



Cornell University®

# **Vice President for University Relations**

## **Position Description – February 2025**

## POSITION SPECIFICATION

<b>Position</b>	Vice President for University Relations
<b>Organization</b>	Cornell University
<b>Location</b>	Ithaca, New York
<b>Reporting Relationship</b>	President, Cornell University
<b>Websites</b>	<a href="https://www.cornell.edu">https://www.cornell.edu</a> <a href="https://universityrelations.cornell.edu">https://universityrelations.cornell.edu</a> <a href="https://www.cornell.edu/engagement">https://www.cornell.edu/engagement</a>

## THE OPPORTUNITY

Cornell University invites nominations and applications for the position of Vice President for University Relations.

Reporting to the President, the Vice President will be ultimately responsible for enhancing and protecting the reputation of Cornell University through the engagement of its vast and diverse constituencies. The Vice President is responsible for developing and implementing a strategic communications agenda for the institution and advancing and protecting the reputation of the Cornell, both proactively and reactively. The Vice President will be a transformational leader and a key architect of Cornell's unique public voice and position. This includes serving as the University's spokesperson and overseeing, coordinating, and integrating internal and external communications targeting the University's diverse constituencies across all campuses.

By promoting the strengths and accomplishments of Cornell's undergraduate, graduate, and professional schools to national and international audiences, including local, state, and federal government, as well as and community policymakers and stakeholders, the Vice President plays a critical role in advancing the University and cementing Cornell's reputation as one of the world's foremost teaching and research institutions.

The Vice President will provide the leadership necessary to plan and implement an effective University Relations strategy; to ensure the full utilization of both traditional and digital communications platforms; and to ensure the consistent, accurate, and effective representation of Cornell to the full range of important constituencies. The Vice President will advise the President on how best to develop, refine, and disseminate messages about the University's key initiatives and lead implementation.

To be successful, the Vice President must welcome the unique challenges and rewards of working as part of a leadership team and develop relationships and credibility with individuals across the University. This will involve managing up, down, and across a diverse range of employees and stakeholders in order to achieve strategic objectives. The Vice President will bring not only an exceptional and diverse set of experiences, but a seasoned, mature, and expertly developed point of view, as well as the energy, drive, and confidence to operate within a dynamic and rapidly evolving environment.



## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### About Cornell University

Founded in 1865, Cornell University is a remarkable community of scholars, educators, students, staff, and alumni who are deeply influenced by proud traditions and a set of cherished founding principles, including Ezra Cornell's ambition to "found an institution where any person can find instruction in any study."

Cornell is a world-class research institution known for the breadth and rigor of its curricula and an academy dedicated to preparing young people to be well-educated and well-rounded citizens of the world. Its faculty and students believe in the critical importance of knowledge—both theoretical and applied—as a means of improving the human condition and solving the world's problems. Faculty, staff, and students thrive at Cornell because of its unparalleled combination of quality and breadth, its open, collaborative, and innovative culture, its vibrant rural and urban campuses, its land-grant legacy of public engagement, and its commitment to its founding principles.

Public engagement is foundational to everything the University does. By contributing to this deep-rooted commitment, Cornell students, faculty, staff and alumni — Engaged Cornell — are forging community partnerships, solving local and global challenges, and creating knowledge to benefit humanity. Cornell relies on a robust exchange of ideas with the public to understand local needs, develop and implement solutions, and deepen community capacity. Building upon the unique strengths of partners, public engagement at Cornell includes extension, outreach, policy briefings, solutions-oriented institutes, and much more.

Cornell is unique among its Ivy League peers as a private university with a land grant mission and four New York State-supported colleges. While Cornell is one private university, four "contract colleges" are connected to the State University of New York (SUNY) system. As a result, Cornell partners with SUNY and works closely with many other key constituencies in New York State to support and deliver on its land-grant mission.

Cornell consists of 15 schools and colleges. Across the Ithaca campus, the Weill Cornell Medicine campuses in New York City and Qatar, and the Cornell Tech campus in New York City, the University enrolls over 16,000 undergraduates and over 10,000 graduate and professional school students. Cornell's nearly 12,000 faculty and staff forge novel partnerships where unexpected integrations of deep expertise point the way toward the solutions of tomorrow. The University fuels this through initiatives that elevate collaboration across disciplines and academic units.

Cornell's main campus is located in Ithaca, New York a city of about 30,000 people in the heart of the Finger Lakes region of Central New York. Both Cornell and Ithaca offer a wide range of cultural activities, sports events, and outdoor activities, with the pleasures of both city and country close at hand. Ithaca boasts unsurpassed natural beauty in its gorges, state parks, and waterfront. Cornell also maintains a robust and growing presence in New York City through its Weill Cornell Medicine campus and programs in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens. Cornell Tech, on Roosevelt Island, is a rapidly growing campus devoted to applied technology, and responsible for over 100 startups and collaborations with the New York City technology sector. Finally, Cornell maintains active global collaborations around the world, supporting its Global Hubs in 11 locations and its medical school campus in Doha, Qatar.



## Cornell University Leadership

**Michael Kotlikoff** is the interim president of Cornell University and professor of molecular physiology. He took office on July 1, 2024. Prior to his appointment, Kotlikoff was Cornell's longest-serving provost, holding that office from August 2015 to June 2024. He previously served as the Austin O. Hooey Dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine from 2007 to 2015. Throughout his tenure at Cornell, Interim President Kotlikoff has overseen numerous initiatives and landmark changes to advance the University's excellence in teaching, scholarship, and outreach, and to enhance academic collaboration across Cornell's disciplines, colleges, and campuses. Kotlikoff's signature strategic initiative, Radical Collaborations, has enhanced Cornell's academic excellence and interdisciplinary collaborations by bringing together world-leading expertise from across widely divergent fields. The initiative has recruited faculty in artificial intelligence, genome biology, design technology, digital humanities, nanoscience, sustainability, and other areas; led investments in university centers such as the Cornell High Energy Synchrotron Source, or CHES; the Society for the Humanities; and the Cornell Center for the Social Sciences; and given rise to the Academic Integration initiative, which deepened collaboration across the Ithaca and Weill Cornell Medicine campuses. During Kotlikoff's time as Provost, significant advances were also made across Cornell in teaching and learning, student and campus life, and the development of policies to facilitate greater faculty diversity and investments in the University's academic facilities. Kotlikoff received his BA (literature) and VMD degrees from the University of Pennsylvania and his PhD in physiology from the University of California, Davis.

## University Relations at Cornell University

University Relations oversees internal and external communications functions for Cornell and encompasses more than 60 professional staff working in Brand Communications, Media Relations, News (the *Cornell Chronicle*), Strategic Communications, and *Cornellians*, the digital alumni publication produced in partnership with Alumni Affairs and Development. University Relations communicators have responsibility for cornell.edu, brand governance, central social media accounts, campus-wide messages, media statements, and more. Further, the Vice President's leadership extends to college/school and unit communications staff across the institution.

University Relations also coordinates Cornell's relationships with local, state, and federal government, as well as and community policymakers and stakeholders. Government relations staff work in Ithaca, Albany, and Washington D.C., interacting regularly with elected officials, associations, and agencies at the federal, state, and local levels. Staff also work closely on New York City policymaker and stakeholder engagement, collaborating with the government and community relations teams at Weill Cornell Medicine, Cornell Tech, and with Ithaca-based academic units that have a presence in New York City.

The Office of the Assemblies and Office of Visitor Relations also reside within University Relations, as does University Licensing, which includes name and logo use, merchandise request approval, and licensing partnerships. More information about University Relations can be found online at the following websites:

Strategic Communications: <https://universityrelations.cornell.edu/units/communications/>  
College/School/Unit Leads: <https://universityrelations.cornell.edu/resources/comms-leads/>  
State Relations: <https://universityrelations.cornell.edu/units/state/>  
Federal Relations: <https://universityrelations.cornell.edu/units/federal/>  
Community Relations: <https://universityrelations.cornell.edu/units/community/>  
Visitor Relations: <https://universityrelations.cornell.edu/units/visitor/>





University Assemblies: <https://universityrelations.cornell.edu/units/assemblies/>  
University Licensing: <https://universityrelations.cornell.edu/units/administration/>  
Office of the Vice President Staff: <https://universityrelations.cornell.edu/staff-list/>

## KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

The Vice President will be expected to acquire a comprehensive understanding of Cornell's University Relations and communications needs and shape and implement appropriate strategies to ensure that they are met. Given the decentralized nature of the institution, the Vice President will need to become broadly informed regarding the diverse needs of Cornell's community members. The Vice President will develop and implement an overarching government relations and communications strategy that is aligned with the University's objectives and ensure that it is integrated and consistently articulated to all of the organization's stakeholders, including leadership, students, employees, media, government, industry leaders, community leaders, and the general public.

The Vice President's primary responsibilities and expectations for leadership include:

- Serve as chief relations and communications strategist to advance Cornell's standing in the world.
- Lead and manage the staff of University Relations to best serve the needs of Cornell's senior leadership, with an eye toward the many different needs of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and other key stakeholders.
- Coordinate and develop relationships across the wide-ranging college, school, unit, and campus-based communications offices, functions, and personnel.
- Serve as the University's principal spokesperson, promoting transparency and trust among students, faculty, leadership, staff, alumni, and the broader community.
- Provide communications counsel to University leadership, as well as develop and maintain relationships across University colleges, schools, departments, campuses, and strategic initiatives to ensure all collective efforts are realized and maximized.
- Create and implement an ongoing reputational analysis program and establish the means for measuring the overall success of communications initiatives, with a particular focus on government relations
- Promote widespread recognition of the University's contributions to the community, government, country, and world.
- Develop proactive initiatives that are designed to advance and elevate the University's standing, prestige, and reputation.
- Lead and coordinate Cornell's strategic communication response to emerging issues and crises, drawing upon the expertise of the Cornell community to help inform decision-making when appropriate.
- Proactively engage and listen to diverse stakeholders in a way that ensures constituencies feel heard and appreciated.
- Build fruitful and lasting relationships with key strategic audiences, including local, state, and federal government, as well as local, regional, national, and international media outlets.
- Maintain awareness of best-in-class communications strategies; implementing best practices aligned with the University's strategic goals and initiatives.
- Coordinate and elevate the use and application of digital and social media communications.



- Proactively lead and coordinate Cornell's domestic and global media relations efforts; strategically manage Cornell's reputation on a global scale to maximize impact, ensuring public perceptions are accurate, consistent, and positive.
- Monitor emerging communications technologies and assess their importance to the interests of the University's broad audiences, including students and their families, faculty, leadership, staff, alumni, and community stakeholders, to enhance engagement and increase perception.
- In a timely fashion, bring relevant technology and communications trends to the attention of other members of senior management, recommending strategies to adopt or adapt to them.
- Routinely research, analyze, and provide counsel on communications initiatives and practices at peer institutions.

### **PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE / PERSONAL QUALIFICATIONS**

The Vice President will have many years of progressively increasing experience planning and executing communications and relations strategies. The ideal candidate must have a track record of representing complex, large-scale organizations and translating business results for key audiences. The successful candidate will be a high-energy, strategic thinker with exceptional interpersonal, verbal, and written communication skills, the ability to foster collaborative decision-making, and strong relationship building skills. The Vice President will engender authenticity and trust across the diverse stakeholders and constituencies. This is a position that will operate at the highest levels of the University and therefore requires the requisite business and communications skills to be credible with University leadership. Executive presence to effectively partner with university leadership is critical and, while this position reports to executive leadership, the successful candidate will understand the value that the Cornell places on shared governance and have an openness and ability to work within that context.

Competitive candidates will have a variety of professional experience and personal qualifications, including the following:

- Demonstrated success in an executive-level communications role of comparable complexity in academia, government, the non-profit sector, or the private sector.
- A demonstrated capacity to envision, develop, and implement a successful and comprehensive University Relations and communications program across an organization with multiple constituencies and a wide variety of audiences, including a strong emphasis on government relations at the local, state, and federal levels.
- Broad experience in all areas of communications, including strategy development, issue/crisis management, and domestic and global media relations.
- A thorough understanding of, and specific experience in, developing and implementing branding and strategic communications plans in both traditional and new media.
- Extensive knowledge of higher education issues and trends.
- A record of recruiting and developing a diverse and talented staff through effective leadership and expert mentoring.
- A deep and abiding appreciation for, and understanding, of higher education, and the ability to embrace and articulate the values that distinguish Cornell.
- A dedication to fostering an environment that embraces all backgrounds and perspectives.



- Outstanding leadership and managerial skills, including experience hiring, developing, and retaining diverse and high performing professional teams and serving as a collaborative leader across peers.
- Exemplary verbal, writing, and communication skills, as well as the professional presence to serve as the University's primary spokesperson.

## EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

The Vice President must have an earned bachelor's degree from an accredited university. Advanced degrees, alongside relevant professional experience, are preferred.

## COMPENSATION

Cornell University offers an attractive compensation and benefits package, commensurate with the successful candidate's background and experience. The estimated salary compensation range for the position is \$550,000 – \$600,000. Cornell University has provided this range which represents its good faith estimate of what the University reasonably expects to pay for the position. The final salary offered to the selected candidate will be determined based on factors including (but not limited to) the experience and qualifications of the selected candidate – including equivalent years in rank, training, and field or discipline; internal equity; and external market pay for comparable positions.

## NOMINATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

Cornell University has retained the services of Dr. Josh Ward at the executive search firm Korn Ferry. Applicants should submit the following two documents (in two separate PDFs):

1. An up-to-date and detailed *curriculum vitae*.
2. A brief (2-4 pages) letter of interest describing why you are interested in the role of Vice President for University Relations at Cornell, why you would be successful based on your professional experience, and why now is a good time for you to consider this opportunity.

For priority consideration, please submit all application materials by **Friday, March 21, 2025**. It is anticipated that the Vice President will take up the position no later than summer 2025. The two PDF documents should be sent directly to Dr. Josh Ward at [Josh.Ward@KornFerry.com](mailto:Josh.Ward@KornFerry.com).

## KORN FERRY CONTACT

**Josh Ward, PhD, MPhil**  
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**EEO Statement:** Diversity and Inclusion are a part of Cornell University's heritage. We are a recognized employer and educator valuing AA/EEO, and we do not tolerate discrimination based on any protected characteristic, including race, ethnic or national origin, citizenship and immigration status, color, sex/gender, pregnancy or pregnancy-related conditions, age, creed, religion, actual or perceived disability (including persons associated with such a person), arrest and/or conviction record, military or veteran status, sexual orientation, gender expression and/or identity, an individual's genetic information, domestic violence victim status, familial status, marital status, or any other characteristic protected by applicable federal, state, or local law. We also recognize a lawful preference in employment practices for Native Americans living on or near Indian reservations in accordance with applicable law. Cornell University embraces diversity and seeks candidates who will contribute to a climate that supports students, faculty, and staff to all identities and backgrounds. We encourage individuals from underrepresented and/or marginalized identities to apply.