



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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Search for the Vice President for Strategic Initiatives

University of Minnesota

Minneapolis, Minnesota

THE SEARCH

The University of Minnesota (the University or U-M), one of the most prestigious public research universities in the nation, seeks an experienced and highly collaborative leader to serve as the inaugural Vice President for Strategic Initiatives (VPSI). This is an exceptional opportunity to join U-M at a pivotal moment in its history and help shape its next chapter while leading strategic planning efforts across the system. With the excitement of a new president, the institution is poised to deepen its commitment to research, teaching, and service, open access to opportunity, and forward-thinking innovation to advance the University's land-grant mission and impact the world.

Dr. Rebecca Cunningham became president of the University on July 1, 2024, serving as the leader of the [five-campus system](#). The University's service to the state can be measured across multiple areas: its five campuses, which serve 68,000 undergraduate and graduate students; its over 600,000 [alumni](#), 62 percent of whom live in Minnesota and contribute to its economy; its [health care enterprise](#), which serves over 1.3 million patients annually in hospitals and clinics across the state; and its [extension](#) programs, which provide solutions, practical education, and training for all Minnesotans. Similarly, the University's impact in national and international spheres can be measured by [\\$1.13 billion in annual research funding](#), its National Science Foundation rank as 12th among U.S. public research universities, [Times Higher Ed Sustainability Impact Ranking](#) as 5th nationally and in the top 10 percent globally, and its [global programs and strategy alliance](#).

Reporting directly to President Cunningham, the VPSI will serve as a trusted advisor to the president and a key member of the president's senior leadership team. Collaborating with other constituencies across the U-M system, the VPSI will lead the execution of the institution's next strategic plan and support high-level, mission critical strategic initiatives and programs that advance the University's growth, impact, and reputation. In addition, the VPSI will work closely with the President and Chief of Staff in strategic policy analysis.

The successful candidate will be a collegial and mission-oriented leader who takes initiative and has the interpersonal skills to operate strategically and effectively to help drive and achieve results. They will bring past experience managing complex change initiatives in a collaborative and consensus-building environment; the ability to be forward thinking and to engage others in challenging convention and

encouraging innovation; a deep understanding of the higher education landscape in the 21st century; effectiveness at pivoting between strategic development and tactical deployment; experience in translating strategy to individual roles and responsibilities; and the ability to earn the trust, confidence, and respect of U-M's senior leadership team.

The University of Minnesota has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national search firm, to assist in this important search. All inquiries, applications, and nominations for this opportunity should be directed in confidence to the University or search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

The University of Minnesota is a comprehensive public research university ranked among the world's most respected institutions of higher learning. The University has scholars of national and international reputation and a strong tradition of education and public engagement. With 68,000 students enrolled across five campuses located throughout Minnesota—the Twin Cities, Duluth, Morris, Crookston, and Rochester—the University advances discovery and innovation to improve society for all. The University has the special distinction of being both a globally engaged R1 research institution and Minnesota's land-grant university, creating a unique capacity and responsibility to improve the lives of Minnesotans and drive the state forward. You can learn more about the unique distinction of each system campus [here](#).

The University of Minnesota is situated and built within the homelands of the Dakota, the Ojibwe, and scores of other Indigenous peoples. It is important to acknowledge the peoples on whose land we live, learn, and work as we actively seek to improve and strengthen relations with the 11 sovereign tribal nations of Minnesota. The University also acknowledges that words are not enough. The University provides support, resources, and programs that increase access to all aspects of higher education for American Indian students, staff, faculty, and community members.

Twin Cities Campus

Nearly 55,000 students are enrolled on the flagship [Twin Cities](#) campus in the heart of Minneapolis-St. Paul, which is the 16th largest metropolitan area in the country. A research university of exceptional breadth and depth with expansive interdisciplinary opportunities, U-M advances education, research, and outreach across [schools and colleges](#), spanning the broad fields of liberal arts; biological sciences; dentistry; design; education and human development; food, agriculture, and natural resource sciences; law; business; medicine; nursing; pharmacy; public affairs; public health; science and engineering; and veterinary medicine. As one of only a few land-grant universities that also are world-class research universities and one of few major land-grant research universities situated in a central metropolitan area, the University of Minnesota has consistently advanced the land-grant mission with exceptional vigor—distinguished by a comprehensive commitment to integrating public engagement deeply into teaching and learning, research, and discovery.

University System

The University's [five distinct campuses](#) serve all regions of the state. Each campus has unique strengths, enriched by its surrounding communities. U-M staff and faculty focus on meeting the needs of each student, supporting them through world-class programming, academics, and hands-on experiences. The University's mission and work extends beyond the campuses, as community engagement is a vital part of the University of Minnesota's mission. From community-partnered research and outreach centers and extension offices to community-based field projects, health clinics, and environmental and agricultural projects, U-M faculty, students, and staff are working hand-in-hand with communities throughout Minnesota and the globe.

The University continues to build on its legacy of excellence in education, research, and service. Whether the Duluth campus's recent designation as an Age-Friendly University, Crookston's recognition as a top performer in the latest sustainable campus index, Morris' unwavering commitment to undergraduate education as reflected in their recognition as a College of Distinction, or leading the workforce preparedness of healthcare workers at Minnesota and beyond at Rochester, U-M embodies its singular vision of excellence and a unified drive to serve.

Health Sciences

The University trains over 70 percent of Minnesota's health professionals, and health sciences research accounts for over \$200 million in externally funded research annually. [University of Minnesota Health Sciences](#) unites education and research across six schools and [patient care](#) across the state.

In January 2023, the University announced the "UMN Health" [Five Point Plan](#) proposal, which will:

- Sustain and advance a world-class academic health system
- Enable governance and control of campus facilities
- Provide opportunities for strategic partnerships
- Create a new state-of-the-art hospital
- Continue to invest in current facilities This vision hinges upon a strong partnership between the State and University. The University's aim is to advance the University's mission of teaching, research, and public service, and support the health of the entire state.

In January 2024, the Governor's Task Force on Academic Health at the University of Minnesota released its [Recommendations to Support World-Class Academic Health Professions Education, Research, and Care Delivery](#). The development of a [strategic plan](#) is one of the priority recommendations included in this report. The University and its affiliate [University of Minnesota Physicians](#) work with [Fairview Health Services](#) to deliver clinical care through a joint clinical enterprise. Ultimately, the University will want to ensure Minnesotans have access to a first-rate academic health system, bringing them the benefits of integrated research, teaching, and top-level care.

Research & Innovation

The University averages over \$1 billion in research expenditures annually, ranking 13th nationally among public universities. Its faculty and experts are considered some of the best in their respective fields. U-M currently boasts 26 Nobel Prize-winning faculty, recipients of prestigious awards such as Guggenheim and MacArthur Fellowships, and many National Academies and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences members.

Division I Athletics

The Twin Cities campus is home to Golden Gopher Athletics, a founding member of the Big Ten, where more than 600 Division I student-athletes compete on 21 (9 men's, 12 women's) teams. Student-athletes not only compete at the highest level in their sports, they also maintain an average 3.44 GPA, one of the highest among public institutions. The University's Intercollegiate Athletics department generates a high level of public interest and media coverage. Golden Gopher student-athletes are featured on television, radio, websites, and in magazines and newspapers nationwide.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The University strongly embraces diversity, equity, and inclusion as foundational values and has made engagement and diversity central to strategic planning across the system. Students on the Twin Cities campus include 29% Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students and 9.5% international students (from over 140 countries), and roughly one in four students of all undergraduates are first-generation students. The University is a nationally recognized leader for students learning abroad and offers programs in more than 70 countries. The Twin Cities campus has been recognized nationally for excellence in diversity and global learning, research, and engagement in the last five years.

The Twin Cities campus is located in a diverse and economically vibrant region at the heart of an increasingly global Midwest. Minnesota has 11 federally recognized tribal nations, the largest urban American Indian population in the country, a dynamic Black community, and significant African, Latinx, and Asian American populations. The links between Minnesota communities and communities worldwide are notable: the Twin Cities has the largest number of people of Somali descent outside of Somalia and the nation's largest urban Hmong American population.

Economic Impact

With an annual operating budget of \$4.5 billion, the University generates an estimated economic impact of \$9 billion for the Minnesota economy. The state's seventh-largest employer, the University has over 27,000 faculty and staff and encompasses regional [extension](#) offices, research and outreach centers, clinics, labs, professional education outreach, and K–12 educational engagement programs throughout the state, as well as world-class performing arts facilities, museums, and galleries. *Forbes* has also ranked the University as one of the country's 20 best educational employers.

UNIVERSITY LEADERSHIP

President Rebecca Cunningham

The University of Minnesota Board of Regents selected [Dr. Rebecca Cunningham](#) as the 18th President of the University of Minnesota System, effective July 1, 2024. The Board chose Cunningham following a thorough and public search that engaged thousands of students, faculty, and staff in listening sessions and public forums on all five campuses.

Dr. Rebecca Cunningham most recently served as the vice president for research and innovation at the University of Michigan, where she was responsible for fostering excellence and upholding the University's public mission in research, scholarship, and creative practice across three campuses and a health system. During her leadership tenure, the University expanded its research volume to a record \$1.86 billion annually as Dr. Cunningham led the design and implementation of the first comprehensive review of the University of Michigan research, scholarship, and creative practice enterprise.

A faculty member in the University of Michigan Schools of Public Health and Medicine since 1999, Dr. Cunningham previously served as the associate vice president for research-health sciences, where she oversaw research faculty affairs and partnered with colleagues across disciplines to facilitate and energize the University's research agenda. Dr. Cunningham served in various leadership positions earlier in her career, including as associate chair of emergency medicine and director of the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-sponsored Injury Prevention Center at the University of Michigan. As a researcher, Dr. Cunningham has earned continuous federal research funding for more than 25 years as a principal investigator and is a National Academy of Medicine member.

Dr. Cunningham holds a bachelor's degree from Fairfield University and a medical doctorate from Jefferson Medical College. She completed her residency in emergency medicine at the University of Michigan Health System in Ann Arbor and a postdoctoral research fellowship with the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

Board of Regents

Established in 1851 at the founding of the University of Minnesota, the [Board of Regents](#) is the University's governing board. Regents articulate a vision for the University and work to ensure the University of Minnesota fulfills its mission of education, research, and outreach for the benefit of the people of Minnesota, the nation, and the world. There are 12 Regents who each serve six-year terms. There is one Regent from each of the state's eight congressional districts as well as four additional Regents from the state at large.

The current chair of the Board is Janie S. Mayeron; her term will expire in 2025.

ROLE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

The inaugural Vice President for Strategic Initiatives at the University of Minnesota will be responsible for overseeing the exploration and completion of a new strategic plan and multiple cross-cutting initiatives to advance the institution's mission and goals. Reporting directly to the President, serving as a member of the President's Cabinet, and working closely with the chief of staff and members of the President's Office team, this position will collaborate and coordinate with senior leaders and diverse stakeholders in shared governance and academic and administrative units across the entire system to discuss, identify and advance shared priorities and the requisite resources that will be needed to support their effective implementation.

Key Responsibilities

- Strategic Planning:
 - In consultation and collaboration with the President, University leadership, and key stakeholders across the University, facilitate the development of a new strategic plan for the University system, including the development of plan objectives, timelines, metrics, implementation, and other management tools and approaches.
 - Oversee the coordination for the University's strategic visioning and mission planning efforts, centering consultation and inclusion across the range of stakeholders across campuses, the state, and beyond.
 - Lead the planning and implementation of cross-cutting strategic plan initiatives, programs, and projects, including possible public and private partnerships, that require coordination among multiple administrative and academic units and consultation with shared governance partners and others.
- Strategic Initiatives:
 - Oversee the planning, execution, assessment and effective communication of high-priority Presidential-level strategic initiatives and programs, including monitoring and facilitating progress, identifying resources, and tracking the attainment of objectives, in close collaboration and coordination with the President, University leadership, and other SMEs on their teams.
 - Lead new strategic initiatives and projects based on trends and research that will advance the University's growth, impact, and reputation.
 - Assess strategic growth opportunities and initiatives to plan, develop and achieve strategic objectives for the institution.
 - Drive organizational readiness around support change management and large-scale transformation.
 - Ensure that leaders responsible for carrying out strategic initiatives have the resources and support they need to be successful and that regular updates are provided to the President on the progress toward their strategic goals.

- Advise and serve as an information resource to senior leaders and others on strategic projects that fall within their areas of responsibility.
- Presidential Support:
 - Promote cross-functional collaboration and stakeholder engagement to foster partnerships across departments, colleges, and administrative units to implement strategic initiatives.
 - Partner with the President and chief of staff in strategic analysis and planning, including advising the President on the operational, legal, and reputational impact of planning alternatives.
 - Monitor trends in higher education and beyond and advise the President and University leadership on ways to promote a strategic advantage for the University, including assessing new opportunities for alignment with institutional priorities.
 - Ensure that the President develops and maintains important relationships both within and outside the organization to further critical partnerships and initiatives that serve the University, its community, and the state of Minnesota.
 - Anticipate, raise, and make recommendations to the President on issues that require leadership attention and/or a policy response.

Essential Qualifications

- MBA, JD, Ph.D. or another terminal degree in a related field plus a minimum of 15 years of experience
- Demonstrated experience and record of success in initiating and managing a strategic plan or complex strategic initiatives across an organization, ideally in higher education
- Successful leader with a track record of achieving intended results, outcomes, and deliverables
- Deep understanding of the higher education landscape, including trends, challenges, and opportunities facing universities in the 21st century
- Exceptional interpersonal, communication, and negotiation skills, with the ability to build consensus, inspire trust, and influence stakeholders at all levels
- Collaborative and consultative mindset with a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and a demonstrated ability to work effectively with individuals from diverse backgrounds and perspectives
- Sound judgment, proven ability to influence, facilitate, and execute, and success achieving expected deliverables while working in a fast-paced environment

Preferred Qualifications

- Experience working in a large, complex, and decentralized organization
- Proven ability to think strategically, anticipate future trends, and develop innovative solutions to address institutional priorities and challenges

- Deep experience in change management and the ability to foster a culture of innovation and transformation

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

The Vice President is a 100%-time, 12-month, professional and administrative (P&A) appointment based in Minneapolis. Salary is commensurate with education and experience, with an anticipated salary range of \$350,000-\$450,000.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website for the search: <https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/university-minnesota/vice-president-strategic-initiatives>. Electronic submission of materials is strongly encouraged. References will not be contacted without advance permission of the candidates.

Keight Tucker Kennedy, Partner

Jeff Kessner, Partner

Ivan Ceballos, Senior Associate

Jenny Rubin, Senior Search Coordinator

Isaacson, Miller

The University of Minnesota shall provide equal access to and opportunity in its programs, facilities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, familial status, disability, public assistance status, membership or activity in a local commission created for the purpose of dealing with discrimination, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression