



The National Public Honors College

Vice President for Advancement and Executive Director of the SMCM Foundation
St. Mary's College of Maryland
St. Mary's, Maryland

THE SEARCH

The first standalone public honors college in the nation, St. Mary's College of Maryland (SMCM or St. Mary's) seeks an innovative, mission-driven, and action-oriented fundraising and alumni engagement professional as the next vice president for advancement and executive director of the SMCM Foundation (VP/ED). Providing bold new leadership, the VP/ED will join the institution at a pivotal moment. This spring, St. Mary's will celebrate the inauguration of new president [Dr. Rhonda Phillips](#), followed by the unveiling of a new campus-wide strategic plan on July 1, 2026. St. Mary's is positioned for significant growth under President Phillips and the next VP/ED, who will serve as the architect of an ambitious future fundraising campaign. As a member of an evolving presidential leadership team, the VP/ED will lead efforts to elevate visibility, deepen engagement, and expand fundraising for a distinctive public liberal arts college with a compelling and rare legacy of excellence and access.

Established in 1840, St. Mary's is designated by state statute as Maryland's public honors college. St. Mary's adopted the brand identity of the National Public Honors College to clearly and confidently communicate what has always made the college distinctive: its rigorous liberal arts and sciences education; vibrant waterfront campus; and commitment to excellence, integrity, and social responsibility. With a diverse and engaged community, St. Mary's offers transformative, experiential learning that prepares students to lead with purpose and thrive in an increasingly complex world.

The current environment demands that St. Mary's expand its external reach, strengthen its approach, and articulate its outcomes in new and compelling ways. To that end, President Phillips and college and foundation board leadership seek an accomplished and high-performing leader to transform St. Mary's advancement function into a modern, best-practices-informed philanthropic and alumni engagement enterprise. Guiding a 12-person team, the VP/ED is responsible for designing and executing a

comprehensive, integrated advancement strategy and the necessary infrastructure to best position the college to respond to the evolving nature of philanthropy, and to more deeply engage the college's broad, multi-generational constituent population. The VP/ED will report directly to President Phillips, and work in concert with her, leveraging her experience with and commitment to advancement-related activities.

The VP/ED will also work closely with college and foundation board leaders to ensure the effective use of their time and maximize their success, serving as the principal advisor on advancement at St. Mary's, and partnering with the president and senior leadership in the cultivation of highest-level donors. As a member of the president's executive team, the VP/ED will be expected to provide meaningful input on the full range of issues facing the institution, and thus a person with a contemporary and comprehensive knowledge of higher education, including public education and the liberal arts, is much desired. The VP/ED will be an active partner to the president and senior leaders in setting vision for the college's strategic priorities, effectively operationalizing the most promising into fundraising strategies and plans.

A minimum of 10 years of leadership experience in advancement, constituency engagement, and staff management is required, as is a knowledge of strategies employed in all major fundraising and alumni engagement functions. The VP/ED must be able to create a metrics-driven, financially prudent, and results- and best-practices-oriented work environment that promotes collaboration and achievement. Experience leading all aspects of a complex team, including managing, mentoring, motivating, retaining, and evaluating staff is essential. A bachelor's degree is required.

St. Mary's College of Maryland has retained Jack Gorman of Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in this recruitment. Please direct all applications, nominations, and inquiries to Isaacson, Miller, as indicated at the end of this document.

ABOUT ST. MARY'S COLLEGE OF MARYLAND

Founded in 1840 as a living monument to the state of Maryland and the birthplace of religious freedom in America, SMCM has evolved through a rich history from its origins as St. Mary's Female Seminary to its designation in 1992 as Maryland's public honors college. Today, SMCM is recognized as the National Public Honors College, offering an accessible, rigorous liberal arts and sciences education grounded in excellence, integrity, and social responsibility. The college enrolls over 1,600 students from 29 states and six countries, with 31 percent representing historically underrepresented groups. With a 10:1 student-to-faculty ratio, 69 academic programs, the LEAD curriculum which integrates credit-bearing professional development coursework into every student's academic program, and offering degrees including the B.A., B.S., and the MAT, SMCM prepares students for success in the workforce, graduate study, and service. Popular majors include psychology, biology, business administration, marine science, environmental studies, and English.

Located on a stunning 361-acre waterfront campus, St. Mary's fosters a vibrant residential community with almost 85 percent of students living on campus and offers 23 NCAA Division III varsity teams. Through its commitment to experiential and applied discovery, St. Mary's provides an integrative pathway that empowers students to learn by doing and to lead with purpose.

Leadership

Dr. Rhonda Phillips was named the eighth president of St. Mary's College of Maryland and began her tenure on July 1, 2025. President Phillips is committed to value-added learning experiences, combining educational, research and engagement opportunities in experiential, transformative environments. She provides interdisciplinary teaching and research experience across a range of diverse topics including community development and well-being studies, economic and technology-based development, and urban and regional planning. Prior to her appointment at St. Mary's College of Maryland, President Phillips was the 20th president of Chatham University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She is Inaugural Dean Emerita of the John Martinson Honors College at Purdue University and held the rank of professor in the Agricultural Economics Department. She joined Purdue from Arizona State University where she was Associate Dean for Barrett, The Honors College.

SMCM's Board of Trustees is chaired by alumnus John J. Bell '95. He was elected in 2024 as the first alumnus chair in history. The SMCM Foundation's Board of Directors is led by President Daniel J. Schiffman '91.

ROLE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR ADVANCEMENT + EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (VP/ED)

The vice president for advancement and executive director of the St. Mary's College of Maryland (SMCM) Foundation (VP/ED) is the chief advancement officer of the college and a key member of the president's senior leadership team. The VP/ED provides strategic vision and executive leadership for all aspects of advancement, including fundraising, alumni relations, donor stewardship, and the operations of the SMCM Foundation. This leader will design and execute strategies that strengthen philanthropic partnerships, expand institutional resources, enhance the college's national profile as the National Public Honors College, and ensure sound governance and fiduciary management of the foundation.

In addition, the VP/ED will personally and successfully engage a select portfolio of highest-level prospects and donors; will partner with gift officers to determine appropriate strategies and define mutually acceptable annual and multi-year performance goals; and will ensure that advancement effectively engages St. Mary's roughly 16,000 alumni and other donors in the life of the college. In addition to the outlined formal duties, the successful VP/ED must be an integral member of the local and college communities. Active engagement in the community will be critical, along with integrity, warmth, resilience, and a deep personal commitment to the mission of the college.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE VP/ED:

Strategic Vision and Leadership

- Assess the fundraising and reputational growth potential of the college and the effectiveness of its advancement programs to exceed the college's \$3 million to \$5 million annual fundraising goal; craft a multi-year strategy to develop the culture of philanthropy, substantially and sustainably increase philanthropic support and endowment growth, and strengthen reputational awareness in keeping with the mission and core values of the college.
- Serve as a trusted advisor the president, board of trustees, and foundation board, and as an active member of the president's senior leadership team, participating in implementing the college-wide strategic plan; provide counsel regarding the fundability of identified priorities and initiatives as well as new ideas; effectively operationalize those with the most promise.
- Lead the planning, preparation, and execution of a future comprehensive fundraising campaign, ensuring an optimally deployed staff and an effective, efficient infrastructure that will support a successful campaign.
- In conjunction with the president and the senior leadership team, develop clear, consistent, cohesive, and compelling messaging that conveys the uniqueness, strengths, and aspirations of St. Mary's and its leadership, and articulates the case for philanthropic support of funding priorities. Effectively communicate messaging through a variety of means to excite and successfully engage a broad array of constituencies, including faculty, staff, students, alumni, donors, and current and future friends of the college.

Executive Support and Engagement

- Guide and support the president in her role as chief spokesperson and fundraiser, serving as advisor and co-strategist in cultivating prospective donors, soliciting transformative gifts, and operationalizing bold new ideas. Similarly guide and support senior leaders, volunteers, faculty, and other key constituents in advancement-related activities, ensuring that their time spent is productive, meaningful, and personally rewarding.
- Provide the highest level of support to volunteer leadership and the board for their activities on behalf of St. Mary's and SMCM Foundation; ensure that their experience is meaningful, productive, and enjoyable, and that their intellectual and emotional connections to the college and each other are strengthened.
- Cultivate strong working relationships with administrators, faculty, and staff across the college, including colleagues in finance, student affairs, enrollment management, and academics, engendering trust through transparent communication and a clear motivation to work as a team.

Programmatic Growth and Frontline Fundraising

- Evaluate, strengthen, and enhance major, planned, and institutional giving pipelines, as well as annual fund programming; develop and implement new innovative programs to identify and acquire prospective donors, increase donor retention, and upgrade and renew existing donors.
- Build and manage a personal portfolio of high-capacity prospects, securing transformational gifts in support of academic programs, scholarships, campus life, and institutional priorities.
- Cultivate and steward relationships with alumni, parents, corporations, foundations, and community partners, ensuring sustained philanthropic investment in the college. Proactively seek to engage and build relationships with others that will result in an increase in both the number and size of gifts; initiate new and innovative techniques to connect with external constituents.
- Provide leadership for innovative initiatives such as the “25 Partners for \$25K” challenge, Bloomberg finance lab, marine science partnerships, and emerging programmatic opportunities.

Staff Management and Operational Oversight

- Maintain a leadership style that is fluid and open; support and mentor the advancement team and operation, setting clear direction and priorities; promote excellence through well-defined goals and implementation of best practices and accountability measures; inspire, empower, and motivate staff through active, transparent communication and delegation; instill a sense of urgency and a proactive orientation across advancement.
- Foster a professional environment that recognizes and rewards performance, supports innovation and risk taking, builds confidence, and encourages teamwork; serve as an advocate for staff, representing their concerns and needs.
- Ensure that all systems and processes, from data capture to gift acceptances and processing, maximize available intelligence via reporting and also follow sound budgetary, legal, and accountancy practices.
- Plan and carefully manage the advancement budget, ensuring that resources are deployed efficiently and effectively in support of St. Mary's fundraising goals and objectives; utilize contemporary analytics to project, measure, and report on progress relative to goals.
- Oversee all governance, compliance, and fiduciary responsibilities for the SMCM Foundation, ensuring proper management of foundation assets, endowments, and restricted funds, working closely with the Joint Investment Advisory Committee (JIAC).

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

St. Mary's College of Maryland seeks an extraordinary leader who will bring with them many, if not all, of the following qualifications and characteristics:

- A minimum of 10 years of progressively responsible fundraising and managerial leadership experience in advancement; knowledge of best practices in all key areas of fundraising and alumni engagement; experience with strategic planning as a member of a senior leadership team; a demonstrated ability to plan, manage, and successfully close a comprehensive campaign.
- Experience building upon an existing advancement program, including individual and institutional philanthropy, resulting in a meaningful increase in philanthropic revenue for an organization; success increasing the effectiveness of an advancement program and its staff through established objectives and performance standards; experience supporting and managing governing boards and their members.
- Proven management skills and the ability to establish a team- and goal-oriented environment that empowers staff through active communication and delegation and that builds confidence, promotes dialogue, and celebrates achievement.
- Superior written, and oral communication skills; superb storytelling skills with the ability to succinctly communicate a vision and process to senior leaders and other key constituents, utilizing data and metrics as appropriate as a foundation for advancement programs.
- Exemplary interpersonal and listening skills; impeccable attention to detail and superb follow-through; strong personal integrity, flexibility, charisma, and work ethic coupled with a sense of humor and perspective; a self-starter, comfortable with ambiguity.
- The credibility, maturity, and sound judgment required to effectively engage and leverage college and foundation leadership, volunteers, and other key constituents in the cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship of key prospects and donors.
- A proven track record of success in personally cultivating, soliciting, and stewarding six- and seven-figure gifts from individual and institutional donors; a high level of comfort and effectiveness working with high-net-worth individuals and organizational leaders.
- A diplomatic, collaborative demeanor; the political savvy to navigate a complex organization; the desire and ability to gain trust and build strong collaborative relationships with all members of an operation across a diverse organization.
- Excellent judgment and creative problem-solving skills, including the ability to resolve conflict.

- A proponent of the liberal arts and public education, with a deep appreciation for the history, achievements, and aspirations of St. Mary's and the ability to effectively articulate its vision to a broad audience.
- A sharp eye for operational efficiency and the best use of resources, including a demonstrated understanding of budgets and the ability to manage them.
- The personal flexibility to travel and work evenings and weekends as required.
- Bachelor's degree required.

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

St. Mary's College of Maryland is committed to practicing salary transparency. The salary range for this position is \$200,000 to \$240,000. The final offer is determined by a candidate's relevant experience, qualifications, and our commitment to internal equity. We review global compensation on a regular basis to ensure market competitiveness and equity. The hiring range for this position has been carefully crafted in alignment with the market.

St. Mary's City, Maryland

St. Mary's City, located in [St. Mary's County](#), is the [historic site Maryland's first capital](#) founded in 1634. St. Mary's County is situated along the Chesapeake Bay and provides abundant opportunities for outdoor recreation, including hiking through local forests, biking across farm fields, and paddleboarding on the St. Mary's River. Nature enthusiasts will appreciate that SMCM was the first college in Maryland designated as an Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary, making it a haven for birdwatching.

St. Mary's City is conveniently located just 75 miles from Washington, D.C., and 97 miles from Baltimore. Nearby towns such as Lexington Park and Leonardtown enhance campus life by offering essential services, hospitals, and waterfront dining options.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and resumes should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller [website](#).

Jack Gorman, Partner
Grace Zakim, Managing Associate
Lisa Clayton, Managing Search Coordinator
Isaacson, Miller

St. Mary's College of Maryland is fully committed to equal employment and educational opportunities for its employees and students. The College does not discriminate or condone discrimination or harassment in the workplace or academic setting, on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy and parental status), national origin, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, marital status, physical or mental disability, protected veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by law.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by St. Mary's College of Maryland (SMCM). The material presented in this leadership profile should be relied on for informational purposes only. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information, the original source documents and information provided by SMCM would supersede any conflicting information in this document.