



**Search for the Vice President of People and Culture
The Morton Arboretum
Lisle, Illinois**

THE SEARCH

The Morton Arboretum (the Arboretum), globally recognized for its century-long commitment to tree-focused science, conservation, and education, seeks a strategic and collaborative leader to serve as its Vice President of People and Culture. This inaugural Vice President will oversee a team and program that ensures the institutional culture and employee work environment are operating at the highest levels and are guided by the Arboretum's core values in decision-making, actions, and behaviors to advance its mission and strategic goals. They will serve as a member of the leadership team and as a partner with other senior executives to build organizational capacity to change and achieve greater effectiveness by developing, improving, and reinforcing strategies, structures, and processes that enable all staff to do their jobs well and grow professionally. The Arboretum has been named a "Top Workplace" by *The Chicago Tribune* and the incoming Vice President of People and Culture will strive to continue this trend, providing people-first leadership to the Arboretum's diverse network of more than 425 employees and over 900 volunteers.

The Vice President of People and Culture will join an engaged and experienced leadership team under Jill Koski, the Arboretum's new president and CEO. The focus on people and culture within the organization is critical to the strategic direction of the Arboretum as it enters its second century. The elevation of this role demonstrates a commitment to creating a sense of belonging and pathways of success for all people who work with and engage with the Arboretum. The Vice President will be integral to building and maintaining a shared culture of collaboration, inclusion, and sustainability to amplify its impact.

A thought leader in human resources, this individual must bring a creative, forward-looking mindset to the role and have deep knowledge of trends in the field to support talent acquisition and development to meet changing workforce needs and best advance the Arboretum's success. The Vice President will be able to identify and leverage synergies across the Arboretum's main functional areas of human resources and determine how to best structure a people strategy that prepares the Arboretum for long-term success across the wide array of institutional job roles and responsibilities from guest services to plant collections and science to education and administrative positions. The incoming Vice President will work across the organization to advance the institution's commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility. In addition, the Vice President will lead the mapping, interdepartmental coordination, and expansion of the

Arboretum's internship and mentorship programs as it develops a new generation of tree advocates, stewards, and professionals.

As the Champion of Trees, the Arboretum is committed to scientifically informed action to benefit trees, both locally and globally. The Vice President will be the champion of its people. The successful candidate will have a minimum of 7 years of experience and a proven track record of providing strategic human resources leadership in complex organizations.

The Morton Arboretum has retained Isaacson, Miller to assist with this important recruitment. Confidential inquiries, nominations, and applications may be directed to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

ABOUT THE MORTON ARBORETUM

Mission

The Morton Arboretum is a world-renowned tree-focused public garden. Its mission is to collect, study, display, and conserve trees and other plants from around the world to inspire learning, foster enjoyment, benefit communities, encourage action, and enhance the environment. The vision is to create a greener, healthier, and more beautiful world where people and trees thrive together.

History

The Arboretum was founded in 1922 by Joy Morton, founder of the Morton Salt Company and son of the founder of Arbor Day. "Plant Trees" was the Morton family motto, and its legacy carries through the Arboretum's mission and programs to this day. Joy established his country estate in Lisle, IL in the early 1900s as a respite from the bustle of the Chicago industrial scene 25 miles away. Between 1909 and 1921, Joy focused on transforming the property into an arboretum, and in 1922, The Morton Arboretum was formally established, with members of Joy's family and Morton Salt executives appointed to life terms on the Board of Trustees. When Joy died in 1934, the Arboretum consisted of 735 acres and many plantings and nurseries, an extensive system of roads and paths, and a small but mighty staff developing and overseeing a general landscape plan.

Strategic Vision

The Morton Arboretum envisions a greener, healthier, and more beautiful world where people and trees thrive together. Three interlinked strategic priorities will help achieve this vision:

- People and communities are engaged and inspired
- Knowledge is advanced through collaborative scientific inquiry
- Trees are protected, preserved, and supported

A key component of the new strategic plan is the Arboretum's continued partnership and engagement with a range of audiences and perspectives. The Arboretum seeks to welcome a diversity of community members to engage with its mission and programs onsite, in addition to engaging audiences virtually and in their communities. The Arboretum is committed to hiring employees, electing trustees, and attracting volunteers representing the broader public, through which the Arboretum will gain enriched perspectives to inform its objectives.

Organization and Programs

In 2022, the Arboretum celebrated its first century of mission impact. Today, the Arboretum encompasses 1,700 acres of woodlands, prairie, lakes, and streams, with plant collections and specialty gardens amid natural landscapes. In addition, the Arboretum is home to 16 miles of hiking trails and 9 miles of paved roads for driving, bicycling, and guided tram tours. The organization attracts more than 1 million visitors annually from across the nation and world and has 58,000 member households. The Arboretum is operated by a team of staff and volunteers, including 230 full-time, 135 part-time, 120 temporary employees, and 900 volunteers.

Plant Collections

The Arboretum grows and displays a rich diversity of trees, shrubs, and other plants that are evaluated for their suitability for the midwestern United States. These living collections include 222,000 plant specimens representing 4,100 different kinds of plants. Arranged by geographic, taxonomic, and other special groupings, the collections are enhanced by restored natural areas of native plants and ecosystems. The Arboretum's work in new plant development results in useful and attractive trees and shrubs that are introduced in the marketplace.

Science and Conservation

The Arboretum is globally recognized for its leadership in developing leading-edge solutions in tree science and research. [The Center for Tree Science](#) (the Center) is the hub of this important work, where a team of scientists with expertise in tree biology, ecology, evolution, conservation, and the cultivation of trees and shrubs develop a deep understanding of trees and what makes them thrive. The Center engages scientists worldwide through its Collaborative Network, which encompasses scientific colleagues from gardens, universities, industries, and organizations. These scientists share their expertise with the Arboretum through special relationships established between the Arboretum and their home institutions. The Arboretum also has an herbarium with a collection of 205,000 dried specimens that are used for botanical research.

In addition to research, the Arboretum advances tree conservation. Through the Global Tree Conservation Program, the Arboretum leads partnerships and assists efforts to prevent tree extinction and secure threatened tree species, with a focus on oaks. In March 2023, the [Species Survival Commission](#) (SSC) of the [International Union for Conservation of Nature](#) (IUCN), the world's largest conservation organization,

designated The Morton Arboretum as the first *Center for Species Survival: Trees*. Only eleven Centers are recognized globally by the IUCN SSC, five of which are in North America.

Learning, Engagement, and Outreach

The Arboretum's Learning and Engagement division provides programming for guests of all ages, including Little Trees, a nature-based early childhood learning program. Educational programs for adults include in-person and online classes in gardening and plant care, conservation, and tree and nature-related topics, in addition to art, photography, and other classes.

The Arboretum also offers science-based advice about trees, plants, and landscapes to amateur and professional gardeners and landscapers throughout the world through the [Plant Clinic](#), which answers thousands of inquiries annually about plant care and selection.

The Sterling Morton Library has collections mainly focused on botany, horticulture, and related subjects, with a wide range of resources from highly scientific works to general gardening guides and a robust children's collection.

The Arboretum's four-acre Children's Garden encourages hands-on learning through immersive play in a tree-filled setting. The Arboretum also hosts Summer Science Camps, nature-based early learning classes, and other programs for children. Additionally, the Arboretum provides a host of supplementary resources for educators and students.

The Arboretum leads the [Chicago Region Trees Initiative](#), a partnership for coordinated action to improve the health, diversity, and equitable distribution of trees in the Chicago region to benefit people and communities. The Arboretum's outreach not only focuses on the Chicago region, but also expands globally through programs like ArbNet, an interactive professional community of arboreta and an arboretum accreditation program. Launched in 2011, ArbNet now includes more than 2,000 institutions from 40 countries.

Leadership

The Arboretum's [Board of Trustees](#) is responsible for the overall governance of the institution and the advancement of its mission. Comprised of corporate and civic leaders, trustees are elected to their roles. Additionally, a Board of Advisors provides guidance and perspectives to the leadership of the Arboretum around strategic matters related to its mission and work.

In 2022, Jill Koski was named the President and CEO of the Arboretum. She was selected as the fourth leader in the Arboretum's 100-year history and the organization's first woman President and CEO. Jill came to The Morton Arboretum from Holden Forests and Gardens in Ohio where she was president and CEO from 2017 to 2022. Prior to that, she was Vice President of Development at The Morton Arboretum for

10 years. Her previous experience includes leadership roles in science-focused environmental nonprofits, namely the John G. Shedd Aquarium and the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum in Chicago.

THE ROLE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT OF PEOPLE AND CULTURE

As a new member of the eight-person leadership team at The Morton Arboretum, the Vice President of People and Culture will be essential to the success of this multilayered organization that employs a vibrant full-time, part-time, and temporary staff of more than 400 people, including scientists, horticulturists, arborists, educators, guest service professionals, and administrators. Additionally, the organization benefits from the service of over 900 volunteers. This new role presents an opportunity to shape the human resources department with a more comprehensive focus on people strategy and organizational development while serving as a thought partner to the President and CEO as well as other members of the senior leadership team. This leader will support staff and volunteers in providing an unparalleled Arboretum experience for all guests and will ensure that employees understand how their professional success amplifies the organization's mission.

The Vice President will oversee the People and Culture team which includes the functional areas of talent acquisition, compensation and benefits, employee engagement and development, and volunteers. They will lead and coordinate inclusion work across the organization and develop an integrated program to create the next generation of public garden professionals through burgeoning internship and mentorship programs. They will oversee the development of workforce policies and practices to ensure compliance with state and federal laws and regulations. Under the Vice President's leadership, the People and Culture team will embody the Arboretum's core values, develop strategies to make certain the values are being upheld by all staff, and ensure all employees feel supported, valued, and motivated.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE VICE PRESIDENT OF PEOPLE AND CULTURE

Develop and implement a modern people strategy that aligns with the Arboretum's core values

In consultation with Arboretum stakeholders, the Vice President will ensure that the Arboretum's people strategies and programs align with the organization's core values and support its workforce in fulfillment of the mission. They will partner with the senior leadership team and the President and CEO to ensure that all departments across the Arboretum maintain people- and mission-focused teams. They will make data-informed recommendations to enhance the culture of the Arboretum, invest in workforce development, and support long-term organization success.

The Vice President of People and Culture must be inherently collaborative, foster an environment of open communication, value diverse perspectives, demonstrate understanding of changing workforce trends, and model their commitment to creating a vibrant and meaningful work environment for all employees. They will partner with the President and CEO to lead a review of the institution's core values and revise them to reflect the evolving culture at the Arboretum.

Lead the People and Culture team, forming synergies across human resources functions

The Vice President leads the People and Culture team and oversees all functional areas of human resources across the Arboretum's employee and volunteer lifecycle. From recruitment and orientation to offboarding, the Vice President will bring a fresh perspective and actively seek out departmental synergies that ensure compliance while supporting the human needs of the Arboretum's workforce.

Functionally, the Vice President will lead the organization's recruitment strategy to ensure the Arboretum meets its talent acquisition objectives. They will also work with managers and leaders across the organization to boost employee engagement, professional development opportunities, and cross-functional relationships. Early in their tenure, the Vice President will work with the President and CEO and the senior leadership to assess findings from a recently executed compensation study of all unique positions in the organization, and ensure that the institution's compensation philosophy and structure align with study outcomes. Based on this assessment, they will develop and implement appropriate long-term compensation and benefits programs to motivate, incentivize, and reward employees for effective, mission-aligned performance. Additionally, they will oversee and find new ways to advance the vital contributions of volunteers in the mission of the organization.

Advance a culture of inclusion

The Arboretum is committed to being a welcoming place for people of all backgrounds and creating a sense of belonging for all who engage in our programs and work. The Vice President will work across departments to ensure the Arboretum is inclusive, accessible, and equitable for its staff, volunteers, visitors, and board members. They will work with partners across the organization to advance IDEA principles and practices in all lines of business from talent acquisition to guest experience to community engagement and business partnerships, understanding that a culture of inclusion is essential to the long-term viability and success of the Arboretum.

Build a pipeline of talent and interest in green career opportunities

The Vice President will also work across departments to provide support and grow the Arboretum's internship and mentorship programs. At present, the Arboretum offers [summer internships](#) in public horticulture, undergraduate research opportunities through the Center for Tree Science, and a [Youth Volunteer Program](#) for younger students through the education department. College and graduate school students can apply to receive service-learning credit hours for direct service to the Arboretum. There are significant opportunities to deepen the Arboretum's connections to regional and national high schools, colleges, and universities; increase student exposure to tree science and conservation as well as public garden and arboretum fields; and create an impactful workforce development pipeline that will sustain the Arboretum's mission in generations to come. The Vice President will work with peers and other colleagues to leverage new opportunities and build capacity for internship and mentorship programs.

DESIRED QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The successful candidate will have a master's degree in human resources management or a related field, or a bachelor's degree in human resources management or a related field with a certification through SHRM or HRCI. A minimum of 7 years' experience in human resources management is required, along with a demonstrated interest in non-profit organizational management. In addition, the ideal candidate will possess many of the following qualifications and characteristics:

- A proven track record of providing strategic human resources leadership in complex organizations.
- Deep and broad knowledge of an array of human resource functions, including employee relations, compensation, benefits, talent management and development, work-life initiatives, equal opportunity, human resources information systems, and payroll.
- Strong project management skills and an ability to drive multiple initiatives simultaneously.
- Analytical skills to assess and synthesize data, develop solutions, and form recommendations that support organizational goals and objectives.
- An ability to handle sensitive information with a high level of discretion.
- Excellent verbal and written communication skills.
- Strong interpersonal skills and the ability to negotiate, resolve conflict, motivate, mentor, influence, and develop relationships at all levels of an organization.
- Demonstrated commitment to promoting accessibility, equity, and inclusivity.
- Spirit of teamwork, collaboration, and a focus on finding solutions to advance progress.
- A dedication to the Arboretum and its mission.

COMPENSATION

The anticipated salary range for this position is \$180,000-\$220,000.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

The Morton Arboretum has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist with this search. Review of applications, nominations, and expressions of interest will begin immediately and continue on a confidential basis until an appointment is made. Applicants should send a cover letter and resume or curriculum vitae. Nominations, applications, and inquiries should be sent electronically and in confidence to:

Jeff Kessner, Partner
Corinne Crews, Associate
Jenny Rubin, Search Coordinator

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/morton-arboretum/vice-president-people-culture>

The Morton Arboretum is a champion for diversity, supporting a culture of inclusion that attracts, inspires, and engages people to achieve success. The Arboretum is committed to hire and develop employees based on job-related qualifications irrespective of race, religion, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, disability, or veteran status. To increase diversity in professions related to the public garden realm, we encourage applications from underrepresented minorities, persons with disabilities, and veterans.

The Morton Arboretum is dedicated to complying with our obligations as an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. All applicants are guaranteed equal consideration for employment.