



School of Medicine
and Public Health
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

SEARCH FOR THE VICE DEAN FOR ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCE/CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER Madison, Wisconsin

The University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health invites applications and nominations for the position of Vice Dean for Administration and Finance/Chief Operating Officer.

THE SEARCH

The [University of Wisconsin-Madison](#) (UW-Madison) [School of Medicine and Public Health](#) (SMPH) seeks an exceptional and strategic leader to serve as its Vice Dean for Administration and Finance/Chief Operating Officer (COO). The COO reports directly to the Dean and Vice Chancellor for Medical Affairs and works in close partnership with faculty, staff, and colleagues across SMPH, UW-Madison, and the broader state and local community. The COO will provide world-class executive leadership for the school's administrative enterprise, including finance, human resources, operations, facilities, information technology, analytics, and organizational effectiveness, with a focus on how these areas can synergize efforts to reach bold, shared goals. As a key advisor to the Dean, the COO will play a central role in advancing the school's strategic priorities through operational excellence, long-range financial planning, and the thoughtful stewardship and deployment of institutional resources. This is a rare opportunity to shape the next era of growth, impact, and excellence at one of the nation's leading public medical schools throughout a newly created leadership role.

The University of Wisconsin–Madison is one of the world's leading public research universities and among the most comprehensive institutions of higher education in the nation. As Wisconsin's flagship land-grant university, UW–Madison combines exceptional academic breadth with a longstanding commitment to research, innovation, and public service. The University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health is an internationally recognized leader in academic medicine and the nation's first school to integrate the fields of medicine and public health, which is central to its identity and impact. Consistently ranked among the country's top medical schools, SMPH advances a distinctive mission that integrates education,

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research, clinical care, and public health to improve the health and well-being of communities across Wisconsin and beyond. The school houses 28 academic departments, numerous research centers and institutes, and a broad portfolio of degree programs spanning the health professions and biomedical sciences.

The creation of this COO role reflects SMPH's commitment to strengthening the administrative, financial, and operational capabilities needed to support its next phase of growth and impact. The COO will join SMPH at a transformative moment, helping to strengthen operational excellence, modernize administrative systems, and align resources with the school's strategic direction. Ultimately, this leader will play a pivotal role in shaping how SMPH evolves, grows, and delivers on its mission of advancing health and health equity in the years ahead.

The University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in this important recruitment. All inquiries, nominations, and applications for this opportunity should be directed in confidence to the firm as indicated at the end of this document.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison

As a public land-grant university and one of the most prolific research institutions in the world, UW–Madison is home to those who are driven by a desire both to explore new worlds and to apply new ideas to real-world problems. With a total annual budget of more than \$5 billion, including more than \$1.93 billion in annual research expenditures, UW–Madison has been in the top ten for national research spending every year since 1972.

Few institutions match UW–Madison's incredible depth and remarkable breadth. The university's 23 schools, colleges, institutes, and divisions include an academic medical center; a college of engineering; schools of veterinary medicine, pharmacy, and nursing; a newly launched college of computing and artificial intelligence; a land-grant agricultural research program and extension program; and an excellent array of physical and natural science, social science, humanities, and arts programs. Ranked 36th overall and 12th among the nation's public institutions by U.S. News and World Report, UW–Madison is one of the nation's preeminent research universities and has been named a "new Ivy" by Forbes. UW–Madison generates \$38.9 billion annually in statewide economic impact and seeds numerous startups, spinoffs, clinical trials, and other entrepreneurial endeavors aimed at translating its discoveries into impact.

University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health

Founded in 1907, the school transformed into the nation's first School of Medicine and Public Health in 2005 to integrate the principles and value of interwoven medical and public health approaches in all its missions. With more than 6,500 employees, including nearly 3,000 faculty members, the school's engagement spans the entire state of Wisconsin and includes a deep commitment to improving the health of people and communities. This commitment manifests itself in innovative models that serve as paradigms for the rest of the country. The school trains students in five health professions degrees and

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programs — Doctor of Medicine, Doctor of Physical Therapy, Master of Genetic Counselor Studies, Master of Physician Assistant Studies, and Master of Public Health — and is home to more than 20 doctoral and master's programs across the biomedical and health sciences as well as exceptional post-doctoral training programs. There are nearly 18,000 SMPH living alumni today, carrying out the school's mission of advancing health for all. Faculty members hold appointments across 18 clinical departments and 10 basic science departments.



SMPH offers a range of educational programs and provides rich health professions training experiences in rural and urban settings, with an emphasis on preparing graduates for success in caring for all populations including people living in medically underserved areas. It utilizes clinical training sites throughout Wisconsin to train and develop a healthcare workforce to serve the needs of the entire state.

From theragnostic and particle beam therapy research to developing new models for studying cancer, and from treatments for neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's and multiple sclerosis to social exposome studies that enable precision public health approaches, researchers at the SMPH are translating discovery into real-world application. SMPH brings together expertise and supports interdisciplinary research, taking advantage of the university's rare status as one of only seven institutions in the nation to have a medical school, agricultural school, veterinary school, engineering school and law school all on one contiguous campus. This creates an environment for extraordinary collaborations.

The UW School of Medicine and Public Health is ranked 10th among public universities and 24th overall in National Institutes of Health funding for schools of medicine in 2025, according to rankings from Blue Ridge Institute for Medical Research. The school's Doctor of Medicine program is ranked Tier 1 for primary care and Tier 2 for research by U.S. News & World Report. The faculty is composed of the nation's leading researchers, educators, and clinicians. This includes several recipients of the National Medal of Science

and the Nobel Prize, as well as 14 members of the National Academies of Medicine, Science or Engineering, and other highly prestigious research awards.

The School of Medicine and Public Health's [strategic plan](#), titled "Forward Together, Healthier Together" sets an ambitious course for its next era of impact. It defines how SMPH will work in deeper partnership with its health system partner UW Health and UW-Madison to strengthen Wisconsin's health ecosystem.

The school's strategic plan was finalized in July 2026, and includes priorities focused on:

- Innovation and discovery through research
- Academic excellence, student and trainee experience
- Patient care innovation
- Community engagement and social impact

SMPH has an annual budget of over \$1.0 billion, reflecting 36 percent growth over the last five years. Just over a third, or \$361 million, of the budget is from federal grants, which is an indication of the strength of the science and research enterprise. UW Health funding is consistently around 30 percent of the budget across all missions and is guided by an affiliation agreement, service contracts, and aligned investments in key initiatives. Non-federal grants, state support, tuition, and other endowments make up the balance of the funding. Notably, SMPH is home to the Wisconsin Partnership Program (WPP), a grantmaking organization to address Wisconsin's most pressing and complex health challenges through grantmaking. Since its inception in 2004, WPP has awarded approximately 750 grants totaling more than \$336 million that have reached all 72 counties in Wisconsin. Community and academic grant recipients have leveraged more than \$983 million in additional funding from federal, foundation, or other agencies to expand or sustain their projects.

In 2025, SMPH and UW Health completed their first-ever joint fundraising campaign under a philanthropic brand called "Wisconsin Medicine," with a goal of raising half a billion dollars. The campaign surpassed its goal of \$500 million, raising just over \$622 million.

Leadership

Dr. Nita Ahuja became the tenth Dean of the School of Medicine and Public Health and UW-Madison's Vice Chancellor for Medical Affairs in May 2025. She also serves as rotating chair or vice chair of the board of the UW Hospitals and Clinics Authority and is a professor in the Department of Surgery. Ahuja holds the Robert Turell Distinguished Chair in Medical Leadership. A renowned surgeon-scientist, she has held top roles at some of the nation's leading research universities and health systems. Ahuja is also chair-elect of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) board of directors and will begin a one-year term as chair in November 2026. AAMC is the representative body serving all accredited U.S. and Canadian medical schools and teaching hospitals.

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Ahuja is a cancer-care innovator whose treatment approaches and research have garnered international recognition. She is an expert in the treatment of sarcomas and complex gastrointestinal cancers, and her innovative surgical and heated chemotherapy approaches have drawn patients from around the world seeking treatment for difficult metastatic cancers.

UW Health and SMPH Partners

UW Health is a separate 501(c)3 governed by the UW Hospitals and Clinics Authority (a public authority) and that partners with the UW School of Medicine and Public Health to fulfill patient care, research, education, and community service missions. UW Health maintains strong linkages to UW-Madison and SMPH through governance and co-development of strategic planning.



UW Health has seen a decade of growth and expansion, with revenue of \$6.3 billion in 2025, and maintains healthy margins. UW Health hospitals, which includes University Hospital on the UW–Madison campus and UW Health East Madison Hospital on the east side of Madison, have achieved a #1 ranking in Wisconsin 15 years in a row by *U.S. News and World Report*. Additional distinctions include being ranked by *Forbes* as 21st in Wisconsin for Best Employers (2025) and by Scientific Registry of Transplant Recipients as the top-ranked heart transplant program in Wisconsin for several adult transplant outcomes (2026). The system serves more than 867,000 patients each year in the upper Midwest and beyond with more than 2,000 physicians and 26,500 staff. SMPH physician faculty members are dually employed (by UW–Madison and UW Medical Foundation, which is the clinical practice plan overseen by UW Health). The UW Health Office of Graduate Medical Education oversees more than 80 ACGME-accredited residency and fellowship programs at UW Hospitals and Clinics.

SMPH also holds a significant academic partnership with the William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital and Clinics, which serves nearly 95,000 veterans across 19 counties in Wisconsin and Illinois. The Madison VA Hospital and Clinics has earned a five-star rating from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and received the 2022 Veterans Health Administration Overall Best Experience Award, which is the highest distinction for VA hospitals in the nation.

In addition, partnerships with several health systems across Wisconsin comprise the school's "statewide campus," which offers clinical training opportunities throughout Wisconsin. These include Advocate Aurora Health/Eastern Academic Campus, Marshfield Clinic/ Northern Academic Campus, and Emplify Health (formerly known as Gunderson Health System)/Western Academic Campus.

The Role of the Vice Dean For Administration & Finance and Chief Operating Officer

The Vice Dean for Administration and Finance/Chief Operating Officer is the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health's senior administrative executive and a key strategic partner to the Dean and Vice Chancellor for Medical Affairs. This newly created position provides executive leadership for the school's administrative enterprise, overseeing finance, human resources, workforce planning, facilities, information technology, business data analytics, project management, and other core operational functions. Most importantly, the COO will develop and implement an inspiring vision for harnessing the capabilities of these core areas to advance initiatives that support the school's education, research, clinical, and public health and service missions. The COO provides oversight across five key functional areas: Finance, Human Resources, Information Technology, Facilities, and Organizational Effectiveness. The COO's direct reports lead these respective functions and include the Chief Financial Officer, Chief Human Resources Officer, Chief Information Officer, and Director of Facilities.

The COO role will be a key leader in the campus community in working with the university in establishing the School of Medicine and Public Health on a course of long term financial and operational excellence. SMPH is the only public medical school for the state of Wisconsin among the entire Universities of Wisconsin system. SMPH has an important partnership with the teaching health system, UW Health, which has a budget of approximately \$7B. The Dean and CEO have embarked on a journey over the past year to become more integrated. The COO will be a key leader in helping operationalize effective and efficient practices in partnership with leaders in UW Health.

Working in close partnership with UW Health, university leadership, and external healthcare partners, the COO will identify opportunities to strengthen operational alignment across the health sciences, advance data-informed decision making, leverage technology and AI-enabled solutions, and position the school for long-term success in an increasingly complex academic health environment. The COO will serve as a strategic change leader and champion, guiding the school through significant organizational and operational transformation, including evolving administrative service models, technology modernization

efforts, enterprise process improvement initiatives, and the complex intersections among the school, UW Health, the university, and external healthcare organizations.

The COO will be expected to carry out the following key responsibilities:

- Provide executive leadership for the school's administrative operations, establishing strategic priorities that align with the Dean's vision and advance the school's academic, research, clinical, and public health and service missions.
- Lead the School's administrative divisions, including finance, human resources, workforce planning, facilities, information technology, project management, and business analytics, ensuring operational excellence, fiscal stewardship, and outstanding service across the organization.
- Serve as a strategic leader within the university and across the University of Wisconsin system to advance long-term financial sustainability and institutional priorities.
- Help lead implementation of the strategic plan including the release of effective use of resources for the key initiatives identified in the 2026 Strategic Plan.
- Develop long-range administrative and financial strategies that strengthen organizational effectiveness, improve operational performance, and ensure the school remains financially sustainable.
- Be able to roll out effective business analytics that can work across the different units of the school as well as the university and the UW Health System including use of leading best practices of artificial intelligence. This would work across all of the key domains of finance, research, and clinical practices such that SMPH has a single source of truth.
- Foster a culture of continuous improvement by establishing performance metrics, evaluating outcomes, and implementing innovative approaches that enhance efficiency, service, and organizational effectiveness.
- Partner closely with the Dean, senior school leadership, UW Health, the Wisconsin Foundation and Alumni Association (WFAA), university leaders, and external healthcare partners to address strategic operational issues, align priorities, and advance institutional initiatives in support of the school's academic, research, clinical, and public health missions.
- Serve as a strategic change leader, helping the school navigate a period of significant organizational transformation while advancing operational excellence across a complex network of university, health system, and external healthcare relationships. This includes leading through evolving administrative models, technology modernization efforts, enterprise process improvements, and increasingly integrated approaches to supporting the school's academic, research, clinical, and public health missions.
- Work in partnership with the UW Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration to foster collaboration across a wide range of financial, administrative, and operational goals.
- Lead major initiatives requiring executive-level coordination, including implementation of the school's strategic plan and other high-priority cross-functional projects, while effectively

navigating complex governance structures, competing stakeholder interests, and significant organizational change.

- Advance the use of technology, analytics, automation, and AI-enabled solutions to improve decision making, operational performance, workforce planning, and resource allocation.
- Ensure effective enterprise risk management in collaboration with university and health system leadership, maintaining compliance with applicable laws, regulations, university policies, and contractual obligations.
- Build strong, collaborative relationships with faculty, staff, department chairs, clinical leaders, and campus partners, fostering trust, transparency, and shared accountability.
- Recruit, develop, mentor, and evaluate senior administrative leaders while building a high-performing, inclusive, and mission-driven administrative organization.
- Have a systematic approach to leadership development and career ladders.

Key Opportunities for the Vice Dean for Administration & Finance and Chief Operating Officer

The success of the new COO will be determined by how well they address the following opportunities:

Advance Operational Excellence Across a Complex Organization

The COO will have the opportunity to build and define a newly created role at a pivotal moment for SMPH. Success will require greater operational alignment, consistency, and accountability across a decentralized organization that includes 28 departments, multiple centers and institutes, and a wide range of administrative practices and cultures. The COO must assess how work gets done across the school, identify opportunities to streamline operations, business processes, and service delivery, and introduce best practices that improve effectiveness while respecting the unique strengths and needs of individual units. A key measure of success will be the ability to translate the school's strategic plan and the Dean's priorities into coordinated execution and tangible results.

Strengthen Financial Stewardship & Resource Planning

SMPH is entering an important period of financial transformation, creating an opportunity for the COO to bring greater sophistication to resource allocation, forecasting, and capital investment decision-making. The COO and their team will move beyond incremental budget management toward proactive, enterprise-wide approach to financial planning that aligns resources with the school's strategic priorities. The COO will play a central role in implementing a new funds flow model in partnership with the health system, evaluating resource utilization across the school, and developing long-term financial strategies that support growth, sustainability, and mission impact while balancing the interests of departments, the Dean's Office, and key university, health system, and community partners.

Strengthen Collaboration Between SMPH and its Partners

The COO will be one of the school's most important relationship builders, serving as a trusted partner to UW Health, university leadership, department chairs, and other key stakeholders across the academic medical center enterprise. Success will require navigating complex governance structures, strengthening operational alignment, and fostering collaboration among organizations with interconnected but distinct priorities. As SMPH pursues significant strategic and operational change, the COO must build credibility quickly, create sustained engagement among stakeholders, and help position the school and its partners to capitalize on opportunities that advance education, research, clinical care, and public health.

Catalyze Organizational Change and Innovation

Under the leadership of Dean Ahuja, the school is charting an exciting future that advances its work on an operational, cultural, and strategic scale. The COO will convert that momentum into durable institutional progress. From modernizing administrative processes and leveraging technology to supporting major initiatives such as funds flow implementation, facilities planning, and evolving shared service models, the COO must lead change in a thoughtful and decisive manner. The COO will have a vital role in sorting and prioritizing competing demands, managing the pace of change and following change management best practices, and challenging longstanding assumptions about how work is conducted and goals are accomplished. The COO will serve as the strategic thought partner to the Dean, understanding and anticipating needs. The ideal leader will bring both the operational discipline and change management expertise needed to help SMPH evolve and succeed at the highest levels the next decade and beyond.

Foster Data-Driven Decision-Making and Organizational Performance

SMPH has a clear opportunity to strengthen its use of data, analytics, and performance measurement. The COO will lead efforts to establish a more sophisticated enterprise approach to data management, analytics, and operational insight, creating dashboards, metrics, and reporting structures needed to support strategic planning, decision-making, and performance improvement. Success will require transforming data into a strategic asset that enables better decisions, greater transparency, and resource optimization across the organization.

Lead People with Vision and Clarity

A member of the Dean's cabinet and manager of a large and broad portfolio, the COO will be an effective supervisor and motivator and lead with clarity around priorities, expectations, and organizational direction. Working closely with a visionary Dean, the COO must be able to provide focus amid complexity, align diverse stakeholders around shared goals, and foster a culture of excellence, collaboration, and service. Building strong relationships with direct and indirect reports, department chairs, and senior leaders will be critical, as will the ability to communicate transparently, earn trust, and demonstrate early wins that reinforce the value of this new leadership role.

Qualifications and Characteristics

The COO will be an experienced financial and operational leader with a track record of success in complex environments and an affinity and talent for communicating and collaborating with a broad range of constituencies. The successful candidate will combine a keen and innovative business sense with a deep attraction to the missions of the University of Wisconsin's School of Medicine and Public Health, and a full appreciation that the fulfillment of its public service commitment is its paramount obligation. While no single individual will embody them all, the successful candidate will bring many of the following professional qualifications, skills, experiences, and personal qualities.

- Master's degree in a relevant field required; terminal degree preferred.
- At least 5-10 years of experience working within higher education.
- 10 or more years of significant senior operational leadership experience in an academic medical center, integrated health system, research-intensive university, or similarly complex organization.
- A strong understanding of human resources processes and the workings of a university.
- Demonstrated success leading large administrative organizations with responsibility for finance, operations, human resources, and organizational effectiveness.
- Experience creating economies of scale and improving operational efficiency across complex organizations.
- Proven record of improving operational performance, financial stewardship, and organizational effectiveness within complex, highly regulated environments.
- Experience working successfully within large, distributed, matrixed organizations serving multiple missions, with demonstrated success navigating complex governance environments and aligning a wide variety of stakeholder groups around shared objectives; ability to build trusted partnerships with physicians, faculty, staff, administrative and academic leaders, and health system executives.
- Demonstrated experience establishing strategic priorities, performance metrics, and accountability frameworks.
- Proven ability to build and use data analytics to drive decision-making and organizational performance.
- Track record of leading enterprise-wide process improvement and operational transformation, including stakeholder engagement, change management, organizational redesign, technology implementation, and sustained adoption of new ways of working.
- Excellent analytical, organizational, and strategic decision-making skills, balancing financial, operational, political, ethical, and cultural considerations.
- Experience leading organizational change, integration, and culture initiatives.
- Exceptional collaboration, communication, and relationship-building skills across diverse stakeholder groups.
- Reputation for integrity, sound judgment, transparency, and stewardship of institutional resources.

- Demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and effectiveness in navigating ambiguity and organizational complexity.
- Proven ability to recruit, develop, and retain high-performing leadership teams.
- Leadership style characterized by humility, emotional intelligence, accountability, and commitment to public service

The Community

Located on an isthmus between two lakes, [Madison](#) is the capital city of the state of Wisconsin. Madison has been voted in the top 100 Best Places to Live in the USA (Livability, 2023) and ranked the seventh Happiest City in America (WalletHub, 2025). Madison is the second largest city in the state, with a city population of approximately 280,000 and regional population of over 1 million. The city is within easy driving range of Chicago and Milwaukee. Madison offers numerous unique neighborhoods and commercial areas including the Capitol Square, State Street, Willy Street, Shorewood Hills, Maple Bluff, and Hilldale. Suburbs and surrounding smaller communities include Sun Prairie, Middleton, McFarland, Verona, Cottage Grove, Waunakee and Fitchburg.

The city's technology economy is growing rapidly, and the region is home to the headquarters of Epic Systems, Exact Sciences, Promega Corporation, American Family Insurance, Trek Bicycle, Sub-Zero, and Lands' End, as well as many biotech, digital health and health tech startups.

Madison is home to one of the strongest local food scenes in the country with restaurants by multiple James Beard Award winners and semifinalists, gastropubs and farm-to-table restaurants. From April to October, the Capitol Square hosts the impressive Dane County Farmers' Market, the largest producer-only farmers' market in the country.

The city has a dedicated athletics fanbase that centers around the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Sports venues include Camp Randall Stadium, the Kohl Center, LaBahn Arena, Wisconsin Field House, and the Alliant Energy Center. The city is rich with cultural offerings such as the Overture Center for the Performing Arts, Orpheum Theatre, Concerts on the Square, Jazz at Five, UW–Madison Mead Witter School of Music and Hamel Music Center, Madison Symphony Orchestra, Madison Opera, Madison Ballet, UW–Madison Chazen Museum of Art, Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Wisconsin Historical Museum and Madison Children's Museum, among others.

The city of Madison and the University of Wisconsin-Madison acknowledge that they occupy ancestral Ho-Chunk land.

Applications, Inquiries, and Nominations

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process with a priority application date of October 3, 2026. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters (addressed to the search committee) should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website: <https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/university-wisconsin-madison-school-medicine-and-public-health/vice-dean>. Electronic submission of materials is required.

Ariannah Mirick, Daniel Rodas, Ivan Ceballos, and Seema Khan
Isaacson, Miller

Important information regarding confidentiality: *Unless confidentiality is requested in writing, UW-Madison is required by Wis. Stat. sec. 19.36(7) to release the names of all applicants to anyone who requests that information. If you would like to request confidentiality, please indicate that via this [survey](#). All candidates who advance to the finalist stage will be announced publicly prior to their campus visits.*

The University of Wisconsin is an Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Employer. We encourage all qualified individuals to apply. Please visit <https://apps.ohr.wisc.edu/eeoquestionnaire/questionnaire.aspx> to complete voluntary self-identification information. Job Requisition ID: JR10014567

If you need to request an accommodation because of a disability, you can find information about how to make a request at the following website: <https://employee disabilities.wisc.edu/disability-accommodation-information-for-applicants/>

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