



POSITION ANNOUNCEMENT

Principal Director, Program Development



POSTING DATE

October 15, 2026

DEADLINE

The application deadline is November 15, and applications received by that date will be given priority. We will accept and review applications until the position is filled. Interviews will take place from mid-November to mid-December, and we will likely invite finalists to complete a work assignment that is designed to test their skills in the specific functions required for the position. We anticipate extending an offer in late December or early January.

SALARY RANGE

\$166,000-185,000

[Sightline Institute](#) is hiring a Principal Director, Program Development, to build our next research program, and then the one after that.

This position is new, created to identify and launch new research areas. The Principal Director scouts, vets, and recommends each new program area. Then they launch it: conducting and publishing the original research that establishes Sightline's credibility in the field, developing the strategy, anchoring early fundraising, and helping recruit the program's permanent director. Once that director is in place, the Principal Director begins again with the next area, in a recurring three- to five-year cycle. The handoff is by design. The goal is a new program that stands on its own, led by someone hired to carry it forward, so the Principal Director can start the next one.

The Principal Director is an accomplished researcher, a skilled writer and speaker, and an experienced program builder. Because the subject changes every few years, we are less interested in deep expertise in any one field than in range.

You would be joining an organization of experienced staff members, fully remote across Cascadia. New programs have always come out of our team of researchers and communicators, kicking ideas around until someone finds the angle. We are more a guild of artisans than a factory, and this role is also built to work that way: you would be working in collaboration with colleagues who know the region and its politics well.

This full-time, salaried role reports to the Executive Director and works in close partnership with Sightline's senior staff. This is an exciting opportunity to contribute to a respected organization with an established track record of success while ushering in expanded areas of impact and reach. This is a unique, dynamic position that will directly contribute to Sightline's impact and to creating strong communities, a green economy and a healthy environment throughout Cascadia.

About Sightline Institute

Our mission is to make Cascadia, the region stretching from Alaska to northern California and the Pacific to the Rocky Mountain States, a global model of sustainability—with strong communities, a green economy, and a healthy environment. Founded in 1993, Sightline is one of the region's most influential public policy think tanks. In 2026 alone, we helped pass six housing laws in Idaho, four in Washington, and two in Oregon, along with Missoula's new zoning code and a major clean energy law in Washington. Several of these were US firsts. Our work on election reform has helped shape how Alaska, Portland, and Seattle run their elections.



In our programs on climate and energy, housing and cities, and democracy and elections, we identify and promote reforms that yield outsized improvements for the region's people and places. A nonprofit, nonpartisan, and independent public policy research center, Sightline provides research, articles, and commentary; maps, graphics, and tools; and framing and messaging guidance. Sightline's influence depends on the depth and breadth of our researchers' expertise and their persuasiveness in presenting analysis and arguments. We aim to draw attention to and build support for data-backed solutions to specific public problems through close engagement in policy debates. We advise and inform public officials, advocates, and the media. We also help organize unusual coalitions, advocate to leaders, and lobby lawmakers, usually at the state level.

Our combination of deep expertise; trusted resources for leaders, advocates, and journalists; practical, research-based policy recommendations; powerful case making and persuasive argumentation; and strategic engagement in unusual coalitions have made Sightline extremely effective at advancing progress toward our mission. Learn more at www.sightline.org.

Why now?

Sightline has been doing this work in Cascadia for 33 years. We have grown steadily, doubling in budget over the past decade and accumulating financial reserves that provide us with stability and options. Generously supported by families and charitable foundations from Cascadia and beyond, we are in the strongest financial position of our history, with a seasoned staff and systems built to support a larger team.

Even so, our region has 21 million people and we have 21 staff. Gradual growth has been good for our culture and our effectiveness, but at this pace, we will never make Cascadia the global model of sustainability we exist to build. So we are trying something different: rather than growing new programs slowly from within, as we always have, we are hiring someone to build them.



Essential Responsibilities

- Scouts, plans, and builds new research programs for Sightline, developing and refining an institutional system for expanding into new issue areas
- Vets potential program areas against Sightline's program-selection criteria and leads a selection process that draws on input from across the organization, recommending a new program area for the Executive Director's decision
- Conducts preliminary research and produces ground-breaking articles and analyses that establish Sightline's presence and reputation in each new issue area
- Plans a maximally impactful strategy for each new program that draws on Sightline's strengths in research, communications, and coalition building, and begins stitching together a coalition in support of it
- Serves as a senior spokesperson for Sightline; writes and publishes research, speaks publicly and to the media, and meets with policymakers, allies, and other stakeholders
- Anchors fundraising for each new program, working with the development team to identify, cultivate, and secure support from prospective funders
- Leads recruitment and staffing for each new program, including hiring and mentoring the director who will lead it, then guides that director through a transition and hands off leadership
- Helps build and manage each program's budget and staffing in collaboration with the operations team, and refines Sightline's method for program development with each cycle

An incomplete list of new program ideas that Sightline has considered, and that the Principal Director could add to, scout and vet includes:

1. **Transportation.** Reviving and expanding Sightline's past work: congestion pricing, building transit and infrastructure far more affordably, autonomous vehicles of all kinds, traffic safety, e-bikes.
2. **Climate migration, population, and demographic change.** Sightline has started preliminary research in this area
3. **Rural Cascadia.** A reboot of Sightline's former Farms and Forests program: alternative meats, a critical rethinking of the usual green narrative on agriculture (e.g., *We Are Eating the Earth*), virtual fencing in place of barbed wire, beaver reintroduction for watershed restoration.
4. **Biological diversity.** An area we have neglected in recent years: orcas and salmon, [amphibians](#), [birds](#), [bats](#), and the "[insect apocalypse](#)." Maybe even proposing to rewild half of Cascadia, after E.O. Wilson's *Half Earth*.
5. **Artificial intelligence.** What it means for our future. How our region should respond. What states can do while the federal government equivocates. And the environmental costs and benefits of data centers.

These are starting points, not a shortlist. Vetting them, and surfacing areas we haven't considered, is work the Principal Director would do in collaboration with our research staff and senior colleagues.



Desired Skills and Experience

- Substantial experience at a senior level in policy research, advocacy, journalism, or a related field, including work you initiated rather than inherited
- Track record of conducting and publishing original, in-depth policy research that changed minds, with demonstrated ability to become credible quickly in fields that are new to you
- Skilled writer and public speaker, comfortable serving as a senior spokesperson with media, policymakers, and other stakeholders
- Strong strategic thinker who divines smart ways to influence policy through research, communications, and advocacy
- Experience contributing to fundraising, including identifying and cultivating relationships with prospective funders and writing proposals and reports
- Experience engaging policymakers to translate research into policy influence; competence in building unusual coalitions is a plus
- Experience leading a new initiative, program, or team from early concept through launch— setting strategy, defining goals, and building a team
- Commitment to Sightline’s [mission and values](#).

Deep subject-matter expertise in one of Sightline’s current or potential program areas is a bonus, not a requirement. Sightline believes in mentoring talent and providing opportunities for growth. We’ve intentionally built flexibility into this role, and we’re open to candidates who may not yet meet every qualification listed, if they bring strong foundational skills, sharp instincts, and a clear ability to grow into the responsibilities described. If you see yourself in this work, we encourage you to apply.



Your First Year:

The early months will be about getting to know Sightline: how we work, how we choose what to work on, and how our research, communications, and advocacy fit together. At the same time, you’ll work with the Executive Director to identify and vet possible program areas against our criteria, then bring a recommendation forward.

Once an area is chosen, your focus will shift to original research and publishing, building the program’s strategy, and beginning to cultivate funders and coalition partners. Throughout, you’ll work closely with our communications, development, and research teams.

Compensation and Benefits

The salary range for the Principal Director level is \$166,000-185,000, plus a 401K employer contribution of 10 percent of salary with no match required. That contribution is added to pay, not subtracted from it: someone earning \$170,000 receives an additional \$17,000 in their retirement account, for total compensation of \$187,000.

As part of our commitment to equity and to reduce bias, Sightline has salary bands for each position level. Employees can earn annual merit raises and periodic promotions, and we support team members along their career pathways with mentoring, training, and learning opportunities.

Benefits also include:

- 95% premium coverage for medical, dental, and vision insurance for the employee and partial coverage for dependents
- 4 weeks of paid vacation
- 12 paid holidays annually
- 2 weeks of paid health, wellness, and care leave, plus access to a shared pool of additional leave for special circumstances
- 12 weeks paid parental leave
- A 3-month paid sabbatical every 7 years
- A \$200 monthly remote work stipend
- Regular staff gatherings for in-person connection

As a nonprofit, Sightline is a qualifying employer for the federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program. Our staff work hard and enjoy balanced lives and a collegial organizational culture.



Location:

Sightline is a virtual-first organization. Our staff, contractors, and fellows live and work in all parts of Cascadia. This position is therefore remote, and you may work at home or in a co-working facility of your choice, but you must live and work in Cascadia: Alaska, British Columbia, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, or Washington. The role requires travel to represent Sightline with policymakers, funders, and allies as well as participation in Sightline retreats and meetings.

To Apply

Please include, in this order:

- A cover letter expressing your qualification for this position along with why you want it. Sightline is a mission-driven organization; we take seriously your motivation and ability to communicate it persuasively.
- Your resume
- A brief, published writing sample that showcases your ability to write clearly, succinctly, and compellingly in a style similar to Sightline's. You may attach the sample or include a link. Our preference is for writing samples that include analysis or recommendations related to a public policy issue. Sightline takes excellent quality research and writing extremely seriously—we're a think tank!—so your writing sample is key in your evaluation.

None of your application packet should be written by artificial intelligence; Sightline uses A.I. in several ways but not for composing text.

Please assemble all application materials in a single PDF with the naming convention **LastName_FirstName_Position**. We review applications that include all three; please reach out if the format is a barrier. Please click [Apply](#), fill out the form and submit your single PDF.

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Sightline Institute is an equal opportunity employer, and all qualified candidates are encouraged to apply. Applicants will not be discriminated against because of race, color, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, religion, national origin, citizenship status, disability, ancestry, marital status, veteran status, medical condition or any protected category prohibited by local, state or federal laws.

