

Nancy Muse

2025 Board Candidates Questions/Answers

Question 1 - As a Director, what are the top conservation and other organizational priorities that you would like to see Sierra Club focus on for the next three years?

Answer:

As a Director, I would embrace climate change as the number one conservation priority that demands our attention as a Club and as a society. During this time with the flood of disinformation and the predicted lack of the political will needed to implement best practices to mitigate the escalating warming of the planet, it is more important than ever that the Club continue to amplify sound climate science. Inherent in combatting climate shift is the preservation of wild lands, keeping forest ecosystems intact, limiting urban sprawl and also facilitating, at every turn, the transition to a clean, safe, renewable energy economy. More tools are needed to clarify the roles of staff and volunteer leaders so that there is no guess work involved. We desperately need Chapter handbooks, as was provided in 2013, which are universal across the Club and in keeping with Club bylaws, so that volunteers and staff can interact with little doubt in how to proceed in challenging situations. This would dramatically decrease time-consuming, morale- busting interactions and would improve collaboration based on sound policy and protocol.

Question 2 - What experience do you have that prepares you for the responsibility of helping Sierra Club stay fiscally sound for years to come, including but not limited to experience with internal information sharing and turnover?

Answer:

I have served and still serve on several environmental non-profit boards in varying roles including chair/president, secretary, programs chair and currently serve on my Chapter Finance Committee. In all instances, I am acutely aware of the need for board members to take their fiduciary responsibilities seriously—to ask questions and not to ‘rubber stamp’ financial reports without needed review of expenditures, which also includes attention to itemized reporting. It is critical for Board members to exercise oversight of finances and uphold needed accountability and transparency and not hesitate to ask questions when in doubt. In all instances as a board member, I am mindful of representing the best interests of the members of the organization, the staff and benefactors who contribute funds in good faith and that all monies will be managed and allocated responsibly. Best financial practices, which depend on eliminating spending on nonessentials, enable staff positions to remain secure, thus promoting trust and enhancing functionality within the Club.

Question 3 - What steps would you take as a Board Director to tangibly lead Sierra Club in lifting up environmental justice/vulnerable communities and supporting them in tackling climate change, pollution, and other environmental issues that impact these communities and stifle their voices?

Answer:

Too often as a Club, we talk among ourselves and there is not enough outreach to those outside the Club, especially in disenfranchised communities which have been exploited by polluting industries. Needed actions to uplift EJ communities may be better accomplished through a program designed to enable Chapters and Groups to provide resources and

educational events throughout these communities with Club grants available to fund these events, including providing adequate publicity. I would support the creation of a program with community-supported guidelines for ongoing outreach in front-line communities. Educational events that are also enjoyable for participants could be offered in schools and after-school program activities, community centers, churches and civic groups. I have had decades of experience creating and participating in such community environmental education programs. These programs have provided knowledge and have proven to first, raise awareness of the sources of pollution, empower citizens to feel confident to raise their voice to speak truth to power and mobilize to support measures and activities to enhance the environmental health and wellness in their communities.

Question 4 - How would you promote collaboration on behalf of Sierra Club with other allied long-standing non-profit organizations to maximize practical gains and mutual success in a landscape of increasing needs for funds and attention?

Answer:

Sierra Club has a history of working with other major organizations which share a common vision and mission, but we must find new ways to form alliances in order to meet unprecedented challenges and not just the national level but also within our states and communities. At this juncture in history, it is more important than ever that we join forces with our friends, allies, state and local governments and supporters, in order to stand up for environmental sanity with a strong message that is inclusive of all, crossing political, religious and societal barriers. As a Board member, I would draw from my decades-long experience with many diverse groups, — including but not limited to residents of indigent and minority communities— at the local, grassroots level which worked in unison when facing especially difficult situations including: proposed industries which posed threats to public health, needless destruction of public lands, forests and open spaces, the need to close a municipal landfill with toxic leachate draining into the nearby creek which flows in to the Tennessee River, stopping the “boondoggle” construction of a nuclear plant and much more.

Question 5 - What is the role of Sierra Club leadership, including the Board of Directors, in creating partnerships and supporting the health and work of Sierra Club at all levels of the organization, including Groups, Chapters, teams, and staff?

Answer:

The overall health of the Club must include enhancing communication between the Board, the Council of Club Leaders, staff and volunteer leaders at the Chapter and Group level. When communication is fragmented or nonexistent, it is impossible for functioning, healthy partnerships to exist. The organization chart shows how Chapter leaders are to work with staff in the Field, People and Governance departments but this is only meaningful if timely and genuine communication is common practice, resulting in mutual respect, camaraderie and trust as the desired outcome. Staff should be supplied with ongoing important and updated information which is critical for them in their respective roles as they assist volunteer leaders to carry out their work effectively and within Club protocols. Improvement in the overall functionality of the Club requires that Board members be engaged with those working in the “trenches” of the club. Self awareness is critical: There is a perception by some that at times, Board members come across as aloof, disengaged and non-receptive to solving numerous, systemic issues that affect the morale of the volunteers who provide essential and valuable free labor within the Club. As a Board member, I would do all within my ability to facilitate and encourage transparency and honest communication among all Club entities.

Question 6 - What experience with grassroots, particularly environmental justice, efforts do you bring, and how do you plan to support this work of Sierra Club?

Answer:

I have worked for decades on a grassroots level, having been a founding member of several local, environmental nonprofit groups including the Shoals Safe Energy Alliance, the Shoals Environmental Alliance and Shoals Earth Month. My work with these groups was alongside diverse members of my local and area-wide community. Several issue-driven actions taken included but were not limited to advocating for rooftop solar, fighting polluting industries, stopping tar sand mining and standing up against sprawl development—all of which would have had a direct, negative impact on minority and indigent populations. I would do all possible as a Board member to use my experience with grassroots groups and encourage Chapters to identify and engage with EJ issues in their respective areas while working to provide funding to assist with needed actions to empower disenfranchised.

Question 7 - What specific work should Sierra Club undertake to engage members and involve volunteer leaders in planning and strategic decision making to help address expressed feelings of disenfranchisement among Sierra Club's base?

Answer: I have heard many members and volunteer leaders express exasperation with the lack of consistency of operational procedures which have gone through several major changes since 2021. The fact that organizational/structural decisions have mostly been made without direct input from volunteer leaders is a cause of most of the feelings of disenfranchisement. It is most important that drastic changes in procedures and structure not be “sprung on” volunteers with no warning as has been done in the past. Volunteers have been made to feel they are expected to follow arbitrary “rules” but without needed details which specify how these rules are to be implemented. There have been vague references to these top-down decisions incorporating volunteer input, however, the details, methodology and rationale has come into serious question. As a Board member, I would advocate for creating opportunities for volunteer Chapter leaders and the Council of Club Leaders to be included in the processes for creating major Club decisions rather than being informed of major decisions after they are made. More on this subject continues in question #9.

Question 8 - In your opinion, how should Sierra Club manage potential conflicting agendas among Board members and across conservation policy priorities, such as protecting our wild public lands while meeting renewable energy needs?

Answer:

There will always be conflicting views and agendas among Board members. The most important consideration is to weigh which priority is most driven by sound science and provides the most benefit including: perpetuation of wildlife populations, climate change mitigation, protection of frontline communities from environmental exploitation and overall, protects the integrity of natural systems, improving quality of life. It is also critical to see where conflicting agendas may overlap in order to reach a reasonable compromise. In cases where the conflicting agendas cannot achieve common ground, it is critical to acknowledge that some agendas are not founded strictly in environmentally best practices.

Question 9 - The Sierra Club structure has changed in recent years; how would you use your role as a Board Director to help Sierra Club to move forward together and make the many entities within Sierra Club operate seamlessly, supportively, and effectively?

Answer:

In order for the various entities in the Club to operate supportively and effectively, the Club must create a culture of trust. For trust to be established, all entities must be assured that they have a seat at the decision-making table. As a Board member, I would advocate for ways to increase opportunities for communication and collaboration among volunteers and staff and find new and better ways to incorporate volunteer and staff engagement in decision-making processes. One way would be to invite Club entities to create concise position statements/plans on important issues that directly affect them—chapter volunteer and staff operations, grassroots network (GRN) teams and others. These statements would be submitted for consideration by those creating new operational guidelines. Additionally, volunteer representatives could be selected from the Council of Club Leaders delegates, GRN CORE teams or other entities to be included in the final decision-making process.

Question 10 - Sierra Club has engaged in a great deal of internal and external equity and justice work in the past few years, shifting its focus and terminology in various ways. Even as its focus has changed and evolved, what areas of equity has Sierra Club continued to overlook?

Answer:

The Club identifies the need to assist EJ communities but can do much more to champion external equity through a more direct “hands on” approach by leaders at the National level. A good example is the recent involvement of the Club’s Executive Director and his visits to Elba, Alabama, where he offered support and promoted public awareness of environmental injustice that is victimizing members of the community. Regional maps, provided by the Club, of areas with known sources of agricultural and industrial pollution such as concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), nuclear waste sites, forever chemicals discharge, coal ash ponds, fracking operations, uranium mining—such as in indigenous communities— and others, would assist volunteers in the Club to be able to better focus on frontline communities in need of support. There is a process that exists internally and is in direct opposition to the Club’s stated values, concerning the way volunteers are treated inequitably when they are the subject of an investigation without due process that takes place without their knowledge and often results in consequences that are not appropriate, resulting in undue and sometimes, irreparable harm. The contradiction lies in the fact that the process, which also poses a huge financial burden, is often perceived as authoritarian and unfairly victimizes the subject of the investigation. Thankfully, there has been pushback against these investigations, with many members and staff calling for transparency, fairness, integrity and clarity of purpose, to guide processes which seek to identify toxic behavior within all areas of the Club.