



Virginia Commonwealth University
Vice President for Government Relations
Position Description



The Opportunity

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) seeks a strategic and visionary leader to serve as Vice President for Government Relations, a role that stands at the intersection of public purpose and the university's enduring commitment to service and impact. As the chief architect of VCU's government relations strategy, this leader will forge influential partnerships, shape public policy, and elevate the university's voice on issues that matter.

The Vice President for Government Relations is a key leadership role responsible for advancing the strategic interests of VCU and VCU Health across local, state, and federal levels of government. This role serves as a primary liaison between the university, health system, and government officials, advocating for policies, public funding, and legislation that support the institution's missions in education, research, healthcare, and economic development. The role requires strategic vision, deep policy expertise, and a collaborative spirit to engage both internal and external stakeholders.

Reporting to the Chief of Staff, with a dotted line to the VCU President, the Vice President advises senior leadership, including the VCU President and VCU Health CEO, on governmental matters and develops comprehensive strategies to enhance public sector engagement and support.

This position also leads a dedicated team of government relations professionals and plays a pivotal role in fostering bipartisan relationships and coalitions to advance solutions to critical issues impacting the university and health system.

Key Responsibilities

- Develop and implement strategic legislative and executive branch agendas in alignment with the priorities of VCU and VCU Health.
- Advocate effectively for institutional interests on key higher education and healthcare policy issues at all levels of government.
- Deep understanding of legislative, regulatory, and political processes, with proven ability to cultivate and sustain strong relationships with state and federal legislators, senior government administrators, local government representatives, and key stakeholders.
- Represent VCU and VCU Health before legislative committees and other public forums, including providing testimony and position statements.
- Monitor and analyze legislative and regulatory developments affecting higher education and healthcare throughout the year and advise leadership accordingly.
- Serve as a trusted advisor to the VCU President, VCU Health CEO, and other senior leaders, providing timely insights and recommendations on policy and political matters.
- Collaborate with other institutions of higher education, health systems, and associations to align on shared goals and enhance advocacy efforts.
- Disseminate relevant data, reports, and policy updates to internal stakeholders to support decision-making and external communications.
- Ensure coordination across university and health system units on governmental affairs, ensuring a unified and strategic approach.
- Lead, mentor, and manage a government relations team, fostering a high-performance and mission-driven culture.

Qualifications

Professional Experience

- Significant experience in Virginia government relations, public policy, or legislative affairs, preferably within higher education, healthcare, or a similarly complex sector.
- Proven understanding of legislative and budget processes at the state and federal levels.
- Demonstrated success in influencing public policy and building bipartisan support for institutional priorities.
- Prior experience managing a team and working cross-functionally with executive leadership.
- Established relationships with legislative and executive branch officials are highly desirable.

Education

- A bachelor's degree from an accredited institution is required; an advanced degree in public policy, law, healthcare administration, or a related field is preferred.

Core Competencies

- Exceptional written and verbal communication skills with the ability to craft and deliver compelling messages.

- High emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills, with the ability to navigate complex political environments, influence others, and build consensus.
- Strong strategic thinking, political acumen, and ability to manage multiple priorities under pressure.
- Proactive communicator with internal stakeholders, ensuring awareness of potential actions/legislation impacting VCU operations and mission.
- Ability to set a leadership example with a deep commitment to ethics, integrity, and confidentiality.
- Collaborative leadership style with a demonstrated ability to work effectively across various stakeholder groups.
- Proven team leadership, which includes setting and clearly communicating performance expectations, ensuring performance accountability, and effectively managing performance-related matters.

Personal Characteristics

- Effective at fostering cooperative partnerships with varied stakeholders.
- Highly ethical and reasoned judgement, integrity, and discretion.
- A collaborative, transparent, and consultative approach to leadership.
- Ability to balance confidence with humility.
- Strong organizational awareness and ability to align governmental affairs with institutional missions.
- A quick learner who is adept at synthesizing information and sharing it as appropriate in a way that it is easily understood.

About
Virginia
Commonwealth
University

Virginia Commonwealth University: An Uncommon University

VCU is a place unlike any other. It represents distinctive excellence, as evidenced through stories of a university and health system challenging preconceived notions and breaking through the sea of sameness prevalent in higher education and healthcare.

VCU is classified as a Carnegie Research I University and is designated a top 50 public research university by the National Science Foundation. U.S. News & World Report includes VCU in the top 20% of its list of “best global universities” and ranks many of the university’s schools and programs in the top 50 in the U.S., including fine arts, education, engineering, health sciences, and social work.

Located in downtown Richmond, VCU enrolls nearly 29,000 students in more than 200 degree and certificate programs in the arts, sciences, and humanities, including many transdisciplinary programs and opportunities. The university maintains robust units of student affairs, as well as student enrollment management and student success, to support students and enhance their VCU experience.

The VCU Health brand represents the health sciences schools of VCU, the VCU Massey Comprehensive Cancer Center, and the VCU Health System, which comprises VCU Medical Center (the only university and research-based medical center in the region), Community Memorial Hospital, Tappahannock Hospital, Children’s Hospital of Richmond at VCU, and MCV Physicians.

Today, VCU plays an integral role in the economic health of the city of Richmond, the region, and the Commonwealth by providing the highest quality education for the current and future workforce, advancing research across a broad range of academic disciplines, and enhancing the translation of research to serve the needs of the commonwealth and nation. Roughly 66% of VCU’s 229,000-plus alumni live in Virginia. The university and health system combined contribute more than \$10 billion annually to the state’s economy, thereby playing a significant role in regional development and community planning.

Quick Facts

- **Founded in 1838**
- **Enrollment: 28,831**
- **Alumni: 227,271**
- **Full-time Faculty: 2,441**
- **Student/faculty Ratio: 17:1**
- **26,000+ employees at VCU and VCU Health System**
- **\$6 billion economic impact as Richmond’s largest employer**
- **930+ alumni-owned businesses in Richmond**
- **34% of alums live in Richmond**

Strategic Plan

The university is guided by its strategic plan. VCU is a rare place of excellence with qualified access. The strategic plan charts the course for VCU's rise as a preeminent urban, public research university committed to equitable access to social, economic, and health success in the coming years. The plan addresses significant issues faced by all institutions of higher education, as well as those specific to VCU. The issues include:

- Growing cynicism that public higher education serves the public good and may not be worth the expense to individuals.
- The significant challenge of the rising cost of education and providing affordable access and support for timely degree completion, regardless of students' particular demographic or group.
- Increased competition in public higher education for students, faculty, government, and philanthropic support and national prominence.
- Dependence on urban universities to lead in solving vexing societal issues, including health and economic vitality.
- Recognition that resourcing the plan's strategic priorities will require an integrated, pan-university approach and will call for hard choices around resource allocation.

Academics

Offering more than 200 degree and certificate programs, VCU is a premier urban, public research university with a genuine commitment to the success of all students, combined with focused community service and an emphasis on challenging traditional learning models with innovative thinking that delivers results. One of 69 public universities to receive both a "Very High Research Activity" status and a "Community Engaged" designation from the Carnegie Foundation, VCU also boasts 10 programs in the U.S. News & World Report's top 10, as well as the No. 2 hospital in Virginia.



VCU is ranked among the top 50 U.S. public research universities by the National Science Foundation. Likewise, the university's emphasis on discovery and innovation creates an entrepreneurial spirit on campus. This mindset contributed to VCU's being awarded more than \$500 million in sponsored research funding and 29 patents in the past year alone. VCU has a rich history in research and continues to be home to pioneers in discovery, as well as advancements in the arts and humanities, and world-renowned scientists who translate research into solutions addressing real-world problems.

In addition to its contributions to the city of Richmond, VCU's Qatar campus offers undergraduate and graduate-level degrees, helping to advance the social, economic, and environmental development of that region. VCU's character, however, extends far beyond just the numbers. The unique backgrounds of the faculty, staff, and students create a vibrant, supportive atmosphere both in and out of the classroom.

Accreditation

VCU is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) to award baccalaureate, master's, doctoral, and first-professional degrees. The most recent decennial reaffirmation of accreditation was awarded in December 2024. The university is committed to continually improving its programs and services to ensure the quality and accessibility of its offerings. Accreditation and academic compliance are essential features of this process.

Leadership

Michael Rao, Ph.D., became the fifth president of Virginia Commonwealth University in 2009 and has continued to cement VCU's place among the nation's premier urban, public research universities. Under VCU's strategic plan, Rao has piloted strategic efforts focused on academic quality, student success, and research that foster regional economic development and improve lives.

As president, Rao leads a prominent national public urban research university, accompanied by a leading university medical center, which is the largest employer in the Richmond area, with more than 26,000 employees. VCU Health is one of the nation's most comprehensive research-based health centers, ranked among the best hospitals in the country and named the No. 1 hospital in the Richmond region by U.S. News & World Report. VCU's community impact, both economic and cultural, continues to grow and is evident in many ways, including the university's renowned athletics program, the landmark Institute for Contemporary Art, the Medicines for All Institute, and the upcoming CoStar Center for Arts and Innovation.

Under Rao's leadership, VCU's place among national research universities continues to rise, with more than 20 graduate and first-professional programs ranked among the top 50 in the nation by U.S. News & World Report, including the nation's No. 1 sculpture program. He also oversaw one of the largest-ever expansions of VCU's master site plan, including the James W. and Frances G. McGlothlin Medical Education Center, the Academic Learning Commons, an expansion of the James Branch Cabell Library, the STEM Building, and the in-patient Children's Tower at the Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU.

Rao has served as a strong, collaborative leader in higher education for over 30 years, beginning in California in 1994, when he became president of Mission College, making him

the youngest college president in the nation at the time. He went on to serve as chancellor of Montana State University–Northern and president of Central Michigan University. Rao holds a bachelor's degree in chemistry from the University of South Florida and a Ph.D. in higher education from the University of Florida. He and his wife, Monica, a watercolorist and graphic designer, have two sons.

Finances

Historically, VCU has been a strong partner to, and economic anchor for, Richmond and its surrounding communities. Combined, VCU and the VCU Health System are the largest employers in the Richmond metropolitan area. VCU, its health system, and other related entities have cash and investments of approximately \$2.8 billion and an endowment balance of \$2.9 billion as of June 30, 2024.

VCU's sponsored research has also grown steadily in recent years and continues its upward trajectory. In 2024, sponsored research surpassed the half-billion-dollar mark. Based on the NSF HERD 2023 survey, VCU ranks among the top 15 percent of all U.S. research universities. The university's operating budget for fiscal year 2025 is \$1.66 billion.

City of Richmond

Richmond is a spirited and culturally vibrant city that fuels the energy on campus and offers endless opportunities for students. Richmond became the Commonwealth of Virginia's capital in 1779. The Richmond region is a vibrant, diverse, and growing community of more than 1.3 million people, offering the ideal combination of small-town charm with intimate neighborhoods and local businesses, alongside big-city amenities that include numerous theaters, galleries, music events, festivals, sports attractions, and more.

The city borders the James River, which offers over 550 acres of parks, making it an ideal place for outdoor recreation. Richmond's location in the middle of the state allows for day or weekend trips to the beach, the mountains, or Washington, D.C. CNN Travel named it the top town to visit in 2024, and the Wall Street Journal recently ranked it No. 11 of U.S. cities with the hottest job markets. The metropolitan area is also home to eight Fortune 500 companies, a diverse range of financial institutions, hospitals, media firms, high-tech manufacturing companies, and state and local government agencies. The city is home to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, VCU's Institute for Contemporary Art, and numerous other cultural institutions that offer enriching opportunities.



In 2024, CNN named Richmond the No. 1 city to visit in America. For more information on the city of Richmond, please visit:

www.grpva.com/living-here www.visitrichmondva.com

Nomination and Application Process

Compensation

Salary will be competitive and commensurate with qualifications and experience.

How to Apply

Vice President of Executive Search Jeremy Duff and Senior Executive Search Consultant Maggie Mayes with Greenwood Asher & Associates® are assisting Virginia Commonwealth University in this search. Applications and nominations are now being accepted. Inquiries, nominations, and application materials should be directed to Greenwood Asher & Associates.

Application materials should include:

- › A letter of interest that clearly states the applicant's qualifications for the position
- › A current résumé/curriculum vitae

For a full application package, please submit a cover letter and CV to

VCUGovRelationsVP@greenwoodsearch.com

Submission of application materials as PDF attachments is strongly encouraged. The search will be conducted with a commitment to confidentiality for candidates until finalists are selected. Initial screening of applications will begin immediately and will continue until an appointment is made.

Greenwood Asher & Associates

42 Business Centre Drive, Suite 206
Miramar Beach, Florida 32550
850-650-2277
greenwoodsearch.com