



PennState

Senior Vice Provost and Chief of Staff

Leadership Profile

July 2025



WittKieffer

Executive Summary

As The Pennsylvania State University (Penn State) continues to move boldly into the future of higher education, they seek a Senior Vice Provost and Chief of Staff (SVP/PCS) to serve as a strategic partner to [Incoming Executive Vice President and Provost Fotis Sotiropoulos](#). This inaugural position will provide strategic advice and partner with university and academic leadership to facilitate the achievement of Penn State's priorities.

The SVP/PCS provides high-level strategic leadership, serving as a trusted advisor and integrative leader across academic and administrative units. This role supports the Provost in advancing institutional priorities through cross-campus collaboration, strategic financial planning, and operational effectiveness. The SVP/PCS drives key initiatives, facilitates and supports decision-making, and ensures alignment with the University's priorities by coordinating senior staff, managing special projects, and fostering innovation. Additionally, the role supports academic leaders in enhancing their effectiveness, leads executive talent management efforts, and represents the Provost's Office in national forums to contribute thought leadership on higher education strategy and policy.

The ideal candidate brings a proven record of leadership in fast-paced, mission-driven environments, with the ability to execute complex, multi-stakeholder initiatives aligned with an innovative academic agenda. They possess financial savvy, a deep understanding of higher education culture and governance, and a commitment to advancing inclusive excellence and community engagement in diverse and vibrant academic environments. With exceptional judgment, communication, and collaboration skills, they are adept at navigating ambiguity and building trust across diverse constituencies. This individual is a strategic thinker and action-oriented leader who anticipates needs, offers candid counsel, and drives institutional effectiveness with integrity, diplomacy, and a sense of humor. An advanced degree is required, as is significant leadership experience, to merit the trust of university and academic leadership. A terminal degree is strongly preferred.

The ideal candidate will embrace the intellectual vibrancy, energy, and complexity of Penn State, quickly developing trusted relationships and communications, facilitating collaboration to address opportunities and challenges, and preparing the Provost to make well-informed decisions. They will earn the trust of various campus interests, have a talent for issue-spotting and anticipating challenges, and be able to communicate emergent concerns proactively to advance the University's strategic objectives. The work of the SVP/PCS is varied and often project-oriented; the successful candidate will enjoy a diverse set of responsibilities that require multitasking and agility.

Founded in 1855, Penn State fulfills its land-grant mission through teaching, research, and public service that benefit the citizens of Pennsylvania. In partnership with industry, education, government, and agriculture, the University leads in research, learning, and engagement—driving innovation, inclusion, sustainability, and global impact. Under [President Neeli Bendapudi's](#) leadership, Penn State operates as a comprehensive, global institution with a university-wide budget of approximately \$9.9 billion, a \$4.5 billion endowment, and a 33-million-square-foot infrastructure spanning 2,100+ buildings—including an airport, housing, utilities, and public safety services. As Pennsylvania's largest non-governmental employer, Penn State has a presence in all 67 counties. With approximately 88,000 students across multiple campuses and its top-ranked World Campus, Penn State is a digitally advanced, geographically distributed university. Its research expenditures have steadily grown, fueling innovation and economic development. Recognized by the Carnegie Foundation as a top-tier research university, Penn State prepares globally minded leaders.

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

Role of the Senior Vice Provost and Chief of Staff

The Senior Vice Provost and Provost's Chief of Staff (SVP/PCS) will play a principal role in partnering with the Provost and leaders across campus to advance Penn State's land grant mission and the six goals defined by President Neeli Bendapudi:

- enhance student success,
- grow interdisciplinary research excellence,
- increase land-grant impact,
- foster diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging,
- transform health through academic and clinical synergy,
- and transform internal operations.



The Provost's Chief of Staff (SVP/PCS) provides executive oversight of staff involved in the prioritization of the Provost's strategies to maximize relationships with key constituents and individuals and ensures timely progress on key initiatives. The primary and senior liaison between the Provost, the Council of Academic Deans, the Academic Leadership Council, and the Provost's Leadership Council, the Chief of Staff will provide executive leadership for a broad portfolio of university functions and departments.

The SVP/PCS is an exciting, crucial, and pivotal role in the Provost's Office as Penn State University evolves itself into the 21st century higher education landscape. They will be fully enmeshed in the inner workings of the Provost's Office, understanding the Provost's goals and objectives at an intrinsic, professional level that allows them to anticipate operational and tactical needs in support of the Provost's vision.

A creative and effective problem-solver and strategic communicator with sound business judgment, the SVP/PCS will be an integral player in the successful execution and implementation of major university initiatives in academic program portfolio optimization, blended and interdisciplinary academic programs, holistic student experience, and resource allocation.

Evidence of success will include full integration into the Provost's Office and within the University community at large. The successful candidate will be viewed and respected as an impactful leader - by the faculty, staff, administration, students, post-docs, Board of Trustees, and the University community. The SVP/PCS will have a finger on the pulse of university events and issues and will be seen as a "go-to" person, voice, and problem solver for university challenges and opportunities.

Opportunities and Expectations for Leadership

Recognizing that this is an inaugural position and the successful candidate will have an opportunity to shape the role in collaboration with the Provost, the following opportunities have been identified as key priorities for the incoming SVP/COS.

Provide strategic leadership and counsel

- Provide counsel and assist the Provost in overseeing the strategic direction and momentum in alignment with presidential priorities.
- Serve as a strategic advisor and integrative leader, fostering collaboration across academic, administrative, and governance bodies to ensure alignment with the University's mission and strategic goals.
- Represent the Provost's Office in national higher education forums and professional associations to contribute thought leadership on topics such as institutional finance, strategic planning, and organizational effectiveness.
- Manage special projects assigned by the Provost.

Lead key initiatives that involve multiple stakeholders and units

- Bring together people and catalyze discussions to support cross-campus collaboration to drive institutional success.
- Provide strategic thought partnership to multiple stakeholders and units to advance innovation and the genesis of new initiatives.
- Drive discussions around new ideas and proposals through careful and data-supported analysis to a stage ready for the Provost's review and decision.

Support academic leaders to strengthen their effectiveness

- Support deans by providing counsel and collaboration that lead to enhanced budgetary oversight and resource management, strategic financial planning, forecasting, and risk assessment.
- Serve as a thought partner to the deans and other academic leaders and members of the Provost's Office team to help them achieve their goals, solve problems, navigate complex processes, and optimize their time with the Provost.
- Ensure a strong relationship between the University Faculty Senate and the Provost's Office.

Coordinate operations and facilitate efficient decision-making

- Facilitate coordination of senior staff as a team and collaborate with senior staff to align operations as well as special projects in administrative units.
- Discover and vet information to ensure timely resolutions to problems and help determine what information or subjects should be elevated to the Provost.
- Organize and prioritize critical issues and required information for the Provost to facilitate effective and efficient decision making.
- Provide executive-level guidance on financial modeling, risk management, and long-term fiscal sustainability, which contribute to sound, strategic financial planning and resource stewardship for the Provost's Office.
- Ensure accountability in budget formulation, forecasting, and is in alignment with institutional priorities.



Lead talent management and leadership development initiatives

- Coordinate annual reviews of academic leaders.
- Lead executive talent management initiatives, including search processes, succession planning, and leadership development programs that support a high-performing, inclusive academic enterprise.

Enhance innovation, institutional effectiveness, and communication

- Champion operational innovation through initiatives that enhance service delivery and institutional effectiveness.
- Identify places where complex processes can get stuck and work with the appropriate offices to resolve those bottlenecks and increase efficiency.
- Coordinate Provost's Office communications, in partnership with the Office of Strategic Communications, for clear, precise, effective communication across the University, especially within the academic enterprise.
- Where strategically appropriate, supervise additional direct reports or offices that serve the common good of the University.

Professional Qualifications and Personal Qualities

- Experience in a high-energy environment with an innovative leadership agenda.
- A record of achievement in executing an ambitious, complex vision with multiple stakeholders.
- Experience successfully managing up and down and a proven track record of responding in a timely and flexible manner.
- Familiarity with academic culture, including shared governance and an understanding of contemporary issues in higher education.
- Financial savvy to serve as a strategic advisor to academic leaders, providing guidance on budget planning, resource allocation, financial forecasting, and risk assessment to support data-informed decision-making and institutional sustainability.
- Experience with and understanding of diverse and vibrant academic environments, internationalization, and university-community partnerships.
- An ability to build effective and inclusive working partnerships with individuals from diverse educational, cultural, and professional backgrounds, both internally and externally.
- Skills to organize, prioritize, and perform multiple job functions effectively, meet established deadlines with short turnaround times, and manage changing situations.
- Proven ability and skill to identify and analyze complex situations, present alternatives and options, and recommend or implement effective courses of action.
- Ability to anticipate the Provost's "need to know" and provide timely information and support.
- A demonstrated knack for quickly earning trust and holding confidences with integrity.
- A fierce collaborative style with a record of bringing people together for collaborative success.

- Outstanding critical and independent thinking and judgment skills
- The ability to be both confident and diplomatic in a complex environment.
- Action orientation; history of taking initiative.
- Outstanding written and oral communication skills, strong interpersonal and listening skills, and the ability to communicate with a wide range of constituents.
- An ability to give honest, candid, and constructive feedback and to deliver difficult messages with tact.
- Inclination to explore all sides of an issue and raise counterarguments, including those that challenge the Provost's position.
- Intellectual and organizational curiosity.
- A sense of humor.

Experience and Education

- Advanced degree required; terminal degree strongly preferred
- Significant leadership experience in higher education, including experience in related policy development, to merit the respect and trust of university and academic leadership.



About The Pennsylvania State University

Founded in 1855, The Pennsylvania State University (Penn State) is one of the world's premier research universities and a driver of economic growth and prosperity for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Led by President Neeli Bendapudi and Executive Vice President and Provost Fotis Sotiropoulos, the University embraces its mission of teaching, research and service with a focus on fulfilling its land-grant mission in a 21st-century context.

With campuses throughout Pennsylvania, and an online World Campus, Penn State is a [strong economic engine](#) across the commonwealth, contributing over \$15.8 billion annually to Pennsylvania's economy and supporting nearly 11,000 jobs. Penn State's research and development expenditures have increased steadily during the past decade, contributing to the Pennsylvania economy through innovation and technology transfer. Federal dollars for research and development have increased substantially during the past 10 years. Likewise, private sector-sponsored research continues to trend upward.

Granted the highest rating for research universities by the Carnegie Foundation, Penn State prepares students to be leaders with a global perspective.

Information about Penn State can be found at psu.edu.

- [Mission and Values](#)
- [Strategic Plan](#)
- [Facts and Rankings](#)
- [Research](#)



About the Executive Vice President and Provost's Office

The Provost's Office provides leadership to shape the future for its students, communities, and the Commonwealth. It contributes to a transformative experience that propels students to thrive in the classroom, throughout their careers and life. Its support for groundbreaking research, scholarship and creative activity drives discoveries that positively impact Penn State's local and global communities. It fosters an environment of inclusive excellence where all Penn Staters can fully realize their potential.

The Provost's Office oversees the [academic enterprise](#) which includes the [Commonwealth Campuses](#); [14 Colleges](#); [Dickinson and Penn State Law](#); Educational Equity; Equal Opportunity and Access; Faculty Affairs; Penn State Global; the J. Jeffrey and Ann Marie Fox Graduate School/Graduate Education; Millenium Scholars; Online Education, Planning, Assessment and Institutional Research; Student Affairs; Penn State Sustainability; Undergraduate Education; the University Faculty Senate; and University Libraries.

[The Provost's leadership team](#) comprises a talented team of one senior vice provost, five vice provosts, the Vice President for Commonwealth Campuses and Executive Chancellor (to whom the Commonwealth Campus chancellors report), and 18 deans whose collaborative and supportive leadership styles have meant much success for Penn State in the current higher education landscape. The office is also supported by a committed and experienced core staff of four.

Other vital leadership across the University is provided by committees, councils, task forces, and teams. These groups provide instrumental perspectives to the Provost's Office. A list can be found [here](#).

Leadership

Fotis Sotiropoulos, Ph.D., Executive Vice President and Provost



Fotis Sotiropoulos is the incoming Executive Vice President and Provost of The Pennsylvania State University. Reporting directly to the President, Dr. Sotiropoulos will serve as the University's chief academic officer, overseeing all colleges, campuses, and academic support units. He will work closely with university leadership, faculty, staff, and students to set academic priorities and advance Penn State's mission of excellence in education, research, and community impact.

Dr. Sotiropoulos most recently served as Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University (2021-2025). He previously held several leadership and faculty positions, including: Interim Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs (2020-2021), Dean of the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences and SUNY Distinguished Professor (2015–2021) at Stony Brook

University; James L. Record Professor of Civil Engineering and Director of the St. Anthony Falls Laboratory at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities (2006–2015); and Faculty member in the School of Civil and Environmental Engineering, with a joint appointment in the G. W. Woodruff School of Mechanical Engineering, at the Georgia Institute of Technology (1995–2005).

An internationally recognized scholar in fluid mechanics, Dr. Sotiropoulos's research focuses on simulation-based engineering science for addressing complex, societally relevant problems in renewable energy, environmental hydrodynamics, human health, and biological systems. He has authored over 220 peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters, with a Google Scholar h-index of 77, and his work has been featured on the covers of several leading scientific journals.

His honors include the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) Fluids Engineering Award (2023), the American Geophysical Union (AGU) Borland Lecture Hydrology Days Award (2019), the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) Hunter Rouse Hydraulic Engineering Award (2017), and a CAREER Award from the U.S. National Science Foundation. Dr. Sotiropoulos is an elected Fellow of both the American Physical Society and ASME, and his research has twice been recognized in the APS Division of Fluid Dynamics Gallery of Fluid Motion (2009, 2011).

State College, Pennsylvania

State College is consistently rated as one of the best places to live in Pennsylvania. Also known as "Happy Valley," State College hosts friendly, walkable neighborhoods, a safe, vibrant downtown, and Penn State's University Park campus – the University's largest campus and administrative hub. Occupying approximately 4.6 square miles, with a world-class university in the middle, State College is a quintessential American college town. Living in State College offers residents an urban feel, and many young professionals live in and around the town.

The State College area has a vibrant restaurant scene, a spirited nightlife, numerous local farmers' markets, an eclectic mix of retail chains and independent shops, an abundance of exciting events and festivals, and a well-regarded school district. Downtown State College is also home to a vibrant cultural arts district featuring galleries and theaters.

To experience the natural beauty of central Pennsylvania, several state parks are easily accessible, with lakes, boating, biking, hiking, skiing, camping, and cabin rentals.

State College Regional Airport is four miles from downtown, and there are short flights that connect to international airport hubs, at Philadelphia, Newark, and Chicago. In addition, five major cities – New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C. – are all within a four-hour drive.

For more information about State College, see:

- [State College](#)
- [Happy Valley](#)
- [Best State Parks Near State College](#)
- [University Park Airport](#)

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 Penn State in this search. For full consideration, candidate materials should be received by Friday, September 5, 2025.

Applications, nominations, and inquiries can be directed to:

Suzanne Teer, Sandra Chu, and Cathryn Davis

PennStateProvostCoS@wittkieffer.com

Penn State is an equal opportunity employer and is committed to providing employment opportunities to all qualified applicants without regard to race, color, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability or protected veteran status. If you are unable to use our online application process due to an impairment or disability, please contact 814-865-1473.

CAMPUS SECURITY CRIME STATISTICS: For more about safety at Penn State, and to review the Annual Security Report which contains information about crime statistics and other safety and security matters, please go to <http://www.police.psu.edu/clery/>, which will also provide you with detail on how to request a hard copy of the Annual Security Report.

Employment with the University will require successful completion of background check(s) in accordance with University policies.