



Inaugural Executive Director, Institute for Advanced Computing
Virginia Tech – Greater Washington, D.C. Area
Alexandria, Virginia

THE SEARCH

Virginia Tech invites nominations and applications for the position of the inaugural Executive Director of the [Institute for Advanced Computing \(IAC\)](#). The Executive Director will serve as the visionary and strategic leader responsible for shaping its long-term vision, expanding its partnerships, and positioning it for national and international prominence. Reporting to the Vice President for the Greater Washington, D.C. Area, and working in close collaboration with senior university leadership and the IAC Managing Director, the Executive Director will guide the Institute's strategic direction while enabling its operational and academic success. This is a rare opportunity for a bold, collaborative, and entrepreneurial leader to build a dynamic, interdisciplinary institute from the ground up—at the intersection of academia, government, and industry—in one of the most important tech corridors in the country.

The IAC holds a distinctive mandate within Virginia Tech. In addition to advancing world-class research, the Institute is responsible for delivering high-quality academic programs—notably industry-informed Master of Engineering degrees. The IAC is poised for significant growth, with graduate enrollment projected to double within the next few years, and the number of faculty to increase from the current 20 to 50 over the next 5-10 years. The Executive Director serves as the chief executive of the Institute, with ultimate authority and accountability for strategy, performance, and resource alignment that underpins this dual mission and will propel the Institute's research enterprise to achieve national prominence and sustained global impact. The Executive Director will identify priority areas for investment and partnership, positioning the Institute within key innovation ecosystems in the greater D.C. area, identifying and working with areas of strength at Virginia Tech that align with the IAC vision and advancing its reputation as a leader in advanced computing research and graduate education. Serving as the Institute's primary external representative, the Executive Director will position the IAC to expand on its research and educational collaborations, to increase faculty hiring, secure new sources of philanthropic investments to reach its fundraising goal of \$250M, and advance public-private initiatives that contribute to economic development and workforce innovation in the Commonwealth of Virginia and beyond. The Executive Director will lead an accomplished team, including the IAC's Managing Director, who oversees the

execution of the Institute's day-to-day operations and academic programs, thereby enabling the Executive Director to concentrate on external engagement, strategic growth, and institutional advancement.

The successful candidate must be a highly collaborative leader with a distinguished record of accomplishment, as defined by the individual's career trajectory, in fields related to advanced computing and demonstrated leadership in positions of significant responsibility in academia, private, or public sectors. The Executive Director will be expected to thrive in a distributed environment—both geographically, given Virginia Tech's multi-campus presence, and organizationally, working effectively across diverse units and stakeholder groups. Equally important, the Executive Director should bring a strong record of institutional leadership, fundraising, and partner engagement, including the capacity to translate strategic vision into operational success, deliver on complex initiatives, and sustain momentum across multiple priorities and constituencies.

Virginia Tech has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist with this important search. Confidential applications, inquiries, and nominations should be directed to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

The Institute for Advanced Computing

The Future is Here

Virginia Tech is expanding its impact in the greater Washington, D.C. area with the recent launch of the IAC, a bold new university-level initiative designed to lead in research, innovation, and education at the convergence of core computing and its transformational applications. Anchored at Virginia Tech's new building in Alexandria, the IAC will serve as a cross-cutting academic and research hub focused on computing with an emphasis on artificial intelligence, machine learning, quantum computing, next-generation wireless, and intelligent interfaces. The institute also oversees Master of Engineering programs in computer science and computer engineering, emphasizing project-based, industry-informed learning.

The Institute's mandate to advance world-class research as well as deliver high-quality academic programs requires integrated leadership that connects industry and the public sector with instruction and discovery in a research-intensive academic setting, ensuring that pedagogical excellence and research innovation reinforce one another and deliver visible impact for students, faculty, partners, and the Commonwealth of Virginia.

With a mission to address global-scale challenges and drive economic and technological advancement, the IAC will leverage Virginia Tech's land-grant mission, its partnerships with industry and government, and its strategic location near our nation's capital. It represents the newest phase of Virginia Tech's evolving innovation network, resulting from the Commonwealth's investment in the university as part of its successful bid to attract Amazon's HQ2 to northern Virginia.

At the Nexus of Academia, Industry, and Government

Located on Virginia Tech's 3.5-acre campus in Alexandria, Virginia, the IAC is just steps away from Reagan National Airport and leading tech companies in the growing [National Landing technology district](#). The Institute's location is uniquely positioned to connect IAC students and faculty to the greater D.C. metropolitan region, while allowing DC area leaders in academia, industry, and government to easily convene at the facility.

The Institute is housed in a new 11-story, 300,000 square foot academic building that provides the ideal space for master's students to "learn by doing" real-world, industry-sponsored projects, a state-of-the-art hub for computer science and computer engineering faculty and graduate students that also serves as home to a range of other academic programs and initiatives that enrich the university's teaching, research, and outreach mission. Building highlights include: multi-purpose areas, research and testing labs, a cyber-physical systems lab, maker spaces, a two-story indoor drone testing cage, and more. Designed for cutting-edge innovation, the building embodies the future of tech education, offering world-class facilities that put IAC students at the center of emerging technology breakthroughs.

About Virginia Tech – Greater Washington, D.C. Area

Virginia Tech's presence in the greater Washington, D.C., area is an important link that extends the university's impact beyond Blacksburg, driving innovation across the Commonwealth and beyond. Through a growing network of engagement with federal, industry, and regional partners, Virginia Tech is advancing solutions to address global challenges in our nation's capital.

Founded in 1969 as a graduate center, Virginia Tech's presence in the greater D.C. area has grown into a dynamic network of [locations](#) and initiatives. Today, this footprint includes Academic Building One in Alexandria, which offers graduate programs through the Pamplin College of Business and the College of Engineering; the Virginia Tech National Security Institute, with operations in both Arlington and Blacksburg; and the emerging Coalition for Smart Construction, slated to open in Falls Church next year. Virginia Tech's Fralin Biomedical Research Institute also has a location at the Children's National Hospital Research & Innovation Campus in Washington, D.C., with strong ties to research in Northern Virginia, among other initiatives established over the past 50 years.

Virginia Tech supports more than 1,077 graduate students enrolled in over 45 graduate degree programs, taught by 120 full-time faculty members across the greater D.C. area. More than 85 active researchers contribute to annual research expenditures exceeding \$15 million—a figure that continues to grow as the university expands its regional presence.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Executive Director serves as the chief executive of the Institute, with ultimate authority and accountability for the external strategy, performance, and resource alignment that underpins this dual mission, ensuring strong alignment with workforce needs, industry trends, and emerging areas of national and global importance, while delegating day-to-day management of operations to the Managing Director, who is responsible for effective internal execution. In doing so, the Executive Director will position and

propel the Institute’s research enterprise to achieve national prominence and sustained global impact. This includes identifying priority areas for investment and partnership, positioning the Institute within key innovation ecosystems in the greater D.C. area, identifying and working with areas of strength at Virginia Tech that align with the IAC vision and advancing its reputation as a leader in advanced computing research and graduate education.

A central part of the role is to lead the development and implementation of a comprehensive strategic plan for the Institute, and to cultivate external partnerships with corporations, non-profits, national laboratories, and government agencies to advance the goals of the Institute, increase funding opportunities, and achieve the aspirations for its visibility and impact.

Serving as the Institute’s primary external representative, the Executive Director will expand research and educational collaborations, secure new sources of philanthropic investments, and advance public-private initiatives that contribute to economic development and workforce innovation in the Commonwealth and beyond. Reporting to the Executive Director, the Managing Director oversees the Institute’s day-to-day operations and academic programs, enabling the Executive Director to concentrate on external engagement, strategic growth, and institutional advancement.

Together, this complementary leadership model positions the Executive Director to serve as the chief executive of the Institute—advancing a bold vision, forging enduring partnerships, and elevating the Institute’s visibility and influence at the highest levels. The Executive Director will lead and supervise the senior leadership team, including the Managing Director, who is responsible for operational execution. Through strategic engagement and a disciplined focus on impact, the Executive Director will position the IAC as a trusted partner and an international leader in advanced computing, ensuring that its work meaningfully contributes to innovation, economic development, and the public good.

The Executive Director will serve as a vital member of the university’s overall leadership team and is expected to promote a culture of excellence, transparency, innovation, and community.

Distinctive Leadership Qualities

The ideal candidate will demonstrate:

- **Name Recognition** – A reputation that is widely recognized in the technology community, enabling the recruitment of stellar faculty and students.
- **Exceptional Leadership** – A proven ability to unite and inspire stakeholders across disciplines, establishing a cohesive identity for a newly created institute that spans multiple academic traditions and research initiatives.
- **Partner Orientation** – Demonstrated success in cultivating partnerships with the full spectrum of industry, from startups to global corporations, as well as with government and nonprofit entities.

- **Collaborative Capacity** – A record of building bridges across disparate fields (e.g., engineering, business, policy, social sciences, arts, mathematics, and physics) and supporting integrated, interdisciplinary programs.
- **Creativity and Vision** – The imagination to identify transformative opportunities, the leadership to mobilize stakeholders, and the initiative to launch new ventures that distinguish the Institute nationally.
- **Fundraising Acumen** – A proven track record in philanthropic fundraising with donors and corporations; experience in mobilizing significant resources to support ambitious goals.
- **Strategic Focus** – An understanding of enrollment pipelines, program scaling, and student experience, with the capacity to oversee the large residential Master of Engineering program.
- **Communication Excellence** – Outstanding communication skills across all audiences, including faculty, students, university leadership, alumni, policymakers, corporate leaders, media, and the public.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The inaugural Executive Director of the IAC will join Virginia Tech at a defining moment of institutional ambition and regional growth. As the university deepens its presence in the greater Washington, D.C. area, the IAC represents a bold next step: bridging academia, industry, and government to drive innovation in advanced computing, research, and graduate education. With its structure, identity, and partnerships still evolving, the IAC offers a rare opportunity for a builder: a leader with entrepreneurial spirit, strategic vision, and the operational drive to shape a high-impact institute to achieve national and international prominence.

The Executive Director must operate at an institutional level—engaging senior leadership, donors, and external partners—while also closely collaborating with the Managing Director responsible for Institute operations, including faculty workload management, curriculum oversight, and fostering the organization’s culture among the faculty and staff. The Executive Director will need to balance delivering on the vision and strategy for the Institute, while ensuring successful IAC program execution and implementation.

Key opportunities and challenges include:

Shape a distinct identity for the Institute

Born out of the Innovation Campus initiative, the IAC must now solidify its identity as one of Virginia Tech’s four thematic institutes, and one with an educational component in addition to its research mission. The Executive Director will be charged with articulating a clear and compelling vision that balances academic excellence, industry relevance, and public impact. The successful candidate will be responsible for shaping

a clear and compelling institutional identity for the IAC, one that reflects Virginia Tech’s land-grant mission while distinguishing the Institute within a competitive landscape of computing research and education. The new leader must define its strategic direction, align internal and external stakeholders around a unified vision, and ensure the IAC’s identity is both distinctive and integrated within the broader university. Equally critical, the Executive Director must translate that vision into operational success: building faculty culture, overseeing the establishment of sustainable programming, and delivering results across research, education, and engagement. This opportunity requires a leader who is both entrepreneurial and grounded, capable of setting ambitious goals while executing with precision and persistence.

Position IAC as a leader in advanced computing research

The IAC is home to faculty with research strengths in artificial intelligence, quantum computing, intelligent interfaces, and next-generation wireless. The Executive Director will be expected to foster the growth of the Institute’s research enterprise and elevate its reputation as a hub of discovery, innovation, and applied impact. There is a significant opportunity to expand sponsored research, form new collaborations with government and industry, and create mechanisms that link research and education in mutually reinforcing ways. The Executive Director must ensure that the Institute’s instructional and research missions are fully aligned. They must enable a virtuous cycle where graduate students contribute to funded research, faculty research informs curriculum, and internal and external collaborations reinforce both missions, helping to ensure the IAC’s impact is both scholarly and societal.

Build and cultivate strategic partnerships across industry sectors and the university

Sitting at the nexus of industry, government, and academia, the Institute is uniquely positioned to serve as both a convener and a catalyst for high-impact collaborations. While foundational relationships exist with major organizations such as Boeing, Northrop Grumman, Amazon, and federal agencies, the Institute now has an opportunity to focus and grow its external engagement strategy. This includes building relationships focused on long-term, mission-aligned partnerships that support project-based learning, applied research, and strategic investment in key focus areas. The Executive Director will work closely with the government and community relations team in outreach efforts and partnerships that will align with the Institute’s goals. Equally important is the need to lead internally as a collaborative partner across Virginia Tech’s distributed research and academic enterprise. The Institute must work fluidly with academic departments, senior administrative leaders, and across Virginia Tech’s network of research institutes. There are significant opportunities for vertical integration across fundamental and applied research, and navigating these collaborations requires the ambition to co-create new models of partnership.

Lead an ambitious fundraising strategy to support the Institute’s growth

The IAC plays a central role in Virginia Tech’s commitment to the Commonwealth of Virginia’s [Tech Talent Investment Program \(TTIP\)](#). As part of this initiative, the university is committed to raising \$250 million in

private support to match state investments in graduate education and innovation infrastructure in Northern Virginia. Approximately \$112 million has been secured to date, and the IAC will be expected to contribute significantly to the remaining target. The Executive Director will enter a landscape of legacy private and corporate donors as well as emerging new funders. The Executive Director must be both a visionary leader and a hands-on fundraiser that is capable of aligning Institute priorities with donor interests, articulating a compelling case for support, and delivering on Virginia Tech's broader promise to the region and the Commonwealth. Opportunities exist for named professorships, faculty cluster hires, and capital projects. The Executive Director will work closely with the university's advancement team to engage existing supporters and cultivate new donors, particularly among those with strategic interests that overlap with the institute.

Scale graduate education in advanced computing, meeting the workforce needs of Virginia's innovation economy

The Executive Director will support and oversee the scaling of its Master of Engineering programs in computer science and computer engineering. These programs are central to Virginia Tech's commitment under the TTIP. With the number of master's degrees awarded last year at 250 and a stated goal to more than double that number in the coming years, the Executive Director will work together with the Managing Director to lead this expansion in a sustainable and strategic way. The programs are designed to be project-based, industry-informed, and responsive to workforce needs, with a special emphasis on serving students from Virginia and across the country. Achieving this growth will require expanded industry partnerships, innovative instructional models, and enhanced student support.

Foster a cohesive faculty culture centered on academic excellence

With the Institute still in its formative years, this is a rare moment to create a faculty culture that is innovative, interdisciplinary, and collaborative from the ground up. IAC faculty are jointly affiliated with home departments on the main campus in Blacksburg, particularly in Computer Science and Electrical and Computer Engineering. This structure creates a powerful opportunity to develop a culture that is both locally grounded and institutionally connected. The Executive Director will support and partner with the Managing Director to bring faculty together around common goals in research, teaching, and mentorship; to shape the rhythms, norms, and values of a newly forming community; and to ensure that faculty feel supported and engaged in both their disciplinary homes and the Institute itself. This will require sustained engagement with faculty and the development of internal norms and values that reinforce the Institute's identity.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Required Qualifications

- Effective record in a senior leadership-level role within an academic or research institution, corporate entity, government agency, or an equally complex large-scale organization.

- A distinguished record of scholarship or professional accomplishment as defined by the individual's career trajectory, in fields that incorporate advanced computing, with demonstrated national or international recognition. Based on background and experience, this position is eligible for tenure.
- A visionary, strategic, and entrepreneurial mindset, with the ability to articulate and advance a compelling long-term vision in a rapidly evolving technological and research landscape.
- A strong record of building and sustaining high-impact partnerships with industry, government, and other external stakeholders, and of positioning organizations within complex innovation ecosystems.
- Experience leading interdisciplinary initiatives and working effectively across complex, matrixed organizations, with the ability to align diverse stakeholders around shared goals.
- Exceptional communication and relationship-building skills, with evidence of inclusive, collaborative leadership and the ability to represent the Institute effectively to a wide range of internal and external audiences.
- Experience in collaborating with partners such as academic institutions or research and industry entities.

Preferred Qualifications

- An earned doctorate in a field relevant to advanced computing or a closely aligned discipline.
- Demonstrated success in leading or coordinating large-scale, multi-institution initiatives, including experience with governance structures, complex collaborations, and major proposal development.
- Experience navigating intellectual property, technology transfer, and commercialization pathways, particularly in the context of cross-sector partnerships.
- Familiarity with academic environments, including experience engaging with faculty and students and supporting educational programs (e.g., residential, hybrid, online) aligned with workforce development,
- A track record of success in fundraising, including the cultivation of major philanthropic support and engagement with donors and sponsors.
- Familiarity with the Washington, D.C. innovation ecosystem and the broader national research and policy landscape.

LOCATION AND CONTEXT

This position is based at Academic Building One in Alexandria, Virginia, within Virginia Tech's growing presence in the greater Washington, D.C. area. The Executive Director will work closely with leadership across all Virginia Tech campuses, including in Northern Virginia, the main campus in Blacksburg and the health sciences and technology campus in Roanoke.

Alexandria, Virginia

Located on the Potomac River just across from Washington, D.C., Alexandria, Virginia, combines a rich historical heritage with a vibrant, cosmopolitan atmosphere. Established in 1749, the city features the nation's third-oldest historic district, where meticulously preserved 18th- and 19th-century architecture lines charming streets. Visitors and residents alike enjoy a lively downtown experience, home to more than 200 independent shops and restaurants, historic museums, and a bustling waterfront. Alexandria has been recognized by [Travel + Leisure](#) and [Condé Nast Traveler](#) as one of the nation's top small cities for its unique blend of history, culture, and modern amenities. See [Visit Alexandria](#) for more information.

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: [IAC Executive Director](#)

Electronic submission of materials is strongly encouraged.

Pam Pezzoli, Partner
Raul Bernal, Senior Associate
Melissa Barravecchio, Senior Search Coordinator

Isaacson, Miller

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

APPENDIX

Institutes at Virginia Tech

Virginia Tech research institutes enhance the university's ability to address large-scale research opportunities by crossing traditional disciplinary boundaries. The eight institutes provide faculty, students, and partners access to world-class expertise across many disciplines and to the scientific and technical capability of specially equipped, advanced laboratories.

Thematic Institutes

Virginia Tech's thematic institutes are high-level organizations focused on thematic research areas of particular strategic interest to Virginia Tech. While faculty who are appointed to serve in these institutes retain their tenure in their respective academic departments, their primary membership, position funding, and identity align with the institute. The high density of research activity in thematic institutes generates interdisciplinary collaborations that amplify research productivity and impactful scholarship. They are provided with physical infrastructure that enables leading-edge interdisciplinary research in a particular area that aligns with the university's vision and mission. In addition to receiving investments of university funds, thematic institutes also have deep relationships with sponsors and receive substantial extramural research grants and/or contract funding through them.

- [Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC](#)
- [Institute for Advanced Computing](#)
- [Virginia Tech National Security Institute](#)
- [Virginia Tech Transportation Institute](#)

Investment Institutes

Virginia Tech's investment institutes are high-level organizations designed to convene research teams comprising faculty from across the university to work on high-value interdisciplinary research projects. This work is enabled by providing essential resources in the form of grant support, specialized research spaces and core equipment. Projects are supported for periods generally shorter than a few years, until they are ready to secure the extramural funding necessary for their continuing growth. Faculty members engaged in these projects retain their primary membership and identity in their respective academic departments.

- [Fralin Life Sciences Institute](#)
- [Institute for Creativity, Arts, and Technology](#)
- [Institute for Critical Technology and Applied Science](#)

- [Institute for Society, Culture, and Environment](#)

About Virginia Tech

As the commonwealth's most comprehensive university and a leading research institution, Virginia Tech offers about 280 [undergraduate](#) and [graduate](#) degree programs to more than 38,000 undergraduate, graduate, and professional students across the commonwealth and manages a research portfolio of more than \$556 million. The university fulfills its role as a land-grant institution by fostering a collaborative environment that integrates technology into all disciplines, so that the Virginia Tech community can serve as a force for positive change around the commonwealth, the country, and the world.

Through experiential learning, future-focused research, and a highly collaborative culture, Virginia Tech strives to accomplish the charge of its motto, *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve). By engaging students and faculty in hands-on discovery, advancing knowledge that addresses the challenges of tomorrow, and fostering an academic community where every individual feels a sense of shared purpose, the university seeks to advance discoveries and cultivate leaders whose ideas and actions reshape society, redefine possibility, and chart a better future for the world.

Virginia Tech has a 2,600-acre [main campus](#) in Blacksburg, Virginia; a significant presence across the commonwealth, including the Institute for Advanced Computing in Northern Virginia, the Health Sciences and Technology Campus in Roanoke, and sites in Newport News and Richmond; educational and research facilities across the state; [a study-abroad site in Switzerland](#); and a 1,800-acre [agriculture research farm](#) near the main campus. The campus proper is located in the New River Valley and is 38 miles southwest of Roanoke.

The university is ranked in the top 6 percent of universities in the nation for research expenditures. University finances include a \$2.27 billion operating budget (2024-25), \$3.026 billion in assets and managed funds (as of June 30, 2024), and a \$1.95 billion endowment (as of June 30, 2024).

Dr. [Tim Sands](#) serves as president, and [Dr. Julie Ross](#) serves as executive vice president and provost of Virginia Tech.

For more information on Virginia Tech, visit the [Facts About Virginia Tech](#) website.