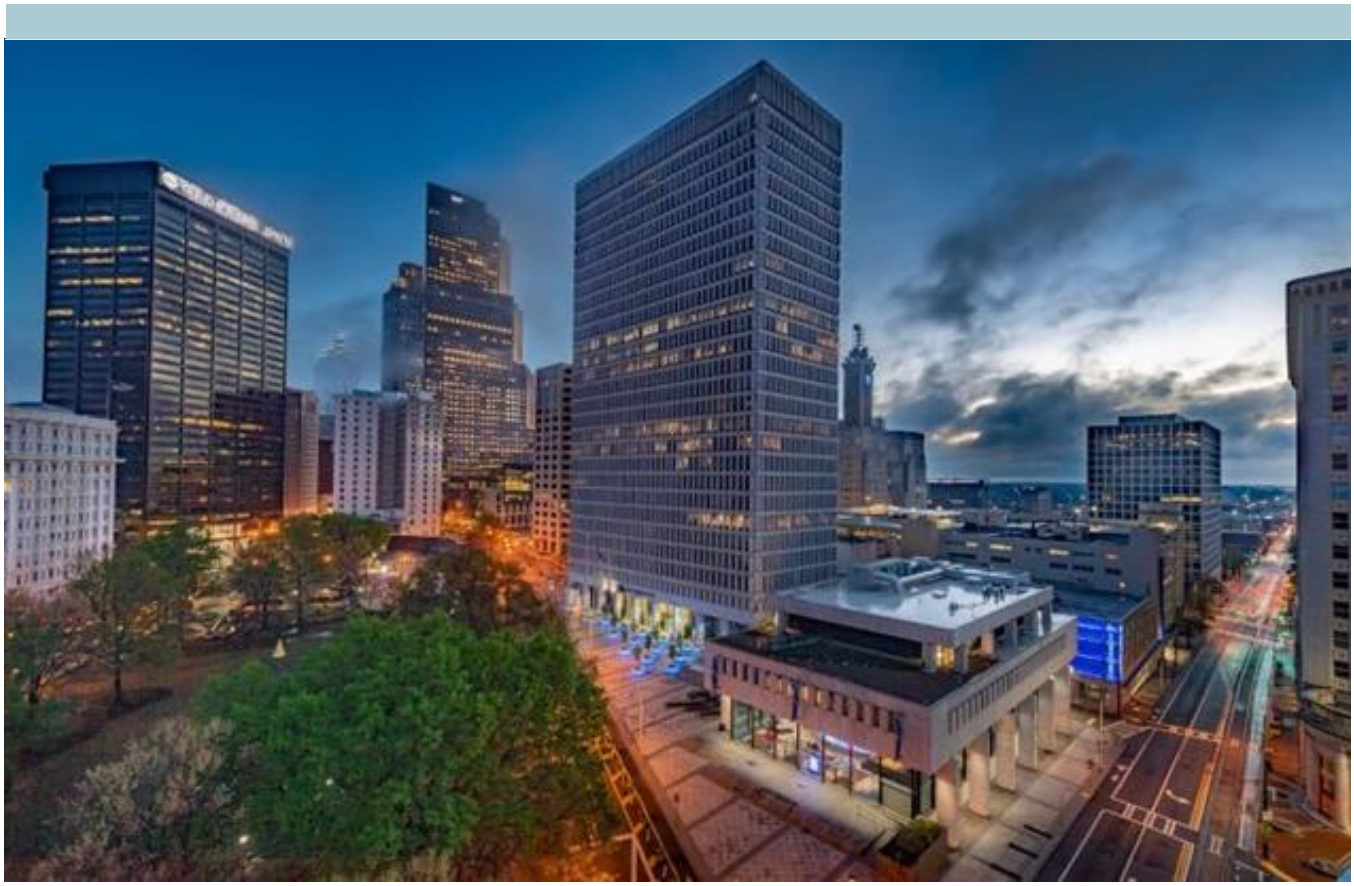
Associate Vice President for Principal Gifts

Leadership Profile

January 2026



WittKieffer

Executive Summary

WittKieffer is proud to partner with Georgia State University (GSU), a public research university in Atlanta, Georgia, as they seek a dynamic and strategic advancement professional who will serve as the institution's inaugural Associate Vice President for Principal Gifts (AVP).

The AVP will join a large and complex advancement operation for GSU, the most comprehensive higher education institution in the state, offering more than 250 undergraduate and graduate degree programs spread across eleven academic colleges and schools with several thousand employees over six campuses. GSU has over 52,000 students, hailing from every county in Georgia, every state in the U.S., and 170 countries. GSU has an economic impact on the Atlanta economy of $2.92 billion annually.

Reporting to and working in close concert with Vice President for Advancement Cheryl Harrelson, President M. Brian Blake, and the Georgia State University Foundation Board of Trustees, this inaugural role will lead efforts to secure principal gifts of $1 million or more, fueling the university's $600 million comprehensive campaign and advancing its standing as a national leader in student success, research, and innovation. The AVP will design and implement strategies to cultivate and solicit transformational gifts, manage a portfolio of high-capacity donors, and build enduring relationships through frequent in-person engagement. Responsibilities include developing customized proposals, stewarding donors, and collaborating across colleges and departments to align philanthropic priorities with institutional goals. Significant travel and participation in campaign events will be required to strengthen donor engagement and expand GSU's reach.

Georgia State is nationally recognized for bold innovation and its commitment to student success, having eliminated achievement gaps and dramatically improved graduation rates. In fiscal year 2025, the university raised $136 million in new gifts and commitments, surpassing expectations and setting a record. This was, in part, due to a one-time $80 million contribution. The AVP will build on this success and play a critical role in shaping a campus-wide culture of philanthropy, mentoring colleagues, and fostering partnerships that yield impactful gifts. Developing a comprehensive principal gifts strategy will be essential as will engaging academic leaders, faculty, and volunteers to identify and cultivate transformational donors. Expanding the prospect pool and leveraging GSU's growing reputation will accelerate fundraising success, while deep collaboration with partners across campus will ensure alignment and maximize opportunities. This position also offers the chance to help build a best-in-class advancement operation, inspiring innovation and creativity across the team.

The ideal candidate will bring strategic leadership, exceptional interpersonal skills, and a proven record of securing principal-level gifts. A bachelor's degree and seven or more years of professional experience are required, along with documented success in donor identification, cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship at the major and principal gift levels. Preferred qualifications include experience with comprehensive campaigns and work within complex organizations. This is a unique opportunity to shape Georgia State's philanthropic future, drive transformative impact, and contribute to an inclusive, high-performing culture of advancement.

To submit a nomination or express personal interest in this position, please see the Procedure for Candidacy at the end of this document.

Role of the Associate Vice President for Principal Gifts

Georgia State University Advancement works to further Georgia State's status as a national leader in student success, research and innovation, and cultural impact. By connecting with alumni, engaging donors, and increasing philanthropic support for students and scholars, we're helping to transform lives and build our global community.

GSU has a centralized advancement program serving the colleges and departments. There are approximately 100 staff members who have collaborative relationships with the senior leadership and deans. In fiscal year 2025, GSU raised $136 million in new gifts and commitments, a new record. GSU is in the quiet phase of its $600 million comprehensive campaign and is currently working with a campaign consultant.

In service of this mission, GSU seeks a dynamic, mission-driven, and results-oriented Associate Vice President for Principal Gifts to join its growing University Advancement team during an exciting time of transformation. Under the direction of the Vice President for Advancement, the AVP will play a pivotal role in developing and implementing long-term strategies to engage individuals and institutions capable of making transformational gifts of $1 million or more. The AVP will have the following responsibilities:

I. Strategic Fundraising & Gift Solicitation (25%)

- Develop and execute short- and long-term strategies to secure principal gifts of $1M+, aligned with institutional and cohort priorities.
- Drive strategies that lead to complex multi-year, multi-million-dollar gift commitments.
- Maintain a deep understanding of university-wide priorities, campaign initiatives, and emerging funding needs to effectively match with donor interests.
- Collaborate with internal teams to structure appropriate giving vehicles, including planned/deferred gifts, blended gifts, and challenge grants.

II. Donor Relationship Management (20%)

- Manage a portfolio of high-capacity donors and prospects, with a focus on high-touch, long-term relationship building and trust development.
- Partner with senior academic and administrative leaders to build meaningful, lasting relationships with donors.
- Utilize regular travel and in-person meetings (5-7 per month) to strengthen engagement, discuss impact, and present philanthropic opportunities.

III. Cross-Campus Collaboration (10%)

- Convene and participate in cohort-based planning sessions to integrate donor engagement across schools and departments.
- Serve as a university-wide ambassador and connector - facilitating collaboration and information-sharing between colleges, programs, and advancement units.
- Coordinate donor strategies with multiple stakeholders to ensure unified messaging and avoid overlapping in donor engagement.
- Help elevate strategic initiatives across academic units into packaged principal-level opportunities in collaboration with other AVPs and the VP.

IV. Proposal Development & Stewardship (10%)

- Lead the development of compelling and customized gift proposals, impact reports, stewardship strategies, and strategic communications for principal gift prospects.
- Coordinate with Donor Engagement and Communications to ensure timely, meaningful, and high-quality stewardship activities and donor-centric recognition plans.
- Prepare briefing documents and talking points for senior leadership engagement with key donors and prospects.
- Ensure gift agreements meet university standards and accurately reflect donor intent, institutional priorities, and legal obligations.

V. Leadership & Program Strategy (10%)

- Provide input on university-wide advancement strategy, including principal gift pipeline development, campaign planning, and cohort alignment.
- Work collaboratively with cohort teams and support staff to help set and meet annual team and individual fundraising goals.
- Contribute to a high-performance, transparent culture by modeling accountability, collaboration, innovation, and strategic thinking.
- Stay abreast of industry best practices and integrate emerging technologies and metrics into strategy development and execution.

VI. Travel & External Engagement (25%)

- Represent the university at strategic donor meetings, campaign events, and external engagements-both regionally and nationally.
- Participate in and help coordinate donor-centered events, including campaign receptions, cultivation dinners, and major announcements.
- Commit to travel at least 25% of the time, including nights and weekends, to accommodate donor schedules and engagement opportunities.
- Serve as a thoughtful, collaborative, and accountable team member. Commit to ethical standards and adhere to the Donor Bill of Rights. Commit to the highest standards of civility and decency toward all.

Opportunities and Expectations for Leadership

Few institutions in America are on as steep an upward trajectory as Georgia State. GSU is nationally recognized as an institution with the courage to foster innovation and pursue new directions and ideas. GSU is also a national model for student success. Over the past decade, the university has increased its graduation rate by 22 points. GSU is graduating 1,700 more students a year than just five years ago, reducing the time to degree by half a semester, and saving students $15 million a year. GSU has eliminated achievement gaps based on race, ethnicity, or income, making it a dynamic, inclusive, and culturally rich community. To maintain this trajectory, the AVP will be asked to help address the following critical issues, among others:

- **Continue to strengthen the GSU culture of philanthropy.**
  Georgia State enjoys a rich history and the loyalty of its alumni. The institution is in a good position to fully develop a culture of philanthropy that emphasizes a strong sense of giving back and the power of charitable giving, as its donor community of alumni, friends, and community partners understands and values the role the university plays in Atlanta and in Georgia. With the support of the Vice President for Advancement, the AVP has the chance to demonstrate the power of principal giving for GSU and help create a much stronger culture of giving. Central to this effort will be establishing a campus culture that optimizes the environment for success, and the AVP can play a critical role through leading by example, mentoring others, and building cross-campus partnerships that yield impactful gifts.

- **Develop a campus-wide principal gifts strategy.**
  The fact that the selected Associate Vice President for Principal Gifts will be the first to occupy the role is a critical one. While GSU has experienced success raising principal and even transformative gifts in the past, it has not created a principal gifts office to help guide these discussions campus-wide. Critical in the first few months of their tenure will be the need for the AVP to develop a comprehensive, campus-wide principal gifts strategy that engages advancement colleagues, academic leadership, key faculty, essential volunteers, and others to think critically about the potential for principal gifts and those who might contribute them. Georgia State has many advantages, including a charismatic and dynamic president, and the AVP will have the time and support to create an overall approach to principal gifts that capitalizes on these. By activating many constituents in this work in a thoughtful, productive way, the AVP can greatly accelerate GSU's fundraising.

- **Expand the prospect pool.**
  Georgia State finished its Burning Bright comprehensive campaign in December 2018, raising $322 million and surpassing its goal of $300 million. Now in the quiet phase of a new campaign, GSU has enjoyed tremendous success over the last several years, including the largest single fundraising year in its history in FY 2025. This most recent success came as the result of a single, transformative gift from an institutional donor, clearly demonstrating GSU's reach and presence in Georgia and its potential as a higher education leader in the region. GSU has done a very good job engaging with alumni and raising the fundraising bar during the current campaign. But with its growing reputation and profile, GSU has the chance to vastly expand its pool of potential donors. It will be critical for the AVP to take a strategic and thoughtful view of the prospect landscape and help the many constituents on campus to develop individual cultivation and solicitation plans for GSU's many capable donors. By mapping out a strategy to cultivate the most productive contributors, the AVP will help make an immediate and dramatic impact.

- **Deeply engage deans, faculty, and others in fundraising.**
  The members of the leadership team at GSU have demonstrated that they are deeply invested in Advancement and the rewards it can bring to the University. President Blake has demonstrated his ability to build relationships with key philanthropic leaders and donors, and his leadership embodies Georgia State's best qualities. A consistent theme that arises in conversations with deans, faculty, and other constituents across Georgia State's campus is their interest in partnering with members of the Advancement team in the

cultivation and solicitation process. The AVP can take a lead role here in both developing the relationships needed for successful development work with individuals across campus and mentoring the frontline fundraising team in doing the same. By utilizing the talent and relationships of the faculty and others in the fundraising effort, the AVP and their colleagues across advancement can more fully realize GSU's potential.

- **Help develop a best-in-class Advancement operation.**
  Two themes emerge when talking with Advancement leaders and others about Georgia State. First, the success of the Advancement effort at the University has been crystallized by recent success and the progress of the current comprehensive campaign. The second is that GSU has even more capacity to increase alumni engagement, non-alumni donor participation, and overall philanthropic support. The next AVP for Principal Gifts will take advantage of this opportunity by effectively inspiring and supporting others across advancement to build a culture of creativity and innovation, encouraging the team to look beyond the existing donor base to engage a wider range of philanthropists. In addition, the AVP will facilitate this work by bringing deep knowledge of university advancement and principal gift fundraising to the role, helping to lead GSU to even higher levels of success.

Professional Qualifications and Personal Qualities

At Georgia State, all students, no matter their background, can achieve at high levels. A majority of GSU students come from historically underserved communities, and when provided with the proper resources they succeed. University Advancement works to further this mission and elevate Georgia State's status as a national leader in student success, research and innovation, and cultural impact. By connecting with alumni, engaging donors, and increasing philanthropic support for students and scholars, UA is helping to transform lives and build a global community. The atmosphere at GSU is people-centered, KPI-focused, and mission-driven. Given this context, the ideal candidate for the Associate Vice President for Principal Gifts will possess the following qualities and characteristics:

Competencies and Skills:

- A clear vision for an outstanding advancement organization that supports the clear and compelling mission of Georgia State University.
- Strategic leadership ability to inspire entrepreneurial activity with a demonstrated history of innovation in developing effective new approaches to development.
- Ability to command immediate credibility with GSU's executive team, advancement staff, and volunteer leadership.
- Approachable leadership style that actively solicits input and welcomes feedback from a highly diverse community; the ability to synthesize various perspectives into a unified vision.
- A collaborative style that emphasizes transparency, trust, and motivation for higher performance.
- Outstanding interpersonal skills and ability to interact effectively and diplomatically with campus administrators, faculty, staff, and external constituencies.
- Superb organizational skills.

Minimum Education & Experience Requirements:

- Demonstrated experience growing revenue in complex environments through effective strategy, resource allocation, and performance.
- Documented evidence of significant personal fundraising success in donor identification, cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship at the principal gift level.
- Seven (7) or more years of professional experience.
- Bachelor's degree.

Preferred Education & Experience:

- Comprehensive campaign fundraising experience.
- Experience in a complex, matrixed organization, whether a university, health system, or other large institution.

About Georgia State University

Overview

Georgia State University is a nationally recognized R1 public research university located in the heart of downtown Atlanta, Georgia. Founded in 1913, GSU has grown into one of the largest and most diverse institutions in the country, enrolling over 53,000 students from 155 countries and 49 states. GSU is widely celebrated as a national leader in student success, particularly for its ability to graduate students at the same rate regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic status. Its innovative, data-driven approach to student support has become a model for institutions across the country. The National Institute for Student Success, created and housed at Georgia State, disseminates these evidence-based best practices to colleges and universities across the country and around the world.

The University is also known for its entrepreneurial spirit and rapid growth in research. According to *U.S. News & World Report*, GSU ranks #1 in the nation for its commitment to undergraduate teaching and as one of the top five most innovative public institutions for 11 years. Georgia State is also one of the fastest-growing research universities in the country. In total, GSU has invested more than $1.88 billion in research over the last 10 years.

GSU offers more than 250 undergraduate and 180 graduate degree programs across 12 colleges and schools. Its urban location provides students with unmatched access to Atlanta's industries, cultural institutions, and government agencies. With a strong emphasis on equity, innovation, and impact, Georgia State continues to redefine what a public research university can achieve in the 21st century.

For more information about Georgia State University, visit https://www.gsu.edu/.

Mission Statement

Georgia State University, one of the largest, most innovative multi-campus public research universities, transforms the lives of students, advances the frontiers of knowledge, and strengthens the workforce of the future. With campuses in and around metro Atlanta, Georgia State readies students for professional pursuits, educates future leaders, and prepares citizens for lifelong learning. Enrolling one of the most diverse student bodies in the nation, Georgia State prioritizes student success, ensuring that students from all backgrounds graduate at high rates. The University provides outstanding experiential educational opportunities and exceptional support for students seeking degrees from the associate to the doctoral level.

One of the nation's fastest-growing research institutions, Georgia State's scholarship and research focus on solving complex issues ranging from the most fundamental questions of the universe to the most challenging issues of its day, while creative activities expand and enrich the world.

Strategic Plan

Georgia State University launched a bold 10-year strategic plan to guide its growth, innovation, and impact through 2033. The plan reflects GSU's identity as a diverse, urban, multi-campus institution committed to student success, research excellence, and community engagement. This strategic plan also reflects GSU's commitment to inclusive excellence, innovation, and social mobility, aiming to prepare students and faculty to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Colleges

Georgia State University is composed of 12 colleges and schools, each offering a wide range of academic programs and research opportunities. These units reflect the University's commitment to interdisciplinary learning, innovation, and student success:

- Andrew Young School of Policy Studies
- Byrdine F. Lewis College of Nursing and Health Professions
- College of Arts & Sciences
- College of Education & Human Development
- College of Law
- College of Arts
- Institute for Biomedical Sciences
- J. Mack Robinson College of Business
- Perimeter College
- School of Public Health
- Honors College
- The Graduate School

The Office of Advancement

The Office for Advancement connects with alumni, friends, and the greater community to share the remarkable accomplishments of Georgia State University. The office achieves this through programs and communications that 1) provide opportunities for alumni, students, parents, friends, and organizations to connect with the university and each other; 2) educate and foster the GSU message in the community; and 3) create and sustain a philanthropic culture within these communities that results in financial support that is mutually satisfying to benefactors and the university.

GSU has a centralized advancement program serving the colleges and departments. There are approximately 100 staff members who have collaborative relationships with the senior leadership and deans. In fiscal year 2025, GSU raised $136 million in new gifts and commitments. GSU is in the quiet phase of its $600 million comprehensive campaign and is currently working with a campaign consultant.

Leadership

M. Brian Blake, President

As the eighth President of Georgia State University, Dr. M. Brian Blake leads the State of Georgia's largest university, spanning six campuses and a community of more than 52,000 students and 8,000 faculty and staff. Georgia State is the most ethnically and socioeconomically diverse Research-1 institution in the nation. With more than 23,000 African American students, the university graduates more African American students than any other non-profit institution in the nation.

Dr. Blake introduced a strategic vision for Georgia State that emphasizes four pillars: Identity, Placemaking, & Belonging; Research, Scholarship, & Creativity; Student Success; and College to Careers. Georgia State's newly adopted strategic plan, "The Blueprint to 2033 - Our Place, Our Time", sets a path for the university to continue to enhance its academic excellence and student success, scholarship and creativity, and campus vibrancy.

During Dr. Blake's tenure, Georgia State University has set several new milestones. With its increasing reputation, the university received the largest number of applications ever for admission to its Fall 2023 entering class. In the same year, the research enterprise exceeded $200 million in sponsor awards - the highest in history. Dr. Blake oversaw the acquisition of more than $55 million in government support for a new 120,000-square-foot Research Tower that will break ground in 2024 and open in 2026. In FY22, the university also raised a one-year amount of more than $100 million in philanthropic gifts for the first time in history. An advocate for campus experience, Dr. Blake is leading the effort to establish new interconnected green spaces and enhanced facilities to activate the center of Georgia State's downtown campus.

Prior to Georgia State, Dr. Blake had over 22 years of faculty and administrative experience across five comprehensive research universities, including provost at George Washington University and Drexel University, dean at the University of Miami, and associate dean for research at the University of Notre Dame. During the first 10 years of his academic career, he was a professor and later department chair of computer science at Georgetown University. Dr. Blake serves on the board of directors for Grady Memorial Hospital Corporation, Metro-Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, Junior Achievement of Georgia, and the Atlanta Convention &Visitors Bureau. Dr. Blake has been included on the 2022 and 2023 lists of the *Georgia 500 - The State's Most Influential Leaders,* as well as recognized as a *2023 Most Admired CEO*. Dr. Blake has a Bachelor of Electrical Engineering from Georgia Institute of Technology, a Master of Science in Electrical Engineering from Mercer University, and a Ph.D. in Software Engineering from George Mason University. Dr. Blake lives in Atlanta with his wife, Dr. Bridget Blake, and their two sons.

Cheryl Harrelson, Vice President for Advancement and Alumni and President of the Georgia State University Foundation

Cheryl Harrelson is responsible for leading the fundraising and engagement operations for the University and working directly with the President of Georgia State University and Foundation Board of Trustees as the institution's Chief Development Officer.

Prior to joining GSU, Cheryl was the Associate Vice Chancellor for Alumni, Annual Giving, and Pipeline Development at the University of California San Diego. Having joined UC San Diego in 2017, she oversaw alumni relations, career services, annual giving (academic and health), campus initiatives, and international engagement.

She has also served as the vice president of advancement and president of the foundation at New Mexico State University, associate vice president for annual giving, stewardship, and special events at Washington State University, associate vice president for advancement information services at James Madison University, and in a number of positions at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University.

Harrelson received her bachelor's degree in mathematics/applied science from the University of California Los Angeles, a master's degree in higher education from the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, and a master's degree in computer information systems from the University of Phoenix.

About Atlanta

The world-class, international city of Atlanta is integral to Georgia State's educational experience. Students and faculty are a part of a living laboratory where they study and create solutions for the challenges of the 21st century. Corporate operations play a major role in the economy, as the city claims the country's third-largest concentration of Fortune 500 companies and hosts the global headquarters of corporations such as The Coca-Cola Company, The Home Depot, Delta Air Lines, AT&T Mobility, Chick-fil-A, and UPS. Over 75% of Fortune 1000 companies conduct business operations in the metro Atlanta area, and the region hosts offices of more than 1,250 multinational corporations. Many corporations are drawn to Atlanta by the city's educated workforce; as of 2014, 45% of adults 25 or older in the city have at least a 4-year college degree, compared to the national average of 38%.

Georgia State is where city life meets campus life. The world-renowned Georgia Aquarium is a short walk from the campus, and the historic Fox Theatre in Midtown is a quick drive or train ride from the university. The Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site, the World of Coca-Cola Museum, the Atlanta History Center, the Carter Center, and the High Museum of Art are among the many historical and cultural attractions in Atlanta. Georgia State is also home to the Rialto Center for the Arts, a venue that features the best of national and international jazz, world music, and dance.

Georgia State's intercollegiate teams, the Panthers, play in the NCAA's Division I. Also, Atlanta is home to professional franchises for four major team sports: the Atlanta Braves of Major League Baseball, the Atlanta Hawks of the National Basketball Association, the Atlanta Falcons of the National Football League, and Atlanta United FC of Major League Soccer.

Procedure for Candidacy

All applications, nominations, and inquiries are invited. Applications should include, as separate documents, a CV or resume and a letter of interest addressing the themes in this profile.

WittKieffer is assisting Georgia State University in this search. For fullest consideration, candidate materials should be received by February 13, 2026.

Nominations, applications, and inquiries can be directed to:

Greg Duyck and Jevon Walton

GeorgiaStateAVP@wittkieffer.com

Georgia State University is an Equal Opportunity Employer and does not discriminate against applicants due to race, ethnicity, gender, veteran status, or on the basis of disability or any other federal, state, or local protected class.