



THE
CHAMPION
of TREES

The Morton Arboretum

Vice President, Engagement & Experience
Position Specification



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01 | Our Client: The Morton Arboretum

Founded in 1922, [The Morton Arboretum](#) (“The Arboretum”) is a globally recognized botanical garden and research center dedicated to the study, conservation, cultivation, and appreciation of trees and other woody plants. Situated on a 1,700-acre campus in the western suburbs of Chicago, the Arboretum serves as a leading center for scientific research, conservation, education, and public engagement while welcoming more than one million visitors annually.

For more than a century, the Arboretum has advanced its mission through the stewardship of extensive living collections, internationally respected research programs, conservation initiatives, educational offerings, and immersive visitor experiences. Today, it stands among the world's leading organizations focused on trees and their essential role in addressing some of the most pressing environmental challenges of our time, including climate resilience, biodiversity loss, urban forestry, and ecosystem health.

The Arboretum's scientists, researchers, and practitioners contribute to critical conversations shaping conservation policy, scientific understanding, and environmental stewardship at local, national, and global levels. Through its leadership in tree science and conservation, the organization serves as both a trusted source of expertise and a catalyst for action across communities, institutions, and ecosystems.

The Arboretum is widely known as one of the Chicago region's most beloved destinations for recreation, seasonal exhibitions, educational programming, and family experiences. Its leadership recognizes a significant opportunity to elevate broader awareness of its scientific, educational, conservation, and civic contributions while continuing its rich legacy of providing a stellar recreational experience.



01 | Our Client: The Morton Arboretum



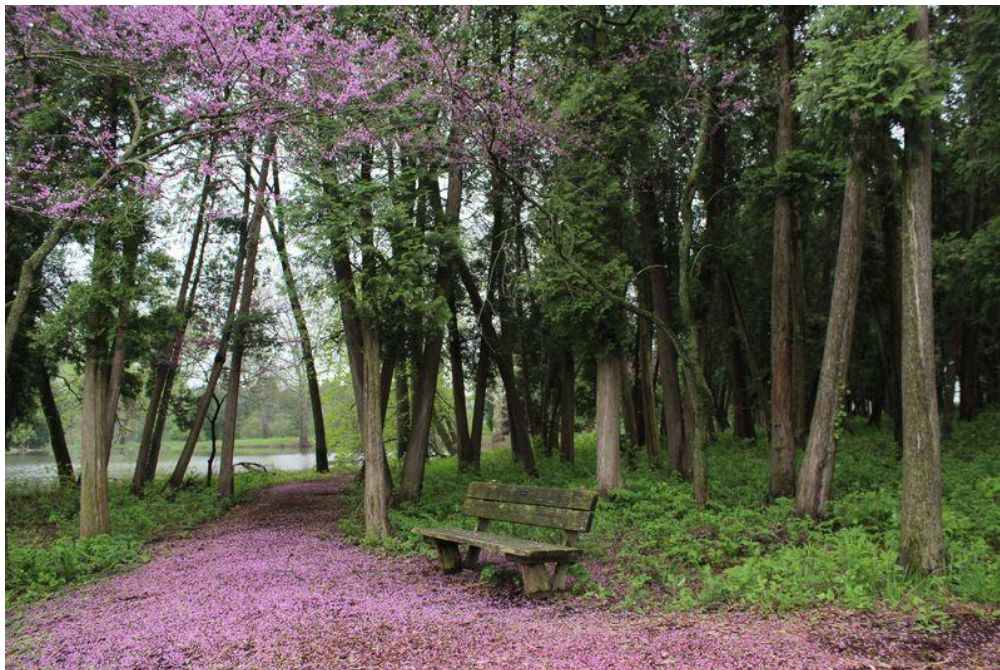
As public gardens and cultural institutions continue to evolve, the Arboretum is uniquely positioned to expand both its visibility and impact, engaging audiences not only as visitors, but also as learners, advocates, partners, and supporters.

Under the leadership of President and CEO Jill Koski, the organization is building upon more than a century of impact while positioning itself for its next chapter of growth. The Arboretum is preparing for a transformational campaign, advancing a comprehensive site planning process, investing in organizational capabilities, and strengthening its executive leadership team. At the same time, it is exploring new ways to deepen audience engagement, broaden community relevance, and extend its influence far beyond its physical campus.

This next chapter will require the organization to continue evolving how it connects with audiences, communicates its impact, and demonstrates the essential role trees play in creating healthier, more resilient communities. The Vice President, Engagement & Experience will play a central role in helping shape and advance that vision.

Morton Arboretum is located just west / southwest of Chicago at 4100 Illinois Route 53, Lisle, IL 60532.

To learn more about the organization, please visit <https://mortonarb.org/>.



02 | The Role & Opportunity



Reporting to the President and CEO and serving as a member of the Executive Leadership Team, the Vice President, Engagement & Experience (“VP, Engagement & Experience”) will provide strategic leadership for a newly integrated portfolio encompassing marketing, communications, public relations, audience engagement, special events, exhibitions, learning and interpretation, public programs, audience insights, and related visitor-facing functions. A unique and key element to this division is that the education team is included, which delivers educational programs to audiences from early childhood through adult learners. This new structure breaks down silos and puts key audience-facing departments in direct conversation and collaboration. This broad division consists of approximately 75 team members, of which approximately 50 are the education team.

The role represents an important evolution for the organization and an exciting opportunity for the right candidate. Historically, the functions of Marketing and External Affairs and the Learning and Engagement function operated under separate leaders but have always closely collaborated. By bringing them together under a single executive, the Arboretum is putting the audience at the center of this new division, and will create greater alignment and opportunity around audience growth, learning and engagement programs, and institutional visibility.

This leader will be responsible for helping the organization enhance its public profile, deepen relationships with existing audiences, attract and engage new and more diverse audiences, and create meaningful experiences that connect visitors and stakeholders to the Arboretum's mission. This is an end-to-end growth-oriented leadership role where success will require balancing commercial and mission objectives while ensuring that engagement, communications, learning, programming, and experience strategies work in concert to advance organizational priorities.

A key mandate for this Vice President will be elevating awareness of the Arboretum's leadership in science, conservation, research, and education. While the organization enjoys strong regional recognition as a destination, leadership believes there is substantial opportunity to further establish Morton as a nationally and globally recognized voice in areas such as climate resilience, urban forestry, biodiversity conservation, and environmental stewardship.

02 | The Role & Opportunity

The VP, Engagement & Experience will play a central role in helping the organization:

Increase Institutional Visibility and Reputation

The Arboretum's impact extends well beyond what many audiences currently understand. This leader will help shape and amplify the organization's public narrative, increasing awareness of its contributions to science, conservation, education, and civic engagement while positioning Morton as a leading voice on issues affecting communities and ecosystems around the world.

Grow and Diversify Audiences

As audience preferences and behaviors continue to evolve, the Arboretum seeks to attract visitors, learners, members, and supporters through enriching special events and exhibitions while deepening engagement among new and existing audiences. This leader will help ensure the organization remains relevant, accessible, and compelling to current and future generations while developing strategies that broaden participation across demographic and geographic segments.

Elevate Learning and Engagement Programs

The Arboretum occupies a unique position at the intersection of a cultural institution and science/conservation organization with core institutional pillars of collections, education, research, and public enjoyment. This leader will help create greater alignment across these pillars, ensuring visitors and stakeholders experience a coherent and compelling connection to the institution's mission and impact.

Advance Organizational Growth, Institutional Positioning, and Campaign Readiness

As the organization prepares for a future campaign and a series of significant campus and programmatic investments, the Vice President will help strengthen the institutional narrative, enhance audience engagement, support revenue-generating initiatives, and position the Arboretum for long-term success.

This executive will inherit a talented team of professionals across a large group of domains. They will be expected to foster collaboration, strengthen organizational alignment, develop talent, and build a culture that balances innovation, accountability, creativity, and mission impact.



03 | The Candidate Profile

The ideal candidate will be a strategic, audience-centered leader who combines engagement, communications, and brand-building expertise with a demonstrated ability to lead complex organizations, navigate change, and align diverse teams around a shared vision. They will bring a track record of building audiences, creating compelling experiences, strengthening institutional reputation, and helping mission-driven organizations expand their relevance and impact.

Strong candidates for the role will possess the following professional and personal qualities, skills, and characteristics:



Experiences & Expertise

- Significant executive leadership experience overseeing audience engagement, communications, marketing, learning, programming, on-site experience, or related functions within complex organizations.
- Demonstrated success developing and executing audience growth strategies that increase engagement, participation, loyalty, and revenue.
- Experience leading multifunctional teams and integrating diverse disciplines around shared organizational goals.
- Experience with long-range planning and strategy development at the enterprise level, balancing shared priorities across all key program areas.
- Strong understanding of brand strategy, communications, digital engagement, audience development, content strategy, and market positioning.
- Experience utilizing audience insights, research, analytics, and market intelligence to inform decision-making and organizational strategy.
- Experience driving earned revenue programs as a critical part of a diverse institutional financial model including contributed, endowment, and grant revenue channels.
- Experience operating successfully within mission-driven organizations where public impact and financial performance must be balanced.
- Demonstrated success leading organizations through evolving consumer behaviors, changing market dynamics, and shifting audience expectations.

Setting Strategy

- The ability to create and articulate an inspiring vision for the organization, connecting the dots across all core mission pillars and program areas.
- The inclination to seek and analyze data from a variety of sources to support decisions and to align others with the organization's overall strategy.
- An entrepreneurial and creative approach to developing new, innovative ideas that will stretch the organization and push the boundaries within the industry.
- The ability to effectively identify opportunities for growth and advance change to achieve institutional goals and priorities.

03 | The Candidate Profile

Executing for Results

- The ability to set clear and challenging goals while committing the organization to improved performance; tenacious and accountable in driving results.
- Comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty; the ability to adapt nimbly and lead others through complex situations.
- Ability to ask good questions to identify gaps and opportunities, and to inspire learning and growth through project execution.
- A leader who is viewed by others as having a high degree of integrity and forethought in their approach to making decisions; the ability to act in a transparent and consistent manner while always taking into account what is best for the organization.

Leading Teams

- The ability to attract and recruit top talent, motivate the team, delegate effectively, celebrate diversity within the team, and manage performance; widely viewed as a strong developer of others.
- The ability to persevere in the face of challenges and exhibit a steadfast resolve and relentless commitment to higher standards, which commands respect from followers.
- A leader who is self-reflective and aware of their own limitations; leads by example and drives the organization's performance with an attitude of continuous improvement by being open to feedback and self-improvement.

Relationships & Influence

- Naturally connects and builds strong relationships with others, demonstrating strong emotional intelligence and an ability to communicate clearly and persuasively.
- An ability to inspire trust and followership in others through compelling influence, powerful charisma, passion in their beliefs, and active drive.
- Encourages others to share the spotlight and visibly celebrates and supports the success of the team.
- Creates a sense of purpose/meaning for the team that generates followership beyond their own personality and engages others to the greater purpose for the organization as a whole.



04 | Compensation & Benefits

Compensation & Benefits

The Morton Arboretum's goal is to compensate for this position at a competitive level. The estimated salary range for this position is \$280,000 to 320,000. Final salary and total compensation of the candidate selected for this role will take into consideration various factors, including level of experience, professional accomplishments, internal equity and the organization's budget.

In addition to salary, Morton Arboretum offers a competitive benefits package. Additional details regarding total rewards can be found [here](#).

The approximated range listed is a good faith determination of potential base compensation as a component of the total compensation for the role at the time of this job advertisement and may be modified in the future.

05 | Contact

Russell Reynolds Associates, the global search and leadership advisory firm, has been exclusively engaged to lead this search.

We welcome nominations and expressions of interest via email. All submissions will remain confidential.

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