

Northwestern University

*President Position and
Candidate Specification*



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The Leadership Opportunity

The Northwestern University presidency represents a rare and compelling leadership opportunity at a defining moment for one of the world's leading research institutions. Northwestern has long been distinguished by its breadth of academic excellence, interdisciplinary culture, and global connectivity. Bolstered by its placement in the world-class city of Chicago and along the shore of Lake Michigan, Northwestern spans three integrated campuses: Evanston; Chicago; and Doha, Qatar.

The University's tradition of exceptional leadership over the past several decades has propelled its eminence. Consistently recognized among the top national and international institutions, the University enjoys unique excellence across schools and departments. The arts, humanities, and social sciences—including exceptional schools of business and law—complement and connect with science, engineering, and medical enterprises. Joint faculty appointments as well as interdisciplinary research centers and institutes provide the foundations for advancing interconnected knowledge, enrichment, and solutions to the world's greatest problems and questions. Across a comprehensive portfolio, Northwestern combines the scale and complexity of a world-class research enterprise with the collaborative ethos of a close-knit academic community.

The University has invested in the advancement of a research enterprise that recently surpassed \$1 billion in annual sponsored funding. Feinberg School of Medicine anchors much of this momentum, ranking among the nation's leaders in NIH support and driving breakthroughs from basic science to clinical partnership under the name of Northwestern Medicine, which includes world-class clinical affiliates such as Northwestern Memorial HealthCare, Ann and Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, and Shirley Ryan AbilityLab. With unmatched breadth, deep expertise, a collaborative and cross-disciplinary culture, and a resolute sense of purpose, Northwestern is uniquely positioned to provide the intellectual and technological leadership required to confront society's most pressing issues.

Faculty across disciplines are responsible for the University's excellence as evidenced by the receipt of prestigious international honors and prizes, including this year's Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences; growth in faculty membership in the National Academies and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; and frequent nominations for and awarding of Pulitzer Prizes and Grammy, Tony, and Emmy Awards. Students also excel and achieve inside and outside of the classroom and lab, including recognition through Rhodes, Marshall, Truman, Fulbright, and other scholarships and fellowships. The caliber and commitment of the University's staff serve as the engine enabling this activity.



The next president will have the opportunity to propel an institution with superb momentum and a unique combination of assets. Northwestern is a founding member of the Big Ten, and both women’s and men’s athletic teams exhibit the excellence that is characteristic of Northwestern. A committed and generous alumni base, translation of science, and strong management have enabled the ambitions of the University and its leaders: the endowment is valued at approximately \$16 billion, and just over four years ago the University completed one of the largest fundraising initiatives in higher education history—*We Will: The Campaign for Northwestern*—which surpassed \$6 billion in donations.

The President is the chief executive officer of Northwestern and is responsible for the leadership, strategic direction, and overall administration of one of the world’s premier research institutions. Reporting to the [Board of Trustees](#) and managing a senior leadership team, the President leads an innovative, collaborative, and multidimensional community of over 4,300 full-time faculty members; 9,000 undergraduate and 14,000 graduate students; and over 8,000 staff. Northwestern seeks a leader who can galvanize its community through cooperative vision and the articulation and advancement of its unique value; foster trust; advance interdisciplinary discovery; steward a complex financial landscape; and champion both undergraduate education and path-breaking research. In short, this is a rare chance to lead a globally prominent university—one defined by excellence, ambition, and a deep belief in its potential—into its next chapter through bold, principled, and forward-looking leadership.

Opportunities and Priorities for the Next President

Articulate and amplify Northwestern’s distinctive strengths by leveraging the full breadth of its attributes—world-class undergraduate and professional schools, a strong athletic program, and leading medical and clinical capabilities—into a signature, interdisciplinary advantage that is evident to both internal and external audiences.

Lead with a bold, visionary strategy that elevates Northwestern’s external presence and anticipates change, positioning the University as a global leader while exhibiting extraordinary judgment through mission-anchored and values-consistent decisions that protect both institutional autonomy and academic freedom and integrity, while stimulating the community toward ambitious University-wide achievements.

Build confidence and connection with the Northwestern community through active listening, commitment to collaborative leadership, and transparent, steady communication—with and among faculty, students, staff, alumni, and friends—that builds trust, sharpens institutional identity, and elevates the University’s standing with clarity and conviction.



Protect and grow research and discovery at scale by defending the University’s mission of education and research, sustaining excellence and competitiveness amid federal uncertainty, and translating breakthroughs into societal impact through strategic partnerships and investment.

Modernize the financial and operating model to fund ambition through sophisticated understanding and prioritization, investments in people and enterprise systems, and a fundraising strategy to fuel Northwestern’s aspirations.

Navigate the changing athletics environment with strategic clarity, maximizing the visibility and opportunity of Northwestern’s Big Ten position in alignment with academic and institutional values and excellence.

Foster the undergraduate experience and well-being across the Northwestern community, enhancing opportunities to learn and engage, while advancing broad access and affordability, and leading by example through visible participation in a culture of fun and well-being that extends to the entire Northwestern community.

Leverage the University’s remarkable and engaged alumni network by building enduring relationships with Northwestern stakeholders on its campuses and around the world and inviting alumni into a shared sense of ownership in Northwestern’s trajectory.

Build a high-functioning, trust-based partnership with a strong and engaged Board of Trustees that is grounded in alignment, clarity of roles, and shared accountability.

Expand Northwestern’s external reach and anticipation of the future by deepening Chicago and Evanston networks and impact, extending global partnerships and presence, and shaping AI-era education with integrity, creativity, and scale, thus strengthening Northwestern’s competitive position in an international landscape and ensuring all communities can thrive.



Ideal Experience and Attributes

- **Integrative Strategic Leadership:** Demonstrated ability to lead a decentralized, multi-school research university; develop and lead high-performing teams; foster collaboration across diverse academic and administrative units, including a distinguished academic medical center; and balance autonomy with institutional coherence and direction.
- **Competitive Vision:** A leader motivated to elevate Northwestern's position in a global context by leveraging and building upon the University's existing strengths and networks and capitalizing on new opportunities while also developing a competitive strategy that anticipates and acts ahead of significant change.
- **Intellectual Credibility, Curiosity, and Breadth:** A leader with the intellectual stature and genuine curiosity to engage meaningfully across disciplines—STEM, arts, and humanities—as well as undergraduate and professional schools; who understands both the academic and medical enterprises; and who earns the respect of faculty as a partner in mission stewardship and inclusive excellence.
- **Sound Judgment through Complexity and Crisis:** Experience in leading through complexity with steadiness and principled decision-making and composure to act decisively in crisis, remaining grounded in institutional values while working with community, government, and internal stakeholders.
- **Strength in Research, Teaching, and the Undergraduate Experience:** A president who upholds rigorous standards in top-tier research and graduate education while placing equal emphasis on undergraduate teaching, mentorship, and access and understands their interdependence in a leading private university.
- **Proven Financial Judgment and Stewardship:** Strong financial acumen and demonstrated success in budget management, with the ability to sustain excellence in service of long-term priorities and to identify and execute tradeoffs within a complex university financial model that includes research funding, academic medicine, financial aid, athletics, philanthropy, and capital investment.
- **Fundraiser and External Ambassador:** Proven fundraising capability grounded in inspiration, credibility, and mission alignment and the ability to represent and translate the full breadth of Northwestern's unique excellence to donors and partners.



- **Advocate of Shared Ambition and Culture of Belonging:** A leader ambitious for Northwestern’s future reputation and impact—deeply attentive to people and culture and committed to developing talent and strengthening infrastructure to enable faculty, staff, and students to do their best work—while advancing a safe, respectful, collaborative environment for all.
- **Community Trust Builder:** An empathetic, earnest, and visible leader who is able to build and sustain trust across faculty, staff, students, trustees, alumni, and external stakeholders and who embodies Northwestern’s collaborative culture and sets a tone of respect, transparency, and shared purpose.
- **Clear Communicator and Institutional Advocate:** A compelling ambassador who can boldly articulate—internally and externally—what makes Northwestern distinctive, translating the University’s work and values to alumni, funders, policymakers, internal constituents, and the broader public with clarity, confidence, and integrity.
- **Diverse Life Experience and Learning Mindset:** A proven and trusted individual with varied professional and personal experiences—both in and out of a higher education setting—that inform an inclusive, grounded leadership approach and whose curiosity fuels meaningful engagement across the Northwestern community, turning learning and dialogue into pragmatic, mission-aligned action.



Search Process

The executive search firm Spencer Stuart has been retained to assist in this recruitment. Inquiries, nominations, and applications are invited and should be submitted in confidence to Spencer Stuart.

NorthwesternPres@SpencerStuart.com

Michele Haertel
Ponneh Varho
David Wick
Katie Stellato
Caroline Koonce

The review of applications will begin immediately and will continue until the position is filled.

Compensation

The base salary range for this position is \$1.5 million to \$2 million, with final determination of compensation made after consideration of qualifications and experience.

Northwestern University is an Equal Opportunity Employer and does not discriminate on the basis of protected characteristics, including disability and veteran status.