



Vice President of Development
The Morton Arboretum
Lisle, Illinois

THE SEARCH

The Morton Arboretum (Morton or the Arboretum), globally recognized for its century-long commitment to tree-focused science, conservation, and education, seeks an experienced fundraising executive to serve as its Vice President of Development (VP). This is a unique leadership opportunity to partner with a committed President and CEO, lead and grow an exceptional team, and guide a comprehensive development program to achieve historic levels of philanthropy as Morton prepares for a multi-million-dollar campaign endeavor in support of its ambitious and forward-thinking strategic plan.

For more than a century, the Arboretum has played an increasingly prominent leadership role as an organization that shares meaningful scientific research, leads global conservation work, and envisions a world where people and trees thrive together. Located just 25 miles west of Chicago, Morton offers an oasis of natural beauty and tranquility just minutes from one of the country's greatest cities. Its 1,700 acres of beautiful tree-filled landscapes are a place of enjoyment, a vibrant hub for nature education, and a world-renowned center conducting scientific research to ensure healthy and resilient trees. More than 400 employees have chosen to advance the Arboretum's mission and are committed to inclusion, responsible stewardship, collaboration, continuous learning, and delivering an exceptional experience to patrons. For the last four years, the Arboretum has been named a "Top Workplace" by *The Chicago Tribune* and this year was also named nationally as a top workplace by USA Today. As a nonprofit organization, the Arboretum's 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.

Reporting to President and CEO Jill Koski, the VP will direct all fundraising, donor engagement, and membership efforts across the Arboretum and successfully lead the impending comprehensive campaign, as well as secure annual operation funding. Working in close collaboration with senior staff and board leadership, the VP will expand and broaden the organization's base of individual, foundation, and corporate philanthropic support, as well as its general membership. Additionally, the VP will direct special giving initiatives and partner with the president and board development committee to drive data-

informed and donor-centric engagement approaches. Importantly, the VP is part of the Arboretum's senior leadership team, a cohesive group committed to guiding the organization at the highest level and ensuring that Morton is among the most respected and far-reaching arboretums in the nation. As part of the senior leadership team, the VP will contribute to advancing the overall organizational strategic plan, setting priorities, and aligning philanthropic objectives across the entire enterprise.

The VP will be a skilled, decisive, and inclusive fundraising leader with awareness of and strong interest in Morton's mission. The ideal candidate must demonstrate superb skills and success in donor cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship at major and principal gift levels; significant experience managing robust teams and programs within a sophisticated development operation across a campaign life cycle; a record of developing and implementing effective fundraising and engagement strategies; and excellent communication and listening skills. The VP will serve as a unifying force for the organization and excel at working in a consensus-driven, collaborative environment, while simultaneously establishing and adhering to clear expectations of accountability and quality. Finally, the VP must be an active community member who embraces the culture and core values of The Morton Arboretum.

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

THE MORTON ARBORETUM

History

[The Morton 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 on to this day through the Arboretum's mission and programs. Mr. Morton established his country estate in Lisle, Illinois in the early 1900s as a respite from the bustle of the Chicago industrial scene 25 miles away. Between 1909 and 1921, Mr. Morton focused on transforming the property into an arboretum, and in 1922, The Morton Arboretum was formally established. Joy Morton was as committed to trees as he was to the future of Chicago. Today, his vision endures more than 100 years later and is more timely and relevant than ever.

Strategic Vision

The Morton Arboretum's vision is a greener, healthier, and more beautiful world where people and trees thrive together. To achieve this vision, the Arboretum has identified three interlinked strategic priorities:

- People and communities are engaged and inspired.

- Knowledge is advanced through collaborative and scientific inquiry.
- Trees are protected, preserved, and supported.

A key component of the current [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. The Arboretum is committed to hiring employees, electing trustees, and attracting volunteers representing the broader public, through which the Arboretum will gain enriched perspectives to inform its objectives.

Organization and Programs

In 2022, the Arboretum celebrated its first century of mission impact. Today, the Arboretum encompasses 1,700 acres of woodlands, prairies, 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 the globe and has more than 53,000 member households. The Arboretum is operated by a team of staff and volunteers, including 230 full-time, 135 part-time, 120 temporary employees, and 1,000 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 more than 100,000 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

Science is the foundation of the Arboretum's work for trees. The Arboretum's [Center for Tree Science](#) conducts essential research to ensure healthy and resilient trees and forests in a rapidly changing world. The [Global Tree Conservation Program](#) works to safeguard threatened tree species through research, conservation, and global collaborations. The [Chicago Region Trees Initiative](#) works to improve the health, diversity, and equitable distribution of trees in the Chicago region and throughout Illinois, working in partnership with hundreds of organizations and municipalities. Foundational to the Arboretum's science and conservation initiatives are the living collections and natural landscapes of the site. Researchers and Collections staff work together closely to develop integrated and collaborative collection acquisition plans, research plots, conservation groves, habitat management plans, and more.

Learning, Engagement, and Outreach

The Arboretum's [Learning and Engagement](#) division provides programming for guests of all ages, including Summer Science Camps and other nature-based early learning programs for children. 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 and horticulture, 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.

Morton's outreach not only focuses regionally, but also expands globally through programs such as [ArbNet](#), an interactive professional community of arboreta and an arboretum accreditation program. Launched in 2011, ArbNet now includes more than 2,500 institutions from 38 countries.

LEADERSHIP

In 2022, [Jill Koski](#) was named the President and CEO of The Morton Arboretum. She was selected as the fourth leader in the Arboretum's 100-year history and the organization's first female leader. Koski came to the 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 a decade. Her prior experience includes leadership roles in science-focused environmental nonprofits, namely the John G. Shedd Aquarium and the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum in Chicago.

The Arboretum's [Board of Trustees](#) is responsible for the overall governance of the organization and the advancement of its mission. Comprised of corporate and civic leaders, trustees are elected to their roles. Additionally, a [Board of Advisors](#) provides guidance and perspectives to the leadership of the Arboretum around strategic matters related to its mission and work. The Board of Trustees is currently chaired by Robert J. Schillerstrom.

FUNDRAISING OVERVIEW

The Arboretum has grown and flourished for more than a century with the generous support of donors who care about trees, people, and communities. For the fiscal year ending December 31, 2024, the Arboretum raised more than \$19.8 million in contributed revenue. Of this figure, \$9.3 million came from private philanthropy, \$4.1 million from government grants, and \$6.4 million from membership dues. The Arboretum's development team comprises 34 staff members but is poised to grow throughout 2025 in preparation for the upcoming comprehensive campaign.

Learn more about the Arboretum's financial and fundraising performance in the [2024 Perennial Report](#).

ROLE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT OF DEVELOPMENT

Reporting to the President and CEO and serving as a key member of the senior leadership team, the VP will define a development vision and implement the necessary infrastructure to support a comprehensive program that strengthens a culture of philanthropy; supports the organization's strategic plan and campaign priorities; attracts new sources of funding; promotes the involvement of donors, members, and families; grows and retains staff; and raises the visibility of Morton as a premiere environmental and cultural institution – regionally, nationally, and globally. In addition to their formal duties, the VP must be an integral member of the Morton community.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Strategic Vision and Fundraising Leadership

- Serve as architect and leader of a strategic, cohesive, and systematic development program to broaden fundraising, outreach, and membership activities, and increase philanthropic revenue year-over-year. Prepare Morton for future fundraising endeavors, most immediately for a comprehensive, multi-million-dollar campaign endeavor, ensuring optimally deployed staff and effective, efficient infrastructure that will support success.
- Assess Morton's fundraising potential and craft a sophisticated multi-year fundraising and engagement strategy that will result in sustainable long-term growth in philanthropic contributions and membership, in keeping with the mission and core values of the organization.
- Based on campaign priorities, identify compelling funding opportunities and match them with existing and prospective donors' interests. Leverage the current strategic plan and emerging campaign messaging to energize, inspire, and engage the Morton community of supporters.
- Personally cultivate, solicit, and steward a select prospect and donor portfolio. Lead the frontline fundraising team by example, demonstrating success and ensuring that timely steps are taken toward solicitation.
- Develop and deploy a strategic and forward-thinking operating model that utilizes and is enabled by metrics, data, and development benchmarking with an eye toward best practices.

Executive Engagement

- Guide and support the President and CEO in her role as chief spokesperson and fundraiser, serving as an advisor and co-strategist in cultivating prospective donors and soliciting transformational gifts. Similarly guide and support senior leaders, volunteers, and other key constituents in all

development-related activities, ensuring that their time spent is productive, meaningful, and personally rewarding.

- In coordination with the President and CEO, advance development conversations at the board level and solicit board participation in executing the fundraising plan.
- Serve as an active and contributing member of the senior leadership team. Build collaborative professional relationships with peers and foster a strong team orientation. Work with a broad range of diverse individuals and groups to achieve shared goals.
- Participate in organization-wide strategic planning efforts and contribute to discussions that guide strategies and policies shaping Morton's future. Listen and contribute to strategic insights.
- Identify compelling funding opportunities within the Arboretum and match them with existing and potential donors.

Staff Management

- Lead, support, and mentor Morton's development staff of 34 (five direct reports), poised to grow to nearly 40 in preparation for the campaign. Promote a culture of excellence, collaboration, and professional growth, and further develop a diverse and high-caliber staff that is well prepared to meet the ongoing challenges and opportunities of an ambitious program.
- Oversee development staff activities, including the hiring, training, defining of job descriptions, and performance review processes for the team. Enhance professional development, career planning, and employee wellness opportunities for development staff. Recruit and retain top talent, further establishing and cementing Morton as a broadly viewed employer of choice.
- Set clear direction, priorities, and measurable goals for the development team. Assess current staff effectiveness and overall organizational structure; create and nurture a culture of transparency, communication, and collaboration. Ensure that all staff members have a common commitment to advancing Morton and its priorities.
- Maintain a leadership style that is fair, equitable, open, and inspiring, empowering, and motivating to staff. Foster a work environment that recognizes and rewards performance, supports new ideas and risk-taking, builds confidence, encourages interaction and teamwork, and reduces silos. Serve as an advocate for staff, representing their needs and concerns.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

While no one candidate will meet all desired criteria, the successful candidate will bring most of the following qualifications and attributes.

- A minimum of 10 years of progressively responsible experience envisioning, developing, and implementing a successful and comprehensive development program in a fast-paced environment. Depth of knowledge of best practices in all key areas of development, including demonstrated ability to manage and close a comprehensive campaign.
- Strong planning and analytical skills, as well as proven experience in developing and effectively implementing an organization-wide development plan.
- Results-driven with personal experience cultivating seven-figure gifts, including supporting donor strategies, solicitation approaches, and donor stewardship.
- A range of experience from a variety of sources including major gifts, corporate and foundation giving, planned giving, and membership programs, with a track record of results across all areas.
- Fluency in a range of gift vehicles, including donor advised funds, estate gifts, and pledges.
- Deep understanding of resource management in terms of time, effort, budget, and funding, and evidence of strategic direction making in allocation and tracking of resources.
- Exemplary organizational development skills in building and managing strong teams; ability to inspire and motivate in line with the Arboretum's focus, key performance indicators, and expectations.
- Experience as an influential leader and manager, with a proven track record of strong hiring, team development, and career progression and promotion.
- Demonstrated history of implementing new ways of thinking and engagement while thinking strategically and tactically.
- Experience building upon an existing program, resulting in a transformative increase in philanthropic revenue for an organization. Success in increasing the effectiveness of a program and its staff through established objective and performance standards.
- A data-driven approach, and the ability to articulate metrics in broadly accessible terms.
- Success working closely with and building collaborative relationships with senior leadership peers, board members, and staff at all levels.
- The credibility, maturity, and sound judgment required to effectively engage and leverage Morton's leadership and volunteers in the cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship of key prospects and donors, including high-net-worth individuals and business leaders.
- Strong personal integrity and work ethic, as well as a sense of humor and perspective.

- Bachelor's degree required.

COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

The expected hiring range for this position is \$275,000 - \$315,000.

To attract and retain the best staff, the Arboretum offers a generous, comprehensive benefits package as part of overall compensation.

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:

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

Jack Gorman, Partner
Nicole Poe, Managing Associate
Sandeep Kaur, Senior Search Coordinator

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 hiring and developing employees based on job-related qualifications irrespective of race, religion, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, disability, or veteran status.

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