



**Search for the Vice President of Operations and Planning
The Morton Arboretum
Lisle, Illinois**

The Morton Arboretum (the Arboretum), globally recognized for its century-long commitment to tree-focused science, conservation, and education, seeks a strategic and collaborative leader to serve as its inaugural Vice President of Operations and Planning (Vice President). It is an exciting moment for the Arboretum as the organization enters a period of significant growth and transformation. The Vice President will have an opportunity to reconceptualize and implement a comprehensive and multi-year site plan for the Arboretum's 1,700 acres that will transform operations and create more accessible, inclusive, and functional spaces for visitors and researchers.

The Arboretum plays an increasingly prominent leadership role as an organization that shares meaningful scientific research, leads conservation work, and envisions a world where people and trees thrive together. More than 400 employees advance the Arboretum's mission and contribute to a culture of collaboration, curiosity, experimentation, and impact. For the last three years, the Arboretum has been named a "Top Workplace" by *The Chicago Tribune*.

The Vice President of Operations and Planning will join an engaged and experienced leadership team led by Jill Koski, the Arboretum's president and CEO, and will work in conjunction with the Board of Trustees and the Buildings and Grounds Committee of the Board. The Vice President will provide strategic leadership for the core functions of facilities, information technology, sustainability, and site planning and design, and oversee risk management across the organization. The Arboretum's leadership is eager to embrace a colleague with deep planning and operations expertise to leverage its many assets and current momentum to help chart the organization's course for the next several decades.

The Arboretum welcomes applications from exceptional leaders who understand the positive impact of protecting the environment and with experience in similarly complex institutions. Isaacson, Miller, an international search firm, is assisting The Morton Arboretum in this recruitment. As indicated at the end of this document, all inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed in strict confidence to the search firm.

ABOUT THE MORTON ARBORETUM

Mission

The Morton Arboretum is a world-renowned tree-focused public garden. Its mission is to collect, study, display, and conserve trees and other plants from around the world to inspire learning, foster enjoyment, benefit communities, encourage action, and enhance the environment.

History

The Arboretum was founded in 1922 by Joy Morton, founder of the Morton Salt Company and son of the founder of Arbor Day. “Plant Trees” was the Morton family motto, and its legacy carries through the Arboretum’s mission and programs to this day. Joy established his country estate in Lisle, IL in the early 1900s as a respite from the bustle of the Chicago industrial scene 25 miles away. Between 1909 and 1921, Joy focused on transforming the property into an arboretum, and in 1922, The Morton Arboretum was formally established, with members of Joy’s family and Morton Salt executives appointed to life terms on the Board of Trustees. When Joy died in 1934, the Arboretum consisted of 735 acres and many plantings and nurseries, an extensive system of roads and paths, and a small but mighty staff developing and overseeing a general landscape plan.

Strategic Vision

The Morton Arboretum envisions a greener, healthier, more beautiful world where people and trees thrive together. Three interlinked strategic priorities will help achieve this vision:

- People and communities are engaged and inspired
- Knowledge is advanced through collaborative scientific inquiry
- Trees are protected, preserved, and supported

A key component of the new strategic plan is the Arboretum’s continued partnership and engagement with a range of audiences and perspectives. The Arboretum seeks to welcome a diversity of community members to engage with its mission and programs onsite, in addition to engaging audiences virtually and in their communities regionally and globally.

Organization and Programs

In 2022, the Arboretum celebrated its first century of mission impact. Today, the Arboretum encompasses 1,700 acres of woodlands, prairie, lakes, and streams, with plant collections and specialty gardens amid natural landscapes. In addition, the Arboretum is home to 16 miles of hiking trails and nine miles of paved roads for driving, bicycling, and guided tram tours. The organization attracts more than one million visitors annually from across the nation and world and has 58,000 member households. The Arboretum is

operated by a team of staff and volunteers, including 230 full-time, 135 part-time, 120 temporary employees, and 900 volunteers.

Plant Collections

The Arboretum grows and displays a rich diversity of trees, shrubs, and other plants that are evaluated for their suitability for the midwestern United States. These living collections include 107,000 plant specimens representing 4,100 different kinds of plants. Arranged by geographic, taxonomic, and other special groupings, the collections are enhanced by restored natural areas of native plants and ecosystems. The Arboretum's work in new plant development results in useful and attractive trees and shrubs that are introduced in the marketplace.

Science and Conservation

The Arboretum is globally recognized for its leadership in tree science and research. The Center for Tree Science (the Center) conducts essential research to ensure healthy and resilient trees and forests in a rapidly changing world. The Center provides practitioners with the tools and insights needed to manage trees and ecosystems, and addresses scientific knowledge gaps that its researchers are uniquely positioned to fill. The research conducted by the Center helps create and sustain diverse and resilient urban trees and forests, evaluates and optimizes regional ecosystem restoration and management practices, and deepens scientific understanding of tree biodiversity and conservation science. The Center includes an herbarium with a collection of 205,000 dried specimens that are used for botanical research.

In addition to research, the Center advances tree conservation. Through the Global Tree Conservation Program, the Arboretum leads partnerships and assists efforts to prevent tree extinction and secure threatened tree species, with a focus on oaks. In March 2023, the [Species Survival Commission](#) (SSC) of the [International Union for Conservation of Nature](#) (IUCN), the world's largest conservation organization, designated The Morton Arboretum as the first *Center for Species Survival: Trees*. Only 11 Centers are recognized globally by the IUCN SSC, five of which are in North America.

Learning, Engagement, and Outreach

The Arboretum's Learning and Engagement division provides programming for guests of all ages. Educational programs for adults include in-person and online classes in gardening and plant care, conservation, and tree and nature-related topics, in addition to art, photography, and other classes.

The Arboretum also offers science-based advice about trees, plants, and landscapes to amateur and professional gardeners and landscapers throughout the world through the [Plant Clinic](#), which answers thousands of inquiries annually about plant care and selection.

The [Sterling Morton Library](#) has collections mainly focused on botany, horticulture, and related subjects, with a wide range of resources from highly scientific works to general gardening guides and a robust children's collection.

The Arboretum's four-acre [Children's Garden](#) encourages hands-on learning through immersive play in a tree-filled setting. The Arboretum also hosts Summer Science Camps, nature-based early learning classes, and other programs for children. Additionally, the Arboretum provides a host of supplementary resources for educators and students.

The Arboretum founded and leads the [Chicago Region Trees Initiative](#), a partnership for coordinated action to improve the health, diversity, and equitable distribution of trees in the Chicago region to benefit people and communities. The Arboretum's outreach not only focuses on the Chicago region, but also expands globally through programs like ArbNet, an interactive professional community of arboreta and an arboretum accreditation program. Launched in 2011, ArbNet now includes more than 2,000 institutions from 40 countries.

Leadership

The Arboretum's [Board of Trustees](#) is responsible for the overall governance of the institution and the advancement of its mission. Additionally, a Board of Advisors provides guidance and perspectives to the leadership of the Arboretum around strategic matters related to its mission and work.

In 2022, Jill Koski was named the President and CEO of the Arboretum. She was selected as the fourth leader in the Arboretum's 100-year history. Jill came to The Morton Arboretum from Holden Forests and Gardens in Ohio, where she was president and CEO from 2017 to 2022. Prior to that, she was Vice President of Development at The Morton Arboretum for 10 years. Her previous experience includes leadership roles in science-focused environmental nonprofits, namely the John G. Shedd Aquarium and the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum in Chicago.

THE ROLE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS AND PLANNING

As a member of the nine-person leadership team at The Morton Arboretum, the Vice President of Operations and Planning will be essential to the success of this multilayered organization. This new role presents an opportunity to lead planning activities to support the Arboretum's strategy, including the effective execution of the organization's new long-term comprehensive site plan that is currently in development with anticipated approval by the Board of Trustees in December 2024.

The Vice President will oversee a total budget of \$7.3 million and have four direct reports who lead the talented teams working in facilities, information technology, sustainability, and site planning and design. The Vice President will also oversee organization-wide risk management. In total, the Vice President's portfolio includes 41 staff members.

KEY OBJECTIVES: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS AND PLANNING

Visionary Leadership

The Vice President of Operations and Planning will serve as a trusted member of President Koski's senior leadership team, advancing the Arboretum's strategic priorities for its grounds, facilities, and infrastructure while fostering a culture of collaboration and innovation. While this person will bring deep subject matter expertise in operations and planning to the leadership team, they will also be a critical organization-wide leader working across functional areas to ensure the Arboretum's ambitious vision for the future is nimble and responsive to evolving needs and opportunities.

Comprehensive Site Plan

The Vice President will contribute to taking the comprehensive site plan from the conceptual phase to schematic design of determined priorities to implementation. The plan complements and advances the organization's current strategic direction and vision for the future. The Arboretum has experienced transformative growth as an outcome of the last full-site plan, and the new comprehensive site plan is the first complete plan in nearly 30 years and the first with a dedicated emphasis on succession planning for the collections. This work will include collaborating with internal and external stakeholders to evaluate the Arboretum's built infrastructure and developing a path forward for the continuous improvement and renovation of the Arboretum's 15 existing facilities across its 1,700 acres, planning new construction to meet current and future needs, and seizing opportunities to create greater operational efficiencies. The plan's focus areas are enhancing guest arrival and orientation, deepening public engagement with the collections, expanding research facilities, improving education and event spaces, and upgrading trails and pathways with an overall emphasis of inclusion, accessibility, and sustainability.

Sustainability and Energy Efficiency

As one of the world's leading scientific centers dedicated to tree conservation and research, The Morton Arboretum is committed to infusing [sustainability and energy efficiency](#) into every aspect of daily operations and long-term planning. Working closely with the Director of Sustainability, the Vice President will centralize efforts across the Arboretum and ensure that considerations of sustainability and energy efficiency are integrated into the comprehensive site plan. This work includes but is not limited to waste reduction, adoption of renewable energy sources—including a new solar array that is being constructed on-site, and the preservation of water quality. The Vice President will advocate for the Arboretum's commitment to environmental sustainability and climate change mitigation and align operations with these goals.

Streamline Operations and Maximize Technology

Technology has expanded the reach of the Arboretum's scientific research, enhanced guest experience, and taken the Arboretum's mission beyond its primary campus in Lisle, IL. In this digital age, where technology is constantly improving, the Arboretum must maintain a sustainable pace of innovation to eliminate redundancies and ensure effectiveness in operations and administrative functions. The Vice

President must holistically assess the existing structures, processes, and workflow to identify solutions that expand access for audiences of different abilities and languages. The Vice President will work closely with the Director of Information Technology to evaluate how the organization might leverage new advancements in technology, including artificial intelligence, to support its needs while remaining hyper-focused on cybersecurity and external threats to the Arboretum's infrastructure.

Inspire and Support an Engaged Staff

The Vice President will lead diverse teams of employees who bring significant expertise to the management and operations of the Arboretum. They will also work closely with external contractors, architects, and engineers to deliver on the Arboretum's vision and strategic plans. In both internal and external engagements, the Vice President must model a people-centered approach that includes active listening and decisive leadership as well as clear and transparent communication. The Vice President will keep staff well-apprised of developments within their departments and across the Arboretum that are likely to impact them while also appropriately representing them in leadership team discussions. Furthermore, the Vice President will provide opportunities for growth and professional development that create clear pathways for advancement.

Support Risk Management Efforts Across the Organization

The responsibility for risk management is currently decentralized across the Arboretum with functional leaders responsible for efforts in their respective areas. As the nature of external threats becomes more complex and increasingly spread across multiple divisions, the Vice President of Operations and Planning will take on a mission-critical role to oversee the risk management activities taking place across the organization, reducing any duplication, and identifying potential gaps that exist and filling them to ensure the Arboretum's exposure to risk is minimized.

DESIRED QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The successful candidate will have a bachelor's degree and at least ten years of planning and operations leadership experience in museums, public gardens, higher education, or similarly complex mission-driven environments with a large physical footprint. In addition, the ideal candidate will possess many of the following qualifications and characteristics:

- Strong project management skills and an ability to drive multiple initiatives and areas of expertise simultaneously.
- Demonstrated experience working as a true business partner with the senior leader of a large division or CEO of a business or organization, with clear experience translating a strategic vision/plan into a successful operating model.
- Demonstrated experience working with and understanding the role of members and committees of a board of trustees as the governance body of an organization.
- Analytical skills to assess and synthesize data, develop solutions, and form recommendations that support organizational goals and objectives with a strong business plan.

- Excellent presentation and verbal and written communication skills.
- Strong interpersonal skills and the ability to negotiate, resolve conflict, motivate, mentor, influence, and develop relationships at all levels of an organization.
- Demonstrated commitment to promoting accessibility, equity, and inclusivity.
- Spirit of teamwork, collaboration, and a focus on finding solutions to advance progress.
- A dedication to the Arboretum and its mission.

COMPENSATION

The anticipated salary range for this position is \$220,000-\$230,000.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

The Morton Arboretum has retained Isaacson, Miller, an international executive search firm, to assist with this search. Review of applications, nominations, and expressions of interest will begin immediately and continue on a confidential basis until an appointment is made. Applicants should send a cover letter and resume or curriculum vitae. Nominations, applications, and inquiries should be sent electronically and in confidence to:

Jeff Kessner, Partner
Berlinda Mojica, Senior Associate
Jenny Rubin, Senior Search Coordinator

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/morton-arboretum/vice-president-operations-and-planning>

The Morton Arboretum is a champion for diversity, supporting a culture of inclusion that attracts, inspires, and engages people to achieve success. The Arboretum is committed to hire and develop employees based on job-related qualifications irrespective of race, religion, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, disability, or veteran status. To increase diversity in professions related to the public garden realm, we encourage applications from underrepresented minorities, persons with disabilities, and veterans.

The Morton Arboretum is dedicated to complying with our obligations as an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. All applicants are guaranteed equal consideration for employment.