



Vice President for Research
West Virginia University
Morgantown, West Virginia

THE SEARCH

West Virginia University (WVU), the flagship public, R1 land-grant university of West Virginia, seeks a collaborative, strategic, and accomplished leader to serve as its next Vice President for Research (VPR). Joining WVU at a pivotal moment, the VPR will help shape the University's next chapter and drive its ambitious vision for the future, including an invitation to join the American Association of Universities (AAU). Under the leadership of President [Dr. Michael Benson](#) and newly appointed Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs [Dr. Beverly Wendland](#), the VPR will partner closely with university leadership, faculty, staff, and key stakeholders to advance [WVU's Strategic Compass](#).

As the state's only R1 institution, West Virginia University is a place where research and creative activity generate meaningful impact for West Virginia, the nation, and the world. Faculty, researchers, and students are advancing work at the frontiers of critical national priorities, from improving human health, with a focus on rural health, to extending the viability of long-duration space travel, to developing next-generation energy solutions, and to transforming approaches to cancer diagnosis and treatment. This momentum is reflected in WVU's continued growth in research activity, with \$259 million in annual expenditures and a sustained record of expansion, as well as in its broader economic impact, which contributes more than \$400 million annually to the state and supports thousands of jobs. Grounded in its land-grant mission, WVU's research enterprise is defined by a shared commitment to applying discovery to real-world challenges, translating bold ideas into innovation, strengthening communities across West Virginia, and extending the University's reach worldwide.

Reporting to the President, the Vice President for Research serves as West Virginia University's chief research officer, providing strategic leadership for the University's large and complex research and creative enterprise encompassing over 100 staff across 18 units. WVU seeks a forward-looking and collaborative leader with a demonstrated record of success and vision to further elevate the research enterprise into a robust, integrated ecosystem aligned with the expectations of a leading R1 institution and reflective of AAU-level aspirations.

The successful candidate will bring a strong record of externally funded research and will be qualified for appointment at the rank of full professor with tenure. The VPR will be a visible leader and advocate, an effective communicator, capable of engaging diverse constituencies, and will work collaboratively across

schools and units to advance research priorities, support faculty success, and enhance the overall impact of the University's research enterprise at the state, national, and global levels.

West Virginia University has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in this important search. All applications, inquiries, and nominations for this opportunity should be directed in confidence to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY

[West Virginia University](#), founded in 1867 as the state's land-grant institution, is a research university that combines a strong commitment to discovery with a deep sense of public purpose. Anchored by its main campus in Morgantown and complemented by [WVU Institute of Technology](#), [WVU Potomac State College](#), and clinical sites across the state, WVU serves more than 26,000 students systemwide and offers a broad portfolio of undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs across a comprehensive range of disciplines. The University is one of a select group of institutions that integrates the land-grant mission with high research activity and a comprehensive health sciences enterprise, positioning it to address complex challenges through research, education, and engagement.

WVU's academic community includes approximately 1,800 faculty and more than 6,500 staff, supporting a dynamic environment for teaching, discovery, and service across [13 schools and colleges](#). The University maintains a student-to-faculty ratio of approximately 19:1, enabling meaningful engagement between faculty and students. Additionally, its graduates and faculty have earned national and international recognition through prestigious awards and fellowships. WVU's research enterprise has demonstrated sustained growth, with annual research expenditures of \$259 million, reflecting its commitment to advancing knowledge and innovation. Consistently ranked among the top public institutions in the United States, WVU also places among the top 2.4% of universities worldwide, underscoring its growing national and global impact.

Grounded in its land-grant mission, WVU is dedicated to improving the lives of West Virginians and people beyond through education, research, and outreach. Its statewide network, including extension services in all 55 counties, supports strong connections to communities, industry, and government partners. This combination of research excellence, broad academic offerings, and deep community engagement positions WVU as a distinctive institution that pairs the scale and capability of a major research university with a mission-driven focus on real-world advancements.

The [WVU Health System](#), the state's largest health system and largest private employer, includes 25 hospitals across West Virginia, eastern Ohio, southwestern Pennsylvania, and western Maryland. Ranked as the #1 hospital in West Virginia by U.S. News & World Report, the flagship J.W. Ruby Memorial Hospital in Morgantown will soon feature a new, state-of-the-art Comprehensive Cancer Center. The WVU Cancer Institute aims to achieve a National Cancer Institute Designation (NCI), a first for West Virginia. To further accelerate growth and infuse West Virginia with new healthcare facilities, the WVU Health System is investing nearly \$400 million across the state to continue to provide quality healthcare to the region.

University Leadership

[Dr. Michael Benson](#), a veteran higher education administrator, became the 27th president of West Virginia University on July 15, 2025. He brings three decades of academic and administrative experience in higher education to his role as he leads West Virginia University into a new era. Previously, he served as president at Coastal Carolina University, Eastern Kentucky University, Southern Utah University, and Snow College.

[Dr. Beverly Wendland](#), a nationally recognized cell biologist, begins her tenure as Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs on July 1, 2026. She most recently served as a senior advisor to the chancellor at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, following a successful five-year term as Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

[WVU's research enterprise](#) is defined by a commitment to advancing discovery with meaningful impact. Faculty, researchers, students, and partners are working at the frontiers of critical national priorities, from improving human health and protecting astronauts during long-duration space missions to developing geothermal and hydrogen energy solutions and transforming cancer detection and treatment. This work is supported by sustained research growth, with \$259 million in expenditures in FY2024 and a continued upward trajectory over the past five years. WVU's research activity also generates significant economic impact, contributing more than \$400.2 million annually to the state, supporting 3,418 jobs, and producing \$24.8 million in state and local tax revenue. As one of just 187 R1 institutions conducting research at the highest level, WVU brings together visionary scholars and global collaborators, engaging across 76 countries and six continents.

WVU's research enterprise spans a diverse set of priority areas, including robotics, forensic science, health sciences, physics and astronomy, neuroscience, humanities, rare earth elements and critical minerals, and cyber research. Across these domains, faculty and students advance work in autonomous systems, evidence analysis, clinical and translational health, fundamental physics, neuroscience innovation, creative and cultural scholarship, energy and mineral extraction, and digital systems, reflecting a broad, interdisciplinary approach to discovery.

The research enterprise is supported by a broad network of institutes, centers, and innovation hubs spanning disciplines and driving discovery from foundational science to applied solutions. Core entities include the [Rockefeller Neuroscience Institute](#), [WVU Cancer Institute](#), and [the West Virginia Clinical and Translational Science Institute](#), alongside interdisciplinary centers such as the [Center for Excellence in STEM Education](#), the [Center for Foundational Neuroscience Research and Education](#), and the [Center for Gravitational Waves and Cosmology](#). Additional important research centers include [the Institute for Policy Research & Public Affairs](#), [the Bureau of Business and Economics Research](#), and [the Regional Research Institute](#).

Complementing these research centers, WVU's innovation ecosystem includes the [Institute for Sustainability and Energy Research](#), [the Innovation Corporation](#), [the Lane Innovation Hub](#), and [the Morris L. Hayhurst LaunchLab](#), the [Office of Innovation and Commercialization](#), and [Vantage Ventures](#), all of which support the translation of discovery into applied technologies, entrepreneurial ventures, and industry partnerships.

Location

Morgantown, WV, is nestled in the scenic hills of Appalachia, a vibrant and growing community that offers an exceptional quality of life. Located within easy reach of major metropolitan areas such as Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Washington, D.C., Morgantown combines the accessibility of an urban corridor with the character and charm of a close-knit college town. Consistently recognized as one of the best places to live and raise a family, the city is home to approximately 30,000 residents and supports a dynamic regional population, offering a thriving arts and culinary scene, strong community engagement, and a spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship. WVU's location also provides unparalleled access to outdoor recreation and natural beauty, with nearby parks, trails, rivers, and landmarks such as Coopers Rock State Forest and the New River Gorge National Park.

ROLE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH

Reporting to the President, the Vice President for Research is the university's chief research officer. The VPR is the chief institutional research strategist and is responsible for overseeing the development of high-impact, disciplinary, and multidisciplinary research initiatives, including those involving partnerships with peer universities, international collaborators, national laboratories, government agencies, and the private sector. The VPR oversees all aspects of research administration and ensures compliance with all regulatory requirements, including export control, responsible conduct of research, human subjects protection, animal welfare, conflict of interest, and effort reporting.

The VPR fosters a service-oriented environment that supports faculty success while facilitating the translation of research into innovation, intellectual property, new ventures, and licensing revenue, contributing to the University's economic impact across the state. In addition, the VPR represents WVU to regional, national, and international research stakeholders and strengthens connections between these external partners and the University's academic and research leadership.

Working in close partnership with the Provost and the Chancellor for Health Sciences, the VPR helps position WVU's centers and institutes for national prominence. The VPR also cultivates strong, collaborative relationships with key academic and research leaders, including the Associate Provost for Graduate Education and Life, the Senior Associate Vice President for Health Sciences Research and Graduate Education, and associate deans for research in academic units to expand doctoral, postdoctoral, and graduate programming in response to market need.

The VPR oversees four direct reports and more than 100 staff members in the Office of Research, with the following units reporting to the office.

- Conflict of Interest Office
- Export Control Office
- Office of Animal Welfare
- Office of Human Research Protections
- Office of Innovation and Commercialization
- Office of Research Project Management
- Regional Research Institute
- Research Computing
- Research IT and Building Supervisor
- Research Office Administrative Support
- Research Office Modernization Initiative
- Research Office WRAP Platform & Program Sponsor
- Research Security
- Responsible Conduct of Research
- Shared Research Facilities
- West Virginia Water Research Institute
- WVU Institute for Sustainability and Energy Research
- WVU Office of Sponsored Programs

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH

The VPR will address the following challenges and strive to use them as opportunities to meet WVU's ambitious goals for research growth, innovation, and recognition:

Advance a cohesive research strategy

WVU's research community reflects strong commitment and momentum, creating a meaningful opportunity for the next VPR to articulate and advance a clear, cohesive research strategy. This includes defining a compelling institutional vision aligned with WVU's Strategic Compass, identifying priority areas for growth, and connecting strategy to measurable outcomes and resource allocation. Advancing this work will require balancing institutional ambition with current financial realities. As WVU continues to pursue long-term goals such as AAU membership, the next VPR will have the opportunity to guide a strategic, phased approach grounded in available resources, faculty capacity, and targeted investments. Establishing clarity around institutional research priorities and aligning those priorities with funding, infrastructure, and incentives will be essential to building momentum and strengthening alignment across the University.

Build and strengthen the research enterprise

The University has a dedicated and committed research administration team. A central priority for the next VPR will be the continuous improvement of the University's core research infrastructure. This includes advancing integrated research administration processes, enhancing post-award support, and establishing robust data governance and reporting capabilities. Ensuring a well-functioning, service-oriented research enterprise characterized by clear roles, accountability, and effective systems will be essential to supporting faculty success and improving the overall research experience across units. At the

same time, this moment presents a significant opportunity to modernize operations. Recent investments in systems, including the implementation of the WVU Research Administration Portal (WRAP), and ongoing organizational restructuring, provide a foundation upon which the next VPR can build a more integrated, transparent, and responsive research infrastructure aligned with best practices at peer R1 and aspirant AAU institutions.

Expand research development and faculty support

WVU is well-positioned to strengthen its support for faculty research and creative activity, creating an opportunity for the next VPR to enhance interdisciplinary research further. Building upon existing strengths, the next VPR can advance a more robust and coordinated approach to research development, including expanded proposal support services, targeted faculty incentives, and investments that enable faculty to pursue and sustain externally funded research. This work also presents an opportunity to introduce and scale mechanisms that support faculty success across the research lifecycle, such as seed funding, course release, and recognition of proposal development efforts. Strengthening support for graduate students and postdoctoral scholars, who are key drivers of research productivity, will be an important component of a comprehensive, forward-looking strategy.

Enhance organizational alignment and partnerships

WVU's research enterprise spans academic units, health sciences, and affiliated organizations, creating an opportunity for the next VPR to foster greater alignment and coordination across these interconnected components. By clarifying roles, strengthening communication, and establishing shared expectations, the next VPR can help create a more cohesive and effective research ecosystem. This work is complemented by an opportunity to deepen collaboration with key internal and external partners. Strengthening relationships with deans, department chairs, and faculty will support greater alignment and engagement, while expanding partnerships with federal agencies, industry, and philanthropic organizations, particularly given WVU's proximity to Washington, D.C., can further enhance the University's research profile.

Foster a culture of collaboration, accountability, and service

WVU's strong institutional mission and collaborative ethos provide a foundation for the next VPR to cultivate further a research culture that emphasizes partnership, transparency, and shared success. There is an opportunity to strengthen cross-disciplinary engagement, enhance communication across units, and reinforce the research office's role as a responsive, service-oriented partner to faculty and staff. By establishing clear expectations, promoting accountability, and improving consistency in processes and support, the next VPR can help foster an environment in which faculty, researchers, and graduate students are well-positioned to pursue meaningful research and creative activity.

Position WVU for success in a changing research landscape

The broader research environment is evolving rapidly, with increasing uncertainty in federal funding, heightened compliance requirements, and growing expectations around industry engagement and

translational impact. WVU, like many institutions, must adapt to these shifts while maintaining competitiveness. This environment creates an opportunity for the next VPR to diversify funding sources, strengthen industry partnerships, and position the University to respond proactively to emerging funding opportunities, including those tied to artificial intelligence, energy innovation, and community-based research.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The successful candidate will be a distinguished scholar and visionary leader who embodies West Virginia University's commitments to excellence, innovation, and interdisciplinary collaboration. This person will bring a proven track record of advancing transformative research and a documented ability to build dynamic partnerships across academia, government, industry, and the broader community. The VPR must have an earned doctorate or equivalent terminal degree, with an outstanding record in research and education commensurate with the appointment as a full professor with tenure at WVU.

While no individual candidate is likely to embody all the desired qualifications, skills, and experience, the successful candidate will possess many of the following:

- Significant (10+ years) progressive leadership experience in research development and administration, including pre- and post-award management, compliance, and data governance.
- Demonstrated ability to articulate and advance a clear, institutionally aligned research vision and translate strategy into measurable outcomes.
- Demonstrated record of scholarly achievement, sponsored research leadership, and recognition as an independent investigator or inventor.
- Experience in R1 environments, familiarity with AAU expectations and ideally NCI-related initiatives, and the ability to operate effectively within complex, resource-constrained organizations.
- Demonstrated ability to build, lead, and manage high-performing teams, while establishing effective processes, accountability, and organizational efficiency.
- Ability to communicate and collaborate effectively with faculty, administrators, and external stakeholders to build strong research partnerships.
- Demonstrated success serving as an advocate for the research enterprise, elevating institutional reputation and visibility with external partners and funding agencies.
- Demonstrated commitment to supporting a broad research portfolio across disciplines, including STEM, social sciences, arts, and humanities.
- Demonstrated entrepreneurial perspective, including experience developing new funding streams, supporting commercialization efforts, and translating research into applied outcomes.
- Knowledge of federal research policies, compliance regulations, and research integrity standards, including experience managing the full lifecycle of sponsored research.

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 for the [West Virginia University VPR](#).

Dan Rodas, Partner

Robin Dougherty, Managing Associate

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Isaacson, Miller

West Virginia University (WVU) is an Equal Opportunity Institution.

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