



Vice President for Development and Engagement
Southern Methodist University
Dallas, Texas

THE SEARCH

Southern Methodist University (SMU) seeks a deeply seasoned, strategic, and relationship-driven leader to serve as Vice President for Development and Engagement (VPDE). Reporting to the Senior Vice President (SVP) for Development and External Affairs, Shontel Grumhaus, early in her tenure, the VPDE will help shape the future of philanthropy and constituent engagement at one of the nation's leading private research universities.

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 dramatically elevating and investing in its advancement enterprise. As SMU prepares for its next chapter of strategic and campaign planning and philanthropic growth, leadership has prioritized strategic investments in talent, infrastructure, and organizational capacity in Development and External Affairs (DEA) that will position the university for unprecedented and sustainable fundraising growth.

This is an exceptional opportunity for a fundraising executive to build upon SMU's momentum and advance a comprehensive development and engagement enterprise that strengthens lifelong relationships with alumni, parents, friends, corporations, foundations, and other philanthropic partners. The VPDE will lead efforts to create a seamless pathway from engagement to annual, major, planned, and principal giving while inspiring a culture of philanthropy that advances the university's most ambitious priorities.

As a key member of the senior advancement leadership team, the VPDE will contribute to institutional strategy while serving as a trusted advisor and partner to university leadership, academic leaders, volunteers, and donors. The successful candidate will bring the vision, credibility, and fundraising expertise necessary to expand philanthropic support, deepen constituent engagement, and position SMU for continued growth and distinction.

As a member of a collaborative and evolving team, the VPDE will provide leadership for a broad portfolio encompassing parent engagement, donor engagement, leadership annual giving, corporate and foundation relations, gift planning, regional major gifts, and family philanthropy and engagement. In partnership with colleagues across the university, the VPDE will develop integrated strategies that

strengthen donor participation, elevate engagement, and generate transformational philanthropic support. In total, the VPDE will oversee a team of 18 development and engagement professionals, including four to six direct reports.

The VPDE will also maintain an active portfolio of principal and major gift prospects, personally cultivating and securing significant philanthropic investments that advance SMU's highest priorities. By modeling fundraising excellence and fostering collaboration across the advancement enterprise, the VPDE will help create an environment where innovation, accountability, and ambitious fundraising goals can thrive.

The successful candidate will be an experienced advancement leader with a record of success building high-performing fundraising organizations and securing significant philanthropic support. Experience overseeing multiple fundraising functions and leading senior advancement professionals will be essential. In addition, the ideal candidate will combine strategic vision with strong execution skills and possess the ability to engage effectively with donors, volunteers, academic leaders, trustees, and colleagues across a complex institution. Beyond professional accomplishments, SMU seeks a leader who is collaborative, intellectually curious, entrepreneurial, and committed to building authentic relationships across a broad community of stakeholders. The successful candidate will bring the judgment, diplomacy, and emotional intelligence required to lead effectively at the highest levels of the institution.

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

As a key member of SMU's senior advancement leadership team, the Vice President for Development and Engagement will oversee a broad portfolio spanning constituent relations, leadership annual giving, corporate and foundation partnerships, gift planning, regional major gifts, and family philanthropy. Working collaboratively across the university, the VPDE will drive a cohesive strategy that deepens relationships, expands philanthropic participation, and accelerates fundraising performance. Leading by example, the role also carries direct responsibility for a select group of major and principal gift prospects. Through strategic leadership, a commitment to fundraising excellence, and an ability to unite teams around ambitious goals, the VPDE will help shape a high-performing advancement enterprise positioned for sustained growth and transformational impact.

- **Leadership and Team Management:** Provide strategic leadership for a comprehensive development and engagement program that creates a seamless donor pipeline from engagement through annual, leadership, major, and principal giving. Establish fundraising priorities, performance metrics, and long-term strategies aligned with the university's mission and institutional goals.
- **Principal and Leadership Philanthropy:** Provide executive leadership, direction, coaching, and performance management for senior development leaders overseeing Parent Engagement, Donor Engagement, Leadership Annual Giving, Family Philanthropy and Engagement, Corporate and Foundation Relations, Gift Planning, and Regional Major Gifts. Build a collaborative, inclusive, and high-performing culture focused on accountability and professional excellence, and results.
- **Frontline Fundraising and Donor Portfolio:** Maintain a select portfolio of principal and major gift prospects; cultivate, solicit, and steward transformational gifts. Partner with university leadership and development officers to advance the university's highest fundraising priorities while modeling fundraising excellence across the division.

- **Donor Engagement Strategy:** Develop and implement innovative engagement strategies that strengthen lifelong relationships with alumni, parents, friends, corporations, foundations, and community partners. Ensure coordinated donor experiences that increase philanthropic participation and long-term donor retention.
- **University Leadership and Collaboration:** Serve as a strategic advisor to the Senior Vice President and collaborate with university leadership to identify fundraising priorities, develop institutional initiatives, and align philanthropic strategies with academic and strategic objectives.
- **Financial and Operational Oversight:** Provide oversight of departmental budgets, fundraising performance metrics, forecasting, reporting, compliance, and operational effectiveness. Use data and analytics to evaluate program success and drive continuous improvement.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

- A minimum of ten years of professional fundraising leadership experience in higher education advancement, fundraising, or nonprofit philanthropy, including experience overseeing multiple fundraising functions and leading senior advancement professionals.
- A demonstrated track record of securing seven- and eight-figure gifts and advancing ambitious philanthropic priorities.
- Expertise in strategic planning, fundraising operations, and data-informed decision making.
- 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.

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 Development and Engagement, Southern Methodist University](#)

Jack Gorman, Partner
Grace Zakim, 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.