



THE
CHAMPION
of TREES

Chief Financial Officer
The Morton Arboretum
Lisle, Illinois

THE SEARCH

The Morton Arboretum (the Arboretum) seeks an experienced, strategic, and mission-oriented leader to serve as its next Chief Financial Officer (CFO). Building on a century-long commitment to tree-focused science, conservation, and education, the next CFO will be a key partner to the President and CEO, Jill Koski, as well as the Arboretum's Board of Trustees in achieving the organization's vision of a greener, healthier, more beautiful world where people and trees thrive together.

For more than a century, the Arboretum has played an increasingly prominent leadership role as an organization that shares meaningful scientific research and leads global conservation work. Located just 25 miles west of Chicago, the Arboretum 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 five 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. The Arboretum plays an increasingly prominent role in global conservation. The Arboretum and the Chicago Botanic Garden have been selected to partner with Botanic Gardens Conservation International in hosting the 9th Global Botanic Gardens Congress in Chicago in summer of 2027, cementing the Arboretum's place as a world-class institution.

Reporting to the President and CEO, the Chief Financial Officer will provide strategic leadership for core functions of finance and financial planning, legal and contracts, private events, food service, new business development, safety and security, guest experience, and the Arboretum store. The CFO will also provide

organizational coordination of Illumination, an annual immersive holiday experience. The organization is financially strong with diverse revenue streams and an endowment valued at more than \$300M. The total approved 2026 budget is \$66M (\$54.5M 2026 operating budget, and \$11M in restricted grant funding, infrastructure investments, and a campaign budget). The CFO will support the organization, including the Vice President of Operations and Planning and Vice President of Development, in advancing a comprehensive site plan as well as an anticipated \$125M fundraising campaign which will transform operations and create more accessible, inclusive, and functional spaces for visitors and researchers.

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

ABOUT 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 the mission 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’s current [strategic plan](#) 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.

The Arboretum seeks to welcome a diverse audience 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 broad public and breadth of communities they serve, through which the Arboretum will gain enriched perspectives to inform its objectives and long-term work.

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 245 full-time, 150 part-time, 100 temporary employees, and over 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.

Organization Finances

The Morton Arboretum enjoys diverse revenue streams and significant assets, including an endowment valued at more than \$300M, providing notable financial stability. In 2025, the Arboretum’s operating budget was \$52.6 million, including capital expenditures. Approximately 50% of gross revenue was from earned income channels, 28% from contributed income, and the balance from endowment earnings. Additionally, the Arboretum has significant restricted grant funds primarily supporting science and conservation programs totaling approximately \$9M annually. More details on previous year financials are included in the organization’s [2024 Perennial Report](#).

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. The Board of Trustees is currently chaired by Robert J. Schillerstrom. Additionally, a [Board of Advisors](#) provides guidance and perspectives to the leadership of the Arboretum around strategic matters related to its mission and work.

ROLE OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

The Chief Financial Officer, in collaboration with the President and CEO and the Board of Trustees, including the Finance and Audit & Risk committees, leads all financial activities of the Arboretum. The CFO develops and implements business and financial strategy to both grow revenue and drive the financial health of the Arboretum. They will be a proactive and strategic partner to the CEO; lead finance and financial planning, legal and contracts, private events, food service, new business development, safety and security, guest experience, the Arboretum store, and organizational coordination of Illumination; and

serve as a member of the Arboretum leadership team. Further, they will be a cross-functional leader with a deep intellectual curiosity for the various projects and goals across the organization. They serve as a strategic thought partner to leaders and teams in all areas.

The Arboretum has seen significant growth in recent decades, and will continue to advance with a compelling strategic vision and comprehensive site plan. The CFO will be a dynamic leader supporting the growth of the organization and ensuring key processes and procedures – including those related to budgeting, risk mitigation, and contracting – operate with the level of sophistication and innovation required by an organization of the Arboretum’s size, stature, and complexity. They will also provide creative and dynamic leadership in considering new areas of business development and revenue streams to ensure continued financial stability while advancing the organization’s overall mission.

The CFO provides leadership guidance, hires, trains, coaches, and develops team members, and ensures adherence to the Arboretum’s policies and procedures across approximately 108 staff with two direct reports, the Controller (who oversees a team of six) and the Senior Director of Guest Experience and Safety (who oversees a team of approximately 100).

They will pay close attention to succession planning and team structure, and will foster a culture that encourages communication, collaboration, innovation, and support.

Other essential functions of the CFO include:

- Lead annual and long-term financial planning to ensure fiscal integrity and support of the Arboretum’s strategic plan. Oversee budgeting and budget performance. Recommend progressive financial structures and strategies, consistent with institutional risk tolerance, to maximize program activity and mission delivery.
- Develop tools and systems to provide critical financial and operational information to the CEO and leadership team and make actionable recommendations on both strategy and operations.
- Partner with the Treasurer, the Finance Committee, and the Audit & Risk Committee in meeting financial governance and oversight responsibilities.
- Oversee the overall assessment and management of institutional risk using the risk management framework and in partnership with the Audit & Risk Committee. Ensure sufficient mitigation strategies are in place to minimize loss, and ensure appropriate legal review of all contracts and agreements.
- Oversight of all contracts, legal matters, and related issues, working closely with leadership team peers and the President and CEO.
- Serve as the primary agent of financial control at the Arboretum. Oversee all accounts, ledgers, and reporting systems, ensuring compliance with appropriate generally accepted accounting principles, and regulatory and audit requirements. Ensure that appropriate internal control safeguards are in place, and oversee all audit activities.
- Provide executive guidance to guest experience and safety programs.

- Serve as the primary staff liaison with the Arboretum's investment advisor in executing investment policies and decisions of the Finance Committee.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The next CFO will bring 10+ years of broad financial experience. A bachelor's degree is required, an MBA is highly preferred, and CPA licensure is a plus. In addition, the ideal candidate will possess many, if not all, of the following qualifications and characteristics:

- Demonstrated experience working as a true business partner with the senior leader of a large division or the CEO of an organization, with clear experience translating a strategic vision/plan into a successful financial plan.
- Strong strategic capability, with the ability to deliver both business and institutional strategy.
- Significant experience gathering and evaluating financial information and making actionable recommendations to senior leadership.
- Experience managing finance functions, including accounting, budgeting, control, and reporting, within a diverse organization.
- Strong analytical and financial modeling skills.
- The ability to model work ethic with a special emphasis on a positive attitude, energetic effort and initiative, and deep commitment to institutional mission.
- Effective oral and written communication skills.
- Exceptional leadership skills with the ability to motivate others and drive multiple initiatives simultaneously.
- Ability to support the pursuit of innovation and business development with integrity.
- High and uncompromising standards for financial control and integrity.
- An interest in and appreciation for the Arboretum's mission and the ability to embrace the brand, mission, and program diversity of the organization; demonstrated alignment with the Arboretum's employee core values.
- Proactive and hands-on with a collaborative style, a strong service mentality, and strong interpersonal skills with experience negotiating, mentoring, and influencing.
- Ability to work with senior managers and interact with a diversity of employees, donors, and visitors coming from a wide range of backgrounds.

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

The expected hiring range for this position is \$240,000-\$320,000. The position is located in Lisle, Illinois. Hybrid work schedules are available for the CFO.

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 with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website: <https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/morton-arboretum/chief-financial-officer>.

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Isaacson, Miller

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.

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

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by The Morton Arboretum. 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 The Morton Arboretum would supersede any conflicting information in this document.