations also provide input to the Council and help bridge the communication gap between the various industries.

Through efforts of the industry, Illinois NREC was formed with a funding mechanism that allows for collected funds to be sent directly to NREC, avoiding state handling. This process works to ensure that these funds are available for research. The act creating NREC allows the Council to annually set the assessment between \$.50 and \$3/ton. From 2012-2024 the assessment remained at \$.75/ton. In January of 2025, the assessment was increased to \$1/ton. A total of \$1.25/ton of fertilizer sold is collected by retailers.

- \$.025 stays with the Illinois Department of Agriculture to administer the Fertilizer Regulatory Programs in the state
- \$1.00 goes to NREC for investment into nutrient research and outreach programs

NREC is governed by 13-member Board of Directors and has an operating budget of approximately \$5M with two full-time staff (Executive Director and Research Director).

## CORE OBJECTIVES:

### FUNDING TARGETED RESEARCH

Soliciting and backing peer-reviewed research on soil reactions, nutrient management, and conservation practices.

### DRIVING ECONOMIC VALUE

Emphasizing the Return on Investment (ROI) for farmers by identifying the most cost-effective and efficient fertilizer management tactics (such as tools calculating the Maximum Return to Nitrogen).

### OUTREACH

Translating research findings into actionable, on-farm tactics through educational programs for farmers, Certified Crop Advisers, and agribusiness professionals.



# The Opportunity

The Executive Director role presents a unique opportunity for a strategic, relationship-driven leader to help shape the future of the NREC. As the organization's senior leader, the Executive Director will play a highly visible and hands-on role in advancing NREC's mission, expanding its reach, and strengthening its impact across the agricultural and research communities. Because NREC is comprised of a diverse stakeholder group with differing agendas and priorities, the Executive Director must be able to keep everyone focused on mutual interest and benefit. Given the organization's lean structure, the Executive Director will oversee a broad portfolio of operational and financial responsibilities.

In addition to leading the organization's education, outreach, and stakeholder engagement efforts, the Executive Director will oversee the recruitment and hiring of a permanent Research Director, as the position is currently being filled on an interim basis. This partnership between the Executive Director and Research Director is central to the

organization's success and offers the incoming leader an opportunity to help shape the future structure, culture, and strategic direction of the organization.

A primary focus of the Executive Director will be translating and elevating NREC's funded research for a broad range of audiences. The successful candidate will build awareness of the Council and its work by communicating research findings in compelling and accessible ways to growers, industry leaders, researchers, policymakers, and other key stakeholders. The Executive Director will serve as a connector and ambassador, ensuring that NREC remains a trusted and influential voice in nutrient management research and education.

The Executive Director will also provide leadership and support to the Board of Directors and its committees, helping drive strategic priorities, governance, and organizational effectiveness. In partnership with Board leadership, the Executive Director will coordinate, produce, and manage key convenings



and events, including the annual Investment Insights Live meeting, where funded research projects are presented and discussed and future research funding priorities are evaluated and determined.

An important aspect of the position is serving as the public face of the organization. The Executive Director will communicate NREC's impact to farmers, policymakers, industry leaders, researchers, and environmental stakeholders while helping build consensus around nutrient stewardship and water quality goals. Success in the role will depend on strong communication and relationship-building skills, strategic leadership capabilities, and the ability to translate scientific research into practical agricultural solutions that resonate with diverse audiences.

The Executive Director will have the chance to lead a respected and influential organization at a pivotal time for agriculture and environmental sustainability. As nutrient efficiency, soil health, and water quality continue to be central issues for Illinois agriculture, the Executive Director will play a role in shaping research investments, advancing innovation, and ensuring that Illinois producers have access to science-based solutions that support both productivity and environmental responsibility.

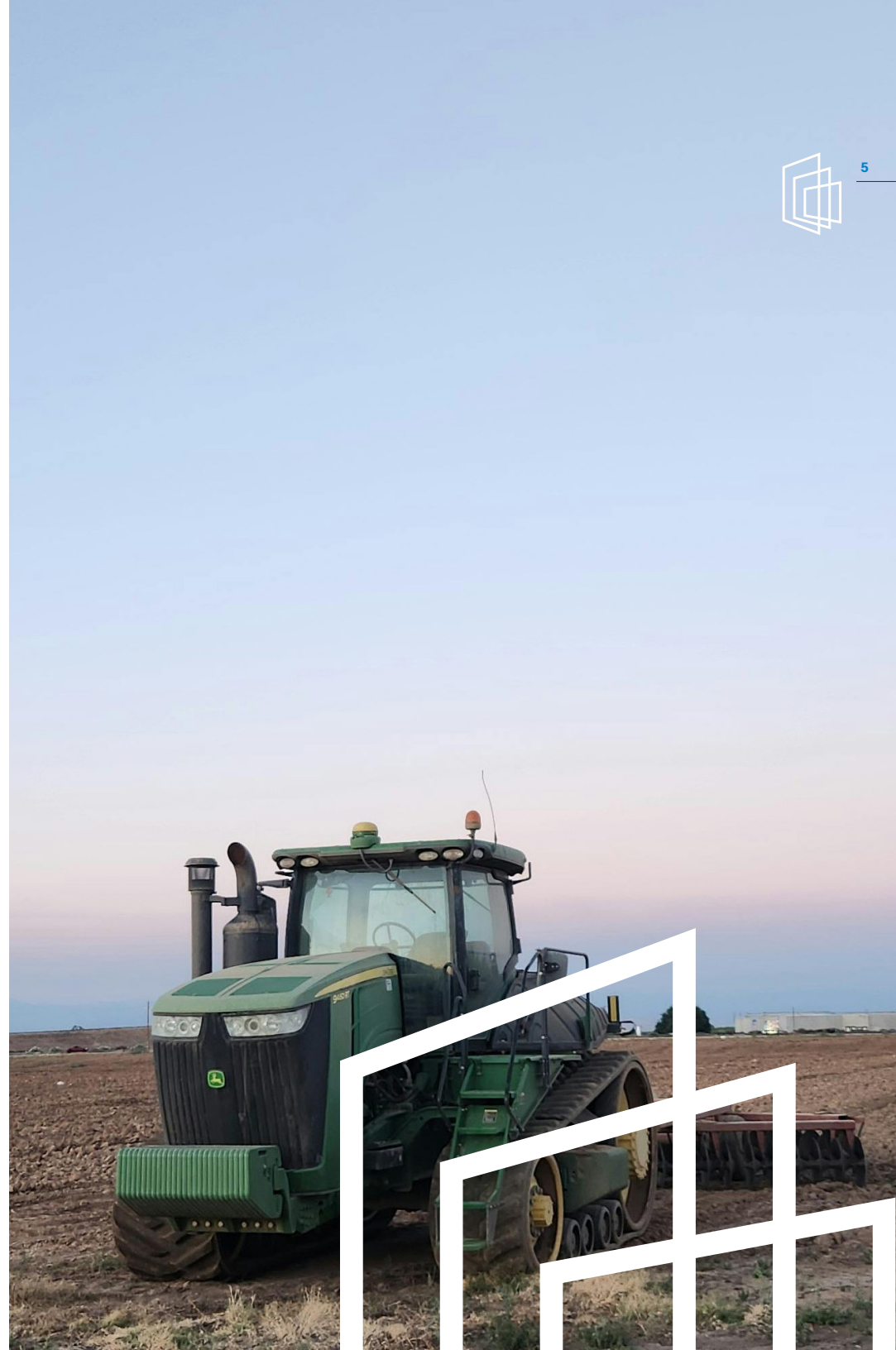
This is an exceptional opportunity for a collaborative and entrepreneurial leader who thrives in a lean organizational environment, values scientific research and education, and is energized by building partnerships, amplifying impact, and advancing meaningful work that benefits agriculture and environmental stewardship nationwide.

#### **SALARY & BENEFITS**

\$125,000 - \$150,000 plus benefits including healthcare allowance

#### **LOCATION**

Springfield or Bloomington, Illinois. This is a fully remote position.





# The Position

The Executive Director serves as the chief executive officer of the NREC, providing strategic leadership, operational oversight, and external representation. This position is responsible for advancing NREC's mission to enhance nutrient utilization, increase crop production, and protect water quality in support of agricultural innovation and sustainability through grantmaking. The Executive Director position requires a dynamic and organized leader who can effectively communicate with NREC members and stakeholders, work with the Research Director to oversee and manage research programs, cultivate partnerships with research institutes and industry partners, and implement efficient organizational effectiveness.

## **CORE COMPETENCIES:**

### *Leadership & Strategy*

- Advise, communicate, and support all NREC committees, with a focus on the Executive Committee and Executive Chair, in the administration and operation of NREC
- Coordinate administrative and communication functions with contractors and stakeholders
- Implement and update, as needed, NREC's strategic plan consistent with its mission, goals, and priorities

- Provide creative and innovative leadership to guide growth, impact, and long-term sustainability
- Foster a collaborative and mission-driven organizational culture

### *Program Management*

- Work closely with the NREC Research Committee and Research Director to assist with the preparation of Requests for Proposals, receipt and review/ scoring of proposals, and grant award process
- Ensure fair, transparent, and effective proposal review and selection processes
- Continue and enhance education and outreach efforts to disseminate NREC work and goals to stakeholders and the public
- Develop innovative and effective social media and internet-based tools for communication and education of NREC work and results
- Take steps to maintain compliance with all public obligations such as the Open Meetings Act
- Identify emerging trends and opportunities in agriculture to elevate NREC's efforts





## CORE COMPETENCIES (CONTINUED):

### *Operations & Financial Management*

- Administer the finances and asset management of NREC funds with contractors as needed to ensure transparent, timely, and sound business practices
- Provide necessary support to external auditors to allow for timely completion of annual audits
- Oversee daily operations, including budgeting, financial management, and resource allocation
- Supervise staff (if applicable) and manage consultants or volunteers
- Maintain compliance with all legal, regulatory, and reporting requirements

### *External Relations & Advocacy*

- Serve as the primary spokesperson and representative for NREC
- Build partnerships with agricultural stakeholders, community leaders, and policymakers
- Represent NREC at events, conferences, and public forums



## COUNCIL-FUNDED PROJECTS FALL INTO THREE MAIN CATEGORIES

with an emphasis on:

### 1 THE 4R'S

Applying the right source of fertilizer, at the right rate, right time, and right place.



### 2 CAPTURING NUTRIENTS

Looking at ways to capture nutrients within the field using cover crops.



### 3 PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT

Exploring methods of capturing nutrients before they are lost in a way that could potentially impact the environment.





# Candidate Profile

NREC seeks a leader who is energized by working in a lean organizational environment and passionate about advancing agricultural research, education, and stewardship. The ideal candidate will bring demonstrated ability to balance high-level strategy and relationship management with hands-on operational execution, including managing multiple priorities.

Preferred candidates will bring the intellectual curiosity necessary to translate scientific research into meaningful and accessible information for a wide range of audiences. The ability to synthesize technical information and communicate it clearly through presentations, convenings, written materials, and stakeholder engagement efforts will be essential.

The successful candidate will demonstrate professionalism and adaptability. Strong organizational and financial management capabilities, including experience overseeing budgets, contracts, and operational systems, are required. Given the organization's structure, the Executive Director must be comfortable managing a broad portfolio of responsibilities and coordinating effectively with external partners, including outsourced accounting and management firms, banking institutions, researchers, and vendors. Experience administering

contracts, monitoring project deliverables, and overseeing payments related to research or grant-funded initiatives will be important for success in the role.

The ideal candidate will bring experience supporting boards and committees and will be adept at building strong, collaborative relationships with organizational leadership. This individual will work closely with the Board of Directors and committee structures to advance strategic priorities, support governance functions, and facilitate productive engagement among stakeholders. Experience coordinating conferences, educational forums, or industry convenings is highly valued, particularly events that bring together researchers and practitioners to discuss emerging issues, findings, and future priorities.

A bachelor's degree in agriculture, nonprofit management, business, public administration, or a related field is expected, with advanced degrees considered beneficial. Candidates should bring a minimum of five years of progressive leadership experience, ideally within nonprofit organizations, associations, agricultural organizations, research institutions, or education-focused environments.





# Application Process & Nominations

Applications and nominations are being received by **Noetic Search**.

To ensure confidential tracking of our search process, no applications will be accepted via email.

Submit a current resume and cover letter below.

[START SUBMISSION](#)

This search is being conducted by Rhyan Zweifler, founder and president of Noetic and Bridget Verdun, executive search consultant.



Rhyan Zweifler



Bridget Verdun

**For more information about Illinois NREC visit:**

**Noetic Executive Search**

[www.noeticxsearch.com](http://www.noeticxsearch.com)

**Illinois Nutrient Research & Education Council**

<https://www.illinoisnrec.org>



The Illinois Nutrient Research and Education Council is an equal opportunity employer. We value diversity in backgrounds and perspectives and encourage qualified candidates of all identities and experiences to apply.