



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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Search for the Vice President for Government Relations

University of Minnesota

Minneapolis, Minnesota

THE SEARCH

The University of Minnesota (the University or UMN) – one of the most prestigious comprehensive, public land-grant research universities in the nation – seeks a strategic, creative, collaborative, and dynamic leader to serve as its first Vice President for Government Relations (VPGR). The Vice President will join the University at an exciting moment in time and will help shape its next chapter. Under the leadership of University President, Dr. Rebecca Cunningham, a new strategic plan and roadmap for the future will be introduced this year, and the University is poised to deepen its commitment to research, teaching, and service, open access to opportunity, and innovation to advance its land-grant mission and further expand its impact nationally and internationally. The Vice President will deepen ties and support with the University's local, state, and federal government stakeholders – elected officials, policymakers, and influencers – in the collective effort to advance the institution's mission and strategic priorities. Amid rapidly shifting public policy landscapes in higher education, the VPGR will play a pivotal role in articulating the University's value and strategy, securing essential resources, engaging and inspiring action among a broad array of stakeholders, and strengthening public trust in the University of Minnesota.

The University's impact in national and international spheres can be measured by its [\\$1.35 billion in research funding](#). The National Science Foundation ranks the University 12th among U.S. public research universities, and *US News and World Report* ranks UMN 23rd in Top Public Schools nationally. [Times Higher Ed Sustainability Impact Ranking](#) places UMN fifth nationally and in the top 10 percent globally. UMN was also ranked first among U.S. public universities in the Times Higher Education's [global interdisciplinary Science Ranking \(ISR\)](#). Similarly, the University's service to the state is measured across multiple areas: its five campuses serve 68,000 undergraduate and graduate students; its over 600,000 [alumni](#) (62 percent of whom live in Minnesota) contribute to its economy; its [healthcare enterprise](#) serves over 1.3 million patients annually in hospitals and clinics across the state; and its [extension](#) programs provide solutions, practical education, and training for all Minnesotans. UMN is home to 4,926 faculty and over 23,000 non-academic staff. UMN faculty are world-recognized for their research, teaching, clinical and engagement accomplishments. UMN currently boasts 26 Nobel Prize recipients and recipients of prestigious awards such as the Guggenheim and MacArthur Fellowships, and many other highly prestigious awards & honors and members of the National Academies.

Reporting directly to the President and serving as a member of the President's cabinet, the inaugural Vice President for Government Relations will lead the University's engagement with federal, state, and local governments, as well as community stakeholders. The successful candidate should have the demonstrated ability to cultivate relationships in Minnesota and across the Upper Midwest and should ideally bring a proven ability to build strategic partnerships that advance higher education initiatives in different geographic and political perspectives. The Vice President will lead an experienced team of government relations experts to develop and implement advocacy strategies to advance the University's mission and priorities. The Vice President will serve as the University's chief representative to elected officials and agencies and serve as the institution's liaison to several national higher education organizations. The position also oversees compliance with legislative reporting requirements and engages internal University constituents in public policy efforts. The VPGR will have the rare opportunity to be the voice and lead governmental partner representing one of the nation's premier public research universities.

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.

ROLE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

The Vice President for Government & Community Relations is responsible for providing strategic vision, leadership, and effective management of the University's state, local, and federal government relations. The Vice President reports to the President of the University and serves as a member of the President's cabinet and as a key partner and advisor to University leaders. The Vice President oversees the Office of Government & Community Relations and a team of 7 full-time employees.

The following are the key responsibilities of the Vice President for Government Relations:

- Plan, direct, and lead implementation of a coordinated strategy for the University of Minnesota – across its campuses, colleges, and units – to cultivate and manage relationships with elected leaders, policymakers, influencers, stakeholders, and constituencies at the federal, state, and local levels with a goal to articulate the University's priorities and increase support of the University's mission and priorities.
- Represent the University's interests at the Minnesota State Capitol and in Washington, D.C. – including with state government agencies, the Governor, with Congress and the federal Executive Branch, before local units of government, and community organizations and campus neighbors.
- Monitor legislative, regulatory, and policy issues at the state and federal levels, identifying areas of strategic opportunity, and formulating and implementing strategies that position the University to meet its mission and priorities, given those opportunities.
- Serve as the University's lead advocate at the state and federal levels in support of the land-grant mission, academic excellence, unique value, and economic impact.

- Engage and collaborate with University leaders, faculty, students, staff, and alumni as appropriate, in advocacy efforts.
- Develop and maintain strong and effective relationships with national higher education policy and advocacy groups and associations (e.g., AAU, APLU, etc.) and other organizations that influence successful federal and state legislative strategies in Minnesota and the nation.
- Manage and lead the University's Government & Community Relations team.
- Development and oversight of the annual budget for Government & Community Relations.
- Oversee all University of Minnesota legislatively mandated/required reports.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

While no one candidate will embody every quality, the successful candidate will bring many of the following professional qualifications and personal attributes:

Required Qualifications

- Bachelor's degree and at least 15 years of professional experience
- Solid understanding of the state, federal legislative, and executive processes
- Demonstrated ability to manage a team of professionals with a broad range of portfolios
- Track record of success in legislative advocacy, elected official, policymaker, and influencer engagement and persuasion
- Ability to set a strategic vision and create public affairs plans and strategies
- Demonstrated ability to develop and maintain strong relationships and effective partnerships
- Experience as a collaborative advisor and executive cabinet member at a university or another large, complex public-serving organization
- Excellent oral, writing, and interpersonal communication skills
- Able to mobilize diverse constituent groups and balance competing demands, priorities, and needs of multiple stakeholders
- Ability to work collaboratively with multiple, diverse constituencies
- Experience with crisis and issues management
- Demonstrates exceptional judgment, discretion, integrity, and flexibility

Preferred Qualifications

- Advanced degree
- Experience working in a complex, decentralized environment
- Experience developing and leading successful legislative strategies in Minnesota and Washington, DC
- Understanding of the breadth and complexity of a major research university

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

The Vice President for Government Relations 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-\$425,000.

The University of Minnesota offers excellent benefits. Please visit the [Office of Human Resources](#) website for more information regarding benefit eligibility.

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](#). Electronic submission of materials is strongly encouraged.

Jeff Kessner, Partner
Keight Tucker Kennedy, Managing 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.

APPENDIX: ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

The University of Minnesota is a comprehensive, land-grant 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 is a proud member of the AAU and 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.

The University's [five distinct campuses](#) serve all regions of the state. Each campus has [unique strengths](#), enriched by its surrounding communities. The Chancellors of the greater Minnesota campuses report directly to the president and work in close collaboration to achieve systemwide goals. UMN 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, UMN 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. Based in the Twin Cities campus (St. Paul and Minneapolis), the Vice President will work in collaboration across the five-campus system to broaden and deepen this legacy. 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, the Vice President will work with the System Chancellors to further embody UMN's singular vision of excellence and a unified drive to serve.

People and Programs

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 major research university of exceptional breadth and depth with expansive interdisciplinary opportunities, the Twin Cities campus advances education, research, and outreach across 17 [schools and colleges](#): Biological Sciences; Continuing and Professional Studies; Dentistry; Design; Education and Human Development; Extension; Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Sciences; Law; Liberal Arts; Management; Medicine; Nursing; Pharmacy; Public Affairs; Public Health; Science and Engineering; Veterinary Medicine. The University of Minnesota is one of the few land-grant leading research universities positioned in a vibrant metropolitan city with over 25

Fortune 500 companies. 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.

At the heart of the University are its essential staff members and its more than 4,000 faculty members. Faculty are considered some of the best in their respective fields. UMN 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. The staff, over 14,000 strong, are known for their dedication to the institution and its community.

Students come to the University of Minnesota from all 50 states and 148 countries. The Twin Cities Campus enrolls more than 30,000 undergraduates and 14,000 graduate and professional students across more than 150 undergraduate majors and more than 550 graduate and professional programs. The University of Minnesota has more than 600,000 living alumni worldwide.

Research & Innovation

The University averages over \$1.35 billion in research expenditures annually, ranking 12th nationally among public universities in the United States. The University's technology transfer work has been recognized for its excellence in several national and global rankings, including: *World's Most Innovative Universities* (Reuters) where UMN ranked 22nd globally and 2nd among Big Ten public institutions; and *Universities Granted U.S. Utility Patents* (National Academy of Inventors) where UMN ranked 16th in the world and 4th among Big Ten public institutions.

Health Sciences

The University trains over 70 percent of Minnesota's health professionals, and health sciences and medical research accounts for over \$570 million in externally funded research annually. [University of Minnesota Health Sciences](#) unites education and research across six schools and [patient care](#) across the state. The University recently partnered with Essentia Health as the institution's partner health system, which will offer additional opportunities for health science deans to expand health sciences education across the state and advance a vision for an integrated "all-Minnesota" framework.

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 3.46 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.

A Welcoming and Inclusive Environment

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 percent Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students and 9.5 percent 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.

Budget and Economic Impact

The University has an annual operating budget of \$4.5 billion structured in an RCM budget model. The University generates an estimated economic impact of \$9 billion for the Minnesota economy. UMN is the state's seventh-largest employer 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

Following a national search, 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.

President 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. As a researcher, Dr. Cunningham has earned continuous federal research funding for more than 25 years as a principal investigator and is a member of the National Academy of Medicine.

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 and are elected by the Minnesota legislature. There is one Regent from each of the state's eight congressional districts as well as four additional Regents from the state at large.

Minneapolis and St. Paul

The University's flagship Twin Cities campus is in the heart of a dynamic metro area that is a global economic leader, a hub for education and culture, and renowned for its abundant cultural and natural resources. The Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area is home to the 4th-largest concentration of Fortune 500 companies in the country as well as thriving entrepreneurial and small-business sectors. Ranked as one of the country's leading "creative economy" communities, the Twin Cities is renowned for its arts and nonprofit sectors, as well as its many lakes and parks and wealth of recreational and entertainment opportunities. Spanning locations in both Minneapolis and St. Paul, the Twin Cities Campus is part of the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. It is a place that offers strong work-life balance, low cost of living compared to similarly sized metro areas, and high rates of health coverage – in short, a place that ranks highly in quality-of-life surveys.