



Vice President for Principal Giving
Southern Methodist University
Dallas, Texas

THE SEARCH

Southern Methodist University (SMU) seeks a visionary, entrepreneurial, and highly strategic advancement leader to serve as its inaugural Vice President for Principal Giving (VP). This newly created position represents a significant investment in the future of philanthropy at SMU and reflects the university's commitment to building a comprehensive principal gifts program capable of supporting its most ambitious academic and institutional priorities. Reporting to Senior Vice President for Development and External Affairs (SVP) Shontel Grumhaus, the VP will play a pivotal role in shaping the university's philanthropic future while helping define the next era of fundraising excellence at SMU.

Southern Methodist University is experiencing a period of extraordinary momentum and transformation. Under the leadership of President Jay Hartzell and Senior Vice President Grumhaus, the university is reimagining its advancement enterprise and making strategic investments in talent, infrastructure, and organizational capacity. As SMU prepares for its next chapter of campaign planning and philanthropic growth, university leadership recognizes a unique opportunity to elevate principal giving from a collection of individual efforts into a sophisticated, institution-wide strategy capable of securing transformational support for the university's highest priorities.

While SMU has achieved remarkable fundraising success and consistently outperformed expectations, much of its recent philanthropic growth has been driven through capital projects or other targeted initiatives. The university now seeks to build a more intentional principal giving program focused on advancing major academic priorities, supporting bold institutional initiatives, and cultivating the university's most significant philanthropic partnerships. The institution is uniquely positioned to elevate its philanthropic trajectory. With ambitious academic priorities, a deeply engaged community of supporters, and significant untapped potential among its most generous constituents, SMU is poised to build a principal gift program of national distinction.

The VP will have the rare opportunity to further establish and significantly elevate a principal gifts enterprise. Working closely with university leadership, deans, advancement colleagues, and key volunteer partners, the successful candidate will develop a comprehensive approach to identifying, cultivating, soliciting, and stewarding donors capable of making transformational investments. The VP will serve as a strategic partner to the president and senior leadership team, help shape campaign priorities and

philanthropic messaging, and establish the frameworks that connect donor interests to the university's most impactful opportunities. The VP will also lead and develop a growing team of principal gift professionals, creating a culture of ambition, collaboration, and accountability while elevating the team's capacity to pursue increasingly transformative philanthropic opportunities.

This role arrives at a particularly exciting moment. SMU's forthcoming strategic plan will articulate an ambitious vision for the institution's future, accompanied by significant philanthropic priorities across multiple areas of the university. The VP will be instrumental in translating those aspirations into philanthropic priorities, building a sustainable principal gift pipeline, and helping position SMU for unprecedented and sustainable fundraising success. As a member of a collaborative and evolving leadership team, this individual will also serve as a thought partner in shaping campaign strategy, strengthening advancement operations, and building a culture of excellence, accountability, and innovation across the growing division.

The successful candidate will be an accomplished principal gifts professional and collaborative leader who combines strategic vision with operational discipline. This individual will bring a record of securing transformational gifts, experience leading within complex organizations, and the ability to navigate confidently among highly influential donors, senior academic leaders, and institutional volunteers. Most importantly, the incoming VP will be energized by the opportunity to build, helping to establish the structures, partnerships, and philanthropic ambitions that will define principal giving at SMU for years to come.

Southern Methodist University has retained Jack Gorman of the national 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 posting.

ABOUT SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY

A nationally ranked private university located near the heart of Dallas, [Southern Methodist University](#) is a distinguished center for global research and teaching. SMU's more than 12,000 diverse, high-achieving students come from all 50 states and over 80 countries to take advantage of the university's small classes, meaningful research opportunities, leadership development, community service, international study, and innovative programs.

The university serves approximately 7,000 undergraduates and 5,000 graduate students through eight degree-granting schools: Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences, Cox School of Business, Lyle School of Engineering, Meadows School of the Arts, Simmons School of Education and Human Development, Dedman School of Law, Perkins School of Theology, and Mood School of Graduate and Advanced Studies. SMU is data driven, and its powerful supercomputing ecosystem – paired with entrepreneurial drive – creates an unrivaled environment for the university to deliver research excellence.

Now in its second century of achievement, SMU is recognized for the ways it supports students, faculty, and alumni as they become ethical, enterprising leaders in their professions and communities. [SMU's relationship with Dallas](#) – the dynamic center of one of the nation's fastest-growing regions – offers learning, research, social, and career opportunities that provide a launch pad for global impact.

Fundraising and Financial Overview

[The Office of Development and External Affairs](#) (DEA) comprises 147 professionals and supports Southern Methodist University by securing funding for university priorities; promoting meaningful involvement in the life and work of the university; heightening international, national, state, and local awareness of SMU; and supporting the enrollment of a diverse and able student body. In Fiscal Year 2026, SMU raised over \$300 million in philanthropic support.

From 2017 to 2025, [SMU Ignited: Boldly Shaping Tomorrow](#) – the university's campaign for impact – inspired an era of unprecedented advancement in academics, athletics, and national prominence. Thanks to more than 67,500 donors, volunteers, and supporters, the campaign exceeded its goal three years ahead of schedule, raising over \$1.656 billion and becoming one of the largest campaigns in the history of private Texas universities.

KEY DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Vice President for Principal Giving provides executive leadership for SMU's principal giving strategy and serves as the university's senior fundraising leader for transformational philanthropy. Reporting to Senior Vice President for Development and External Affairs Shontel Grumhaus, the VP partners closely with President Jay Hartzell, academic deans, trustees, volunteer leaders, and senior university leadership to secure the institution's most significant philanthropic investments in support of the university's strategic priorities. The VP represents SMU with donors, trustees, volunteer leaders, foundations, and external partners while serving as a trusted ambassador for the university's mission and strategic vision.

- **Strategic Partnership with University Leadership:** Advise senior leadership on philanthropic strategy, align donor interests with institutional priorities, and translate goals into transformational opportunities. Support board engagement, volunteer leadership recruitment, and briefing preparation.
- **Principal Gift Fundraising:** Develop, manage, and personally lead a portfolio of some of the university's highest-capacity prospects and donors by cultivating, soliciting, negotiating, and stewarding transformational gifts in close coordination with university leadership.
- **Presidential and Executive Partnership:** Serve as the strategic fundraising partner to the President, SVP, deans, and academic leadership by developing donor engagement strategies, preparing presidential briefings, coordinating donor meetings, and providing strategic counsel on principal gift opportunities.

- **Presidential and University Events:** Provide strategic leadership for presidential and university events involving principal gift prospects and donors, partnering with university leadership and advancement colleagues to leverage these opportunities for cultivation, engagement, solicitation, and stewardship.
- **Team Leadership and Staff Development:** Build and scale a best-in-class principal giving program, fostering a culture of collaboration, accountability, and continuous improvement. Lead a team of five to six professionals, including: Senior Director of Principal Giving, Director of Principal Giving, Principal Gift Proposal Writer, Executive Assistant/Program Coordinator (to be hired), and additional Principal Gift Officers as the program grows.
- **Portfolio Strategy and Pipeline Management:** Develop and oversee principal giving portfolio management processes, prospect strategy meetings, donor pipeline reviews, and fundraising analytics to maximize principal gift opportunities.
- **Campaign Leadership:** In partnership with the SVP and VP for Campaign, provide leadership for comprehensive campaign planning and execution by developing transformational gift strategies aligned with campaign priorities and institutional objectives.
- **Cross-Functional Collaboration:** Partner with key advancement units, including schools and unit development, corporate and foundation relations, gift planning, prospect development, stewardship, alumni engagement, parent and family philanthropy, and development services, to coordinate donor strategies and maximize fundraising success.
- **Proposal Development and Donor Communications:** Oversee development of customized investment opportunities, principal gift proposals, case statements, presidential briefings, impact reports, donor communications, and stewardship strategies supporting transformational philanthropy.
- **Budget and Resource Management:** Develop and manage departmental budgets, monitor fundraising performance, assess resource needs, and recommend organizational improvements to enhance effectiveness.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

- A minimum of ten years of professional fundraising experience and at least seven years of management experience, preferably within a private research university setting.
- Demonstrated success cultivating, soliciting, and stewarding seven- and eight-figure gifts and the ability to inspire high-net-worth individuals to provide significant philanthropic support to an institution.

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- Demonstrated experience strategically contributing to and guiding comprehensive campaigns, ideally from inception to successful close and post-campaign analysis.
 - The ability to influence without authority, navigate complex organizations, exercise executive presence and political acumen, translate academic priorities into philanthropic opportunities, and lead strategic change.
 - Professional credibility, intellectual depth, maturity, and collaborative skills to garner the trust and confidence of the President, Provost, deans, board members, faculty, and volunteer leaders.
 - The ability to lead, mentor, and motivate staff, and to encourage growth and change in both people and programs. A strong commitment to personal and professional development, and the ability to foster a collaborative and high-performing team environment.
 - Exemplary interpersonal communication skills; active, engaged listener; superior written and oral communication skills; clarity, crispness, and elegance in writing and speaking. The ability to succinctly articulate a vision and processes to key constituents, utilizing data and metrics as appropriate.
 - The desire and ability to build bridges and strong collaborative relationships with all members of an operation.
 - A sharp eye for operational efficiency and the best use of resources.
 - The ability to manage multiple projects simultaneously and with confidence and discretion.
 - Impeccable attention to detail; superb follow-through; strong personal integrity, charisma, and work ethic coupled with a sense of humor and perspective.
 - The personal flexibility to travel and work evenings or weekends as required.
 - Bachelor's degree required; master's degree preferred.

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:

[Vice President for Principal Giving, Southern Methodist University](#)

Jack Gorman, Partner
Nicole Poe, Managing Associate
Lisa Clayton, Managing Search Coordinator
Isaacson, Miller

Southern Methodist University will not discriminate in any employment practice, education program, education activity, or admissions on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, genetic information, or veteran status. SMU's commitment to equal opportunity includes nondiscrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by Southern Methodist 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 SMU would supersede any conflicting information in this document.

ADDENDUM

President Jay C. Hartzell

A nationally recognized university leader with extensive expertise in business education and research, President Hartzell began his tenure on June 1, 2025. He guides the university at a time of significant opportunity and growth, working alongside students, faculty, staff, trustees, alumni, and supporters to advance a bold new era of impact. Along with university leadership, President Hartzell championed a comprehensive listening effort during his first year on campus to better understand what makes SMU distinctive. Informed by perspectives from across the Hilltop and far beyond, the resulting strategic framework and plan reflect shared pride, confidence, and purpose while charting an ambitious path forward for the coming decade.

Before joining SMU, President Hartzell served as president of The University of Texas at Austin, where he led the university to record highs in applications, enrollment, graduation rates, research expenditures, and philanthropic support. His presidency followed more than 20 years on the faculty, including serving as dean of the McCombs School of Business, one of the nation's largest and most prestigious business schools. He began his academic career as an assistant professor of finance at New York University's Stern School of Business. A respected scholar, President Hartzell has published research in leading journals centered on corporate finance, corporate governance, and real estate.

Beyond campus, President Hartzell serves on the Dallas Citizens Council, the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas CEO Advisory Council, and the boards of MGIC Investment Corporation and Susser Bank. He previously served on the boards of Austin Habitat for Humanity and the American Real Estate and Urban Economics Association, and earlier in his career worked as a consultant with Hewitt Associates. He earned a bachelor's degree in business administration and economics (cum laude) from Trinity University and a PhD in finance from UT Austin.

Shontel Grumhaus, Senior Vice President for Development and External Affairs

Shontel Grumhaus joined SMU in March 2026 as Senior Vice President for Development and External Affairs. As a veteran development and fundraising executive, Grumhaus has more than 18 years of experience driving transformative philanthropy in higher education. At SMU, she is charged with translating bold ambition into tangible results, all for the betterment of students, research, and the community.

Before SMU, Grumhaus was Senior Associate Vice Chancellor for Development and Chief Strategist for Schools and Units at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC Chapel Hill), where she led advancement strategy across the university and managed a team of development professionals. Previously, she was Senior Associate Dean for Advancement at the Kenan-Flagler Business School, where she and her team surpassed a \$400 million campaign goal. The campaign included securing \$75 million to support construction of a new academic building, which was matched by an equal commitment from the

North Carolina Legislature. Prior to her time at Kenan-Flagler, Grumhaus oversaw the major gifts team for the College of Arts and Sciences. During her six-year tenure, she led a team that successfully launched a \$750 million campaign, significantly strengthening the college's fundraising capacity and long-term philanthropic pipeline.

An alumna of UNC Chapel Hill, Grumhaus holds a bachelor of science in business administration and a master of accounting.