



Letter to the NOLS Board of Trustees and Executive Team - July 2026

To the NOLS Board of Trustees and Executive Team,

We write to you as the newly formed NOLS Employee Association Board following the announcement of Jen Sallwick's departure from the role of Interim Vice President of Expeditions.

One of our main goals as a board is to be the listening and informed representatives of the employee communities we each are a part of. We have built a board that includes Wilderness Medicine Instructors, Expeditions Instructors, headquarters staff, and branch staff; that is from the United States and abroad; and whose experience at NOLS ranges from two years to over a decade. This letter is not solely about Jen's departure; it is a wider view on what her departure indicates to the employees that we represent.

Over recent years, NOLS employees have experienced repeated leadership transitions, interim appointments, organizational restructuring, and the loss of long time staff who carried deep institutional knowledge and relationships across the school. Individually, these changes may be understandable. Collectively, they have created an environment of instability with increasing effects on our employees.

Each leadership transition carries costs that are difficult to quantify but impossible to ignore. Employees lose trusted leaders and advocates. Projects lose momentum and ownership. Teams are asked again and again to absorb additional responsibilities and financial costs while adapting to shifting priorities and reporting structures. Morale declines, burnout becomes more evident, and confidence in the school's direction becomes harder to sustain.

Jen's departure has brought these concerns to the surface. Many employees viewed her as a leader and bridge between different parts of the organization. Her departure has raised a question that we hear from employees across the school: **when will workforce stability become our priority?**

We recognize and appreciate that the NEA, Board, and Executive Team are all working towards the same goal: a healthy, financially and operationally sustainable NOLS that fulfills its mission and is positioned for long-term success. We are ready to be a partner to you in this work, and we are eager to hear your thoughts on how we can best support you in fulfilling our collective mission. We are uniquely positioned to bring forward the experiences, concerns, and ideas of employees across the school; to help strengthen communication between employees and leadership; and to help ensure the success of the Second Summit Strategic Plan, and its focus on Our People. Therefore, we have two asks:

First, moving forward, we ask for greater communication and transparency with the NEA regarding significant organizational and leadership changes so that we can better understand the context and direction of the school. This allows us to keep our members and co-workers informed and updated, and dispel incorrect assumptions and gossip.

Second, we ask that workforce stability be treated as a strategic priority. Financial health is essential, and we appreciate the intensive work that has gone into this goal; and, people are equally worth this effort. We are here to work with you to make NOLS a work environment where employees can build, innovate, and lead without operating in a state of uncertainty.

With appreciation for the work that you do to make this school a better place,

The NEA Board

Anna Santoleri, NEA President, Rocky Mountain Program Supervisor and Field Instructor

Sanjana Govind, NEA Vice President, Field Instructor

Aila Brennan, Rocky Mountain Asst Rations Manager

Bryan Sarg, Field Instructor and Rocky Mountain In-Town Employee

David Valenzuela, Patagonia & Rocky Mountain Program Supervisor, Field Instructor

Elie Rabinowitz, Field Instructor

Griffin Leemon, Field Instructor