

Stanford | Doerr

School of Sustainability

Associate Dean for Development
Doerr School for Sustainability, Stanford University
Stanford, California

THE SEARCH

[Stanford University](#) (Stanford) seeks a deeply seasoned, impact-oriented, and entrepreneurial fundraising leader to serve as the associate dean for development (AD) for the [Stanford Doerr School of Sustainability](#) (SDSS). This is a rare opportunity to shape the growth trajectory of a new school at one of the world's premier research universities and dramatically amplify Stanford's impact in tackling the urgent climate and sustainability challenges facing all people.

Building on Stanford's foundational commitment to improving lives, SDSS formally launched in 2022 as the university's first new school in 75 years. Its creation was made possible through a [\\$1.7 billion fundraising effort, including a \\$1.1 billion naming gift by John and Ann Doerr](#)—the largest gift in university history. Drawing on the expertise of scholars across Stanford and industry leaders, SDSS is a global hub and model for fostering excellence in education, cutting-edge research, and real-world solutions to sustainability challenges, translating knowledge into action, and ensuring a future for humanity and the planet. As SDSS enters its fifth year amid a pivotal moment for U.S. conservation policy, its mission to educate the next generation of leaders, advance transformative research, and drive global impact has never been more vital. Philanthropy remains essential to the success of this mission.

Reporting to a visionary partner in [Dean Arun Majumdar](#), the AD will serve as chief philanthropy officer and as a key member of the school's senior leadership team. In addition, the AD will maintain dotted line reporting to the associate vice president (AVP) in the Office of Development (OOD) and collaborate closely with central OOD colleagues, driving principal gift strategy that balances donor intent with the most pressing institutional priorities. To that end, the AD will design an ambitious, forward-looking, multi-year fundraising strategy that sustainably scales the school's philanthropic enterprise during a critical growth phase. Leading a 12-person team, the AD will build fundraising capacity to support both immediate priorities and long-term strategic ambitions. Key priorities include raising capital support for the new Sustainability Commons, set to begin construction in late 2026; the hiring of an additional 60 faculty over

10 years to provide strength and breadth across areas of scholarship; growth of the [Sustainability Accelerator](#); and continued endowment and research support.

As a trusted thought partner to the dean, the AD will help shape bold new ideas for SDSS, turning the strongest into clear, prioritized, and widely championed initiatives. The AD will bring a broad institutional perspective to the role, contributing to strategic direction as a member of the dean's senior team and forging strong partnerships across SDSS and other divisions, schools, and units in a complex matrixed environment. In close collaboration with academic leadership and faculty, the AD will learn and articulate the school's priorities and aspirations to individual and institutional donors. As a highly visible ambassador, broadcaster, and content connector, the AD will often travel with the dean and other key partners to cultivate and steward key relationships, including with SDSS's Leadership Advisory Council and other highest-impact donors.

The ideal candidate will have a successful track record leading high-performing fundraising programs, preferably within a complex research university environment. Success in this role requires strong intellectual curiosity, a commitment to advancing climate action, and an entrepreneurial mindset that turns bold ideas into results. Of equal importance is the ability to translate complex academic content into compelling donor narratives, along with the agility to learn quickly and engage deeply with faculty and their content areas. This individual must possess achievement in personally securing principal gifts from individual and institutional donors, with a high degree of comfort and effectiveness in working with ultra-high-net-worth individuals, global organizational leaders, and philanthropists who may not have an existing institutional affinity. The AD will be an unflappable problem-solver and relationship builder who can thrive in a fast-paced environment and inspire a team to meet ambitious goals.

Stanford Doerr has retained Rachel Ellenport and Grace Zakim of the executive search firm Isaacson, Miller to conduct this important recruitment. Confidential inquiries, nominations, and applications may be directed to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

ABOUT THE STANFORD DOERR SCHOOL OF SUSTAINABILITY

SDSS's launch united all the departments in the School of Earth, Energy & Environmental Sciences (Stanford Earth), which Stanford established in 1947, and the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering from the School of Engineering, which the university established in 1925, as well as the [Woods Institute for the Environment](#) and [Precourt Institute for Energy](#). Stanford Earth closed with the launch of the Stanford Doerr School of Sustainability, while the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering became a joint department shared by the School of Engineering and the new school. New departments have been added as the school has grown. To spearhead these efforts, the university named Dr. Arun Majumdar, an internationally recognized expert in advanced energy systems, new materials, electrical grids, and renewable energy, the inaugural dean of the Stanford Doerr School of Sustainability ahead of the school's launch.

Today, SDSS enrolls 1,199 students and has graduated 6,929 alumni across seven departments in [Civil and Environmental Engineering](#), [Earth & Planetary Sciences](#), [Earth Science System](#), [Energy Science & Engineering](#), [Environmental Social Sciences](#), [Geophysics](#), and [Oceans](#). The school also offers three interdisciplinary programs for undergraduate, master's, and PhD students to provide broad-based education to yield new insights and create novel solutions to urgent global programs including the [Earth Systems Program](#), the [Emmett Interdisciplinary Program for Environment and Resource](#), and the [Change for Sustainability Program](#). Furthering the work to convert sustainability challenges into opportunities is SDSS's new [Sustainability Accelerator](#), which identifies, funds, and supports over 90 interdisciplinary projects through cohort teams connecting Stanford faculty, investors, practitioners, and other scaling partners across the globe.

With an objective to reimagine academia, SDSS's departments, programs, and institutes remain steadfast in their commitment to hire and host award-winning faculty and practitioners, admit and educate students to become future leaders, develop innovative curricula, and conduct knowledge-driven research. Looking towards the immediate horizon, SDSS has future sights set on three key fundamental philanthropic priorities:

- **Foster and recruit top-tier talent** in faculty, staff, undergraduate and graduate students, and post-doctoral fellows
- **Supercharge research and ideas** with increased endowments and funds for the Accelerator, institutes, and research initiatives
- **Build capital investments** to design and construct a new campus

[Learn more](#) about Stanford Doerr's broader strategic priorities and its latest progress report.

SDSS Philanthropy and Finances

SDSS has benefitted from exponential 35 percent growth in its annual fundraising productivity since its inception, reaching over \$70 million in FY 25, of which \$43 million was gifted by new donors to Stanford. In the same fiscal year, the school's operating budget was \$202 million.

ROLE OF THE ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR DEVELOPMENT

Reporting directly to the dean with a dotted line to the AVP in the Office of Development, the associate dean for development will lead all aspects of the development program at Stanford Doerr, building upon existing forward momentum through creativity, thought partnership, and bold innovation during a significant growth phase.

Overseeing an experienced fundraising team and inspiring others to collaborate, the AD will set strategic vision, build donor capacity and commitment, bring fresh ideas that respond to the evolving nature of philanthropy, and apply data-informed outreach and fundraising strategies that increase the impact and effectiveness of the philanthropic enterprise.

CORE FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Vision, Strategic Leadership, and Executive Engagement

- Guide and support a highly generative dean in his role as chief spokesperson and fundraiser, serving as a trusted advisor and co-strategist in cultivating and soliciting transformative gifts; utilize the dean's time efficiently and effectively.
- Assess current advancement operations, systems, and processes, and implement the necessary infrastructure to support and scale a comprehensive program.
- Develop and execute a fundraising strategy for SDSS, including the planning, coordination, and execution of large-scale, complex university-wide fundraising initiatives in close partnership with the dean and OOD leadership.
- Ensure the dean, AVP, and other key leaders are appropriately engaged and effectively leveraged in key fundraising initiatives and donor engagement efforts. Research and prepare background information, draft high-level strategy briefings, and prepare correspondence or other communications as needed.
- Engage academic leadership and faculty members, including directors, department chairs, and managers, in the fundraising process, ensuring their time is highly productive, meaningful, and personally rewarding; build strong and mutually beneficial relationships between faculty and external audiences such as donors, alumni, and corporate and foundation leaders.
- Manage and staff the school's advisory board in support of the dean's priorities, including developing agendas, materials, and logistical plans for the semi-annual meetings. Assist in the identification, recruitment, and cultivation of new advisory board members, identifying key leaders with an affinity for the mission of the school. Support advisory board members' involvement in philanthropic strategy and implementation.

Programmatic Elevation and Fundraising

- Provide dynamic and innovative leadership for a comprehensive development operation, building programs and infrastructure that support both short- and long-term goals to expand philanthropic support for SDSS.
- Formulate a keen understanding of the education and research initiatives within the school, the vision of the dean, and the aspirations of key faculty members and leaders; identify stories that will elevate awareness and understanding of funding priorities; champion those stories in clear and compelling terms with multiple internal and external audiences.
- Foster strong collaborative working relationships with academic and administrative leaders across Stanford, especially with central development colleagues, schools, and offices.
- As the school's lead fundraiser, personally manage a portfolio of principal gift prospects; devise cultivation plans and solicitation strategies that lead to gifts in support of SDSS; collaborate with university colleagues on shared prospect strategies; and leverage the network of existing donors and launch systematic initiatives that will identify new individual and institutional prospects, including unaffiliated donors, capable of making significant contributions in support of SDSS.

- Design and implement a comprehensive, coordinated stewardship program to engage current donors and SDSS's key volunteers; ensure that donor stewardship makes supporting the school and university a personally fulfilling experience; and convey to donors the impact their contributions have on SDSS's mission.
- Work collaboratively to strategize and plan donor cultivation, recognition, and stewardship events and opportunities to spotlight the dean and school faculty.
- Attend key events throughout the year, staffing the dean and SDSS's academic community in their roles as philanthropic partners.
- Travel with the dean for select donor and prospect visits.

Team Building and Management

- Recruit, mentor, and lead a talented team; promote excellence through well-defined goals and accountability measures; inspire, empower, and motivate colleagues through active, transparent communication and delegation.
- Review existing roles and explore opportunities to maximize coordination and productivity, enhance communication, and promote staff collaboration and professional satisfaction.
- Foster a professional environment that recognizes and rewards risk-taking and creativity, strives for excellence through mastery of best practices and implementation of new ideas, and ensures the continued collaborative and collegial nature of the team.
- In partnership with SDSS's senior associate dean and chief operating officer, establish and carefully manage the fundraising and personnel budget, including travel, events, general operation expenses, and related expenditures; review and approve all expenditures and assume full responsibility and accountability; ensure that resources are deployed efficiently and effectively in support of the school's goals and objectives.

QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

- Minimum of 12 years of progressively responsible fundraising and managerial experience in development, with at least 10 years in a leadership role, preferably within a complex higher education environment.
- Depth of knowledge of best practices in all key areas of development, ideally with some experience working with unaffiliated donors.
- An awareness of and commitment to solving climate and sustainability issues and their impact on society.
- A convener with the ability to build bridges and strong, productive, collaborative relationships across complex institutions, as well as the ability to influence and engage peers.
- Experience supervising, recruiting, and mentoring senior fundraisers; setting goals; and managing performance and budgets required, as well as the ability to implement a focused strategic plan while directing a fundraising team.

- Exceptional communication skills with the intellectual depth and curiosity necessary to understand and translate academic, technical, and research information for all audiences; clarity, crispness, and persuasiveness in written and oral presentations.
- Superior interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence with the ability to engage comfortably and effectively with faculty, leaders, staff, donors, alumni, and other external constituents.
- Ability to adapt to and lead through changing circumstances in an environment where working across boundaries and leveraging strengths are necessary; ability to operate effectively, flexibly, and collegially in a complex environment, and within a new school in that environment.
- The credibility, emotional maturity, authenticity, and sound judgment required to effectively engage and leverage university leadership in the cultivation and solicitation of high-net-worth individuals.
- A highly motivated self-starter with the ability to function independently yet relate comfortably to a multifaceted fundraising environment, participating in and contributing to a total team effort.
- A self-assured problem solver who can anticipate challenges and obstacles and has the intelligence, creativity, and tenacity to provide and execute strategic and effective solutions.
- Demonstrated ability to work effectively with volunteer leadership, providing strong support, inspiring them to productive action.
- A calculated risk-taker who is comfortable working with ambiguity.
- Bachelor's degree required.

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

The expected pay range for this position is **\$252,660 to \$314,186** per annum. Stanford University provides pay ranges representing its good-faith estimate of what the university reasonably expects to pay for a position. The pay offered to a selected candidate will be determined based on factors such as (but not limited to) the scope and responsibilities of the position, the qualifications of the selected candidate, departmental budget availability, internal equity, geographic location, and external market pay for comparable jobs. In addition to the base salary, Stanford University offers a [comprehensive rewards package](#) with an extensive range of benefits.

Located 35 miles south of San Francisco and 20 miles north of San Jose, Stanford University is in the heart of Northern California's dynamic "Silicon Valley," home to Yahoo!, Google, Hewlett-Packard, and many other cutting-edge companies that were started by and continue to be led by Stanford alumni and faculty. Although Stanford University is virtually a community unto itself, and even has its own zip code, it calls the [City of Palo Alto](#) home. To the west of the university's 8,180-acre campus are the Santa Cruz Mountains and Pacific Ocean, and to the east San Francisco Bay. Known as The Peninsula, the area is rich in natural beauty, culture, and entertainment.

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/stanford-university-doerr-school-sustainability/associate-dean-development>

Rachel Ellenport, Partner
Grace Zakim, Managing Associate
Christina Garrison, Senior Associate
Rebecca Lyons, Senior Search Coordinator
Isaacson, Miller

Stanford is an equal employment opportunity and affirmative action employer. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability, protected veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by law.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by Stanford University. 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 Stanford University would supersede any conflicting information in this document.

ADDENDUM A: LEADERSHIP

Dr. Arun Majumdar | Dean, Stanford Doerr School of Sustainability

Dr. Arun Majumdar is the inaugural Dean of the Stanford Doerr School of Sustainability. He is the Jay Precourt Provostial Chair Professor at Stanford University, a faculty member of the Departments of Mechanical Engineering and Energy Science and Engineering, a Senior Fellow and former Director of the Precourt Institute for Energy and Senior Fellow (courtesy) of the Hoover Institution. He is also a faculty in Department of Photon Science at SLAC.

Majumdar received his bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering at the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay in 1985 and his Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley in 1989.

[Learn more](#) about Dean Majumdar.

Neil Penick | Associate Dean for External Relations, School of Humanities and Associate Vice President for Development

Since 2020, Neil Penick has overseen development and communications for the School of Humanities and Sciences at Stanford. In 2025, he was also appointed to the role of Associate Vice President for Development. In that capacity, he provides development oversight, guidance and support for the Stanford Doerr School of Sustainability, the Graduate School of Business, the Graduate School of Education, the Stanford Law School, the School of Engineering, the University Libraries, the Stanford Linear Accelerator (SLAC) and the Hoover Institution. He began his Stanford career with The Stanford Fund in 2003 and then joined The Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies in 2006, where he led development and communications as the Senior Associate Director for Development and External Relations. He earned an AB in English from Kenyon College and an MBA from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

Stanford Doerr Advisory Council

[SDSS's Advisory Council](#) is comprised of 23 leaders in industry, government, and academia who work with faculty, students, and staff to help shape new initiatives and maximize impact. To learn more about the Advisory Council, visit: <https://sustainability.stanford.edu/our-community/advisory-council>.

ADDENDUM B: ABOUT STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Founded in 1885, Stanford is one of the world's premier institutions of higher education. The institution has been defined by its willingness to experiment beyond known limits and has thus achieved some of the most iconic advancements in technology, medicine, business, the arts, humanities, and the social sciences of the 20th and 21st centuries. The university consistently ranks among the top five institutions across the nation and in the world. In 2026, Stanford ranked #4 out of 436 National Universities and #3 as a Best Global University per *US News and World Report*, 3rd in the World's Top Universities in 2026 by *TIME*, and

4th in *Forbes' List of America's Top Colleges*. With its close ties to Silicon Valley, the future is arguably invented at Stanford.

As of Fall 2025, the university has over 17,000 students who come from all 50 states and 75 countries—representing a dynamic and global student community—as well as over 2,400 faculty, including 20 Nobel laureates who are current members of the Stanford community. The core academic mission at Stanford is anchored by its seven schools: the [Graduate School of Business](#), [Stanford Doerr School of Sustainability](#), [Graduate School of Education](#), [School of Engineering](#), [School of Humanities and Sciences](#), [Stanford Law School](#), and the [School of Medicine](#). Stanford is also the base for 15 independent labs, institutes, and centers, and includes the SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory. Supporting this mission is a diverse and dedicated staff of nearly 19,000, driven to impact the future of Stanford's legacy. With more than 248,000 alumni, the global community of Cardinals are among the most renowned leaders in academia, business, arts and entertainment, government, media, astrophysics, nonprofits, and athletics.

ABOUT THE OFFICE OF EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Stanford's Office of External Relations (External Relations) is a central division comprised of [development](#), [university communications](#), [government affairs](#), [community relations](#), and [operations](#). External Relations embraces and celebrates the diversity of Stanford's constituencies and aligns the work of Stanford's externally facing teams. The group's five distinct functions collaborate with partners across the university, including with the [Office of the President](#), [Office of the Provost](#), [Stanford Alumni Association](#) and the [Office of Special Events and Protocol](#), to enhance existing programs and develop new strategies for communications, engagement, philanthropy, and service. External Relations is led by [Martin Shell](#), vice president and chief external relations officer.

Stanford's seven schools operate independently within a decentralized model, each with their own development, alumni engagement, marketing, and communications teams.

University Philanthropy and Finances

In 2011, Stanford made history by concluding the most successful fundraising campaign in U.S. higher education, a \$6.2 billion effort known as *The Stanford Challenge*, which eclipsed its original \$4.3 billion goal. While the university has not been in an active campaign since *The Stanford Challenge*, it continues to thrive as a high performing development program that has consistently raised between \$1 billion to \$2 billion in philanthropic contributions since 2020. In FY 2025, Stanford raised nearly \$1.6 billion. In the same year, its endowment was valued at \$40.8 billion.