



**The Research  
Foundation for**

The State University of New York

## **Chief Operating Officer**

Leadership Profile

2023-24



*WittKieffer*

## Executive Summary

The President and CEO of The Research Foundation for SUNY (RF) and its Board of Directors invite nominations and applications for an experienced research administration leader to serve as RF Chief Operating Officer (RFCOO).

Driving social impact, enhancing human wellbeing, and stimulating economic growth, the RF provides SUNY's 30 state-operated campuses with an infrastructure of people, technology, and processes that enable faculty to write and submit grant proposals to agencies, foundations, and companies; establish contracts and manage funding awarded to run campus-based research projects; protect and commercialize intellectual property created within those projects; and establish enduring partnerships that shape the future.

In collaboration with new System Provost and President of the Research Foundation, [Dr. Melur "Ram" Ramasubramanian](#), the RFCOO will play a critical role on the RF leadership team, working to establish an environment that expertly and efficiently supports research and discovery across the SUNY System. The RFCOO will oversee the execution of the core functions of the RF, including the efficient and transparent administration of sponsored programs and technology. This individual has day-to-day oversight of the strategic, operational, and financial goals of all areas within the RF, coordinating with elected officers and working with the leadership team members responsible for key functional areas. The RFCOO provides essential leadership in supporting the Presidents, Operations Managers, and other leaders at SUNY's campuses, offering direction and oversight for initiatives and projects that support SUNY's research mission and the RF's strategic plan. The RFCOO is a key strategic partner to the RF President and acts in the place of the President during the President's absence.

The RFCOO will evaluate the RF's current operating practices, ensuring that they are optimized to cultivate, support, and facilitate campuses' ability to establish and increase faculty scholarship, cutting edge research, and the recruitment and retention of strong faculty researchers across the System. To that end, they will scale and optimize operations to support SUNY's efforts to elevate research expenditures, technology transfer, and cross-institutional research collaboration. The RFCOO will be responsible for leading and motivating a high-performing team, with a portfolio that includes Industry and External Affairs, Human Resources, Information Technology Services, and Sponsored Program Administration and Regulatory Affairs. The RFCOO will champion the RF's values of inclusion, equity, and belonging in its workforce for diversity of people, culture, thought, perspective, and background. They will ensure that operational procedures are communicated clearly, to manage and advance the business of serving SUNY.

The ideal candidate will be an experienced leader in one or more key operational areas including research administration, grants and sponsored project administration, technology transfer, finance, legal affairs, or human resources, bringing deep familiarity with research compliance and commercialization. The RFCOO will be a data-driven leader who will partner closely with the President of the RF to identify existing pain points in research administration across the System and optimize operations to better the experience of all faculty and research administrators of SUNY.

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

## Role of the Chief Operating Officer

The Research Foundation Chief Operating Officer plans, organizes, and provides strategic direction to all the functions of the RF in providing outstanding services to The State University of New York (SUNY) research community in the core business areas of sponsored program administration and technology commercialization.

The RFCOO supports the President by taking responsibility for leadership, management, and direction of an integrated functional team supporting RF operations across thirty SUNY campuses. This includes providing vision and operational leadership for the administration of sponsored programs and industry and external affairs across SUNY; responsibility for the support and oversight of OMs; and acting to remedy operational problems at campuses, including the review of campus leadership responsible for RF operations. The RFCOO will ensure that all RF services provided to campus constituents are of high quality and consistent with national best practices. The RFCOO fosters a highly collaborative environment that recognizes that the SUNY research enterprise is driven by SUNY faculty and works to ensure that from an operational and administrative perspective, the RF is as effective and efficient as possible.

As the fiscal agent for the RF for purposes of grant administration, the RFCOO collaborates with other SUNY leaders to build and maintain relationships with state and federal funding agencies, state and regional economic development agencies, and a vast array of industry partners. The executive is part of a leadership team supporting the Presidents and Operations Managers (OMs) at campuses and other SUNY leaders. They also provide direction and oversight for initiatives and projects that support SUNY's research mission and the RF's strategic plan.

In addition, the RFCOO is responsible for:

- Ensuring that ethical values are aligned across the organization, promoting open communication, and avoiding bias in decision making;
- Ongoing improvement in sponsored programs administration both in terms of the people (staffing, training) and technology;
- Ensuring that RF technology commercialization support aligns with campus needs and expectations; and
- Serving all committees of the Board, supporting other Board delegates as needed.

## Opportunities and Expectations for Leadership

The following represent some of the immediate and inter-related opportunities that the RFCOO will address during the first few years in office:

### **Scale and optimize operations to support SUNY's efforts to elevate research expenditures, technology transfer, and cross-institutional research collaboration**

Working in close concert with the President of the Research Foundation, other members of the RF leadership team, and research leaders at the SUNY campuses, the RFCOO will scale and optimize operations to advance the strategic vision for robust and enhanced SUNY research activity and outcomes. The RFCOO will support these efforts by achieving operationally strong and financially efficient processes in pursuit of the RF's mission. The RF has made considerable process in this effort, and continued areas

for optimization remain. The RFCOO will ensure that the continued refinement of the RF's processes and workflow benefit from the input and meet the needs of key constituents. They will also ensure that RF technology commercialization support aligns with campus needs and expectations. The RFCOO will provide the communication and identify training necessary to ensure success.

In consultation with the RF Chief Compliance Officer and functional owners, the RFCOO will implement key functions that ensure appropriate risk management and control systems in compliance with laws, rules, regulations, and policies and procedures. The RFCOO will bring a deep understanding of KPIs and work to establish metrics that can track sponsored programs activities across the system, with dashboards specifically tailored to show each campus information that is most important to them. They will identify areas within SUNY's research infrastructure that require additional support, as well as areas that might be lacking in research proposals that are not funded, to promote continuous improvement.

### **Ensure strong collaboration and communication across the SUNY System and beyond**

One of the most important priorities of the RFCOO will be to build exceptional relationships and working partnerships with key SUNY partners to advance the mission of the RF and SUNY. These partners include RF Central Office (RFCO) Officers and Vice Presidents as well as all RF staff at 35 State Street. The RFCOO will broadly support the leadership team, campus OMs, Board members, and SUNY, among others. The new RFCOO will promote, enable, and participate actively and enthusiastically in fostering positive, collaborative, solutions-oriented relationships for the benefit of SUNY, its faculty, and the research and discovery that is helping to transform the state, the country, and the world.

The RFCOO will broadly support the leadership team, campus OMs, Board members, and SUNY in creative, compliant, and timely problem solving. There is an opportunity to strengthen communication about the RF – its purpose, goals, and processes, how to engage with its staff and leverage its resources and expertise most effectively, and how it relates and interacts with SUNY campuses. As such, the RFCOO will develop and encourage strong collaborative working relationships with SUNY Administration, Campus Presidents, OMs, and other members of the campus research community. The RFCOO will serve as the lead communications liaison, ensuring active, regular, collaborative, and clear communication to clarify RF's role, key processes, and the value and service that RF brings to the System. The RFCOO will also represent the RF to a broad range of external constituencies across the state and nationally, and maintain a presence at national forums and organizations and societies that are key to the RF's business success (e.g., Council on Government Relations, NCURA, and SRAI).

### **Lead a diverse and highly functioning team**

The RFCOO will lead a team of approximately five employees, overseeing the areas of Industry and External Affairs, Human Resources, Information Technology Services, and Sponsored Program Administration and Regulatory Affairs. The RFCOO will inspire and motivate this integrated, high performing team. They will ensure the growth of leadership and management skills of the executive team, leading and supporting the corporate workforce, and driving a culture of engagement and growth. The RFCOO will set the tone, champion this culture, and hold their leaders accountable to supporting their teams in a way that ensures their continued growth and development and ability to perform at their highest level of contribution. The RFCOO will ensure a culture of collegiality, respect, and service in support of each other and the RF's many constituents, fostering a supportive, solutions-oriented culture.

## Professional Qualifications and Personal Qualities

The ideal candidate will be an experienced leader in one or more key operational areas including research administration, grants and sponsored project administration, technology transfer, human resources, finance, or legal affairs, bringing deep familiarity with research compliance and commercialization. A bachelor's degree is required and an advanced degree, along with experience in non-profit and higher education settings, is preferred.

The following credentials and attributes are considered essential for viable candidates:

- **Strategic vision:** Experience providing vision and operational leadership for the administration of sponsored programs, industry and external affairs in a complex environment; understanding of the mission, goals, and objectives of a major public university system and the roles of research and public service, and the need for an effective business infrastructure in support of that mission; knowledge of entrepreneurial, creative, and innovative approaches to manage continuously changing challenges facing non-profit corporations and externally funded programs and operations;
- **Leadership:** Track record of empowering and cultivating trust within a strong leadership team that models cohesive and innovative leadership as well as mentoring; experience fostering a diverse and inclusive workforce; effective delegation skills to foster a sense of teamwork, shared goals and priorities; ability to lead change in an organization and flexibility to adapt to changing priorities both in terms of people (staffing, training) and technology;
- **Management:** Experience working in a complex, rapidly evolving, and regulated non-profit or higher education environment with varied constituencies; strong administrative skills including budgeting, program development and program management, as well as the ability to delegate to and lead a strong and dedicated team; appropriate management experience including progressively more complex technical and executive experience in positions of a similar scope reporting to a President or organizational CEO; research management skills including familiarity with state and federal funding priorities and grant administration, and experience working in a complex, rapidly evolving, and regulated environment with varied constituencies;
- **Relationship management:** Ability to interact effectively with all levels of RF staff and trustees, SUNY system, and campus-based constituents including faculty and research staff, partners in business and industry, and federal and New York State government; demonstrated ability to display positive attitudes and behaviors, which demonstrate an awareness and willingness to respond to and engage constituents in order to satisfy their needs and manage their expectations;
- **Communication:** Excellent communication skills in person and in writing with the ability both to listen and persuade; skills to communicate the RF's mission, priorities, and needs to others including System leadership, campus presidents, OMs, and others; ability to understand the needs of faculty and other campus-based researchers and to communicate what they can expect from the RF and how best to get what they need; effective negotiating skills combined with the ability and inclination to be a team player;

- **Personal qualities:** The highest degree of professional and personal integrity and a respect for institutional stewardship and service; ability to take initiative and implement creative solutions; ability to navigate a complex institution with political astuteness, patience, and tolerance for ambiguity.

## About The Research Foundation for SUNY

### History

The SUNY Research Foundation (RF) is the largest comprehensive university-connected research foundation in the country and supports a vibrant research ecosystem that cultivates innovation and entrepreneurship across multiple key areas including Artificial Intelligence, Clean Energy, Biotechnology, Longevity, Substance Addiction, Nextgen Quantum Computing, Environmental Health, and Resiliency. The Research Foundation for SUNY was chartered in 1951 by the New York State of Regents as a non-profit education corporation, governed by its own [board of directors](#) to:

- Assist in developing and increasing the facilities of the State University of New York to provide more extensive educational opportunities for and service to its students, faculty, staff, and alumni, and to the people of the State of New York, by making and encouraging gifts, grants, contributions, and donations of real and personal property to or for the benefit of the State University of New York.
- Receive, hold, and administer gifts or grants, and to act without profit as trustee of educational or charitable trusts, or benefit to and in keeping with the educational purposes and objects of the State University of New York.
- Finance the conduct of studies and research in any and all fields of the arts and sciences, of benefit to and in keeping with the educational purposes and objects of the State University of New York.

### Mission

Driving social impact, enhancing human wellbeing and stimulating economic growth, the RF provides SUNY's 30 state-operated campuses with an infrastructure of people, technology, and processes that enable faculty to write and submit grant proposals to agencies, foundations, and companies; establish contracts and manage funding awarded to run campus-based research projects; protect and commercialize intellectual property created within those projects; and establish enduring partnerships that shape the future.

The RF's **mission** is to provide talent, services, and technology that empower SUNY to research, innovate, and transfer discoveries that transform the world's knowledge economy. RF's **vision** is to make SUNY the best place for faculty, students, and staff to research, innovate, and solve the world's most pressing problems.

### Organizational Structure

The RF comprises a central office and operating units at 30 state-operated campuses across New York State, and is governed by a board of directors. The RF Board of Directors oversees the operations of the corporation in accordance with its stated mission and purpose. This voluntary board draws members from

various constituencies including SUNY faculty, researchers, campus and system administrators, as well as individuals representing business, industry, and community sectors. RF Operations Managers at the campuses are appointed by the RF President on the recommendation of the respective campus president. The RF President delegates to each Operations Manager the authority to execute the powers and duties necessary to conduct RF business at their campus in a manner consistent with the RF's policies and overall system of controls.

## **Sponsored Programs Administration and Management of Research Grants**

When a grant or contract is awarded to a SUNY faculty member, the RF administers and manages these funds to ensure compliance with university, grant sponsor, and government policies and procedures. Funding received by the RF in the form of a sponsored award is administered at the direction of the faculty member on whose behalf the award was received, subject to the policies and procedures of the given campus, as well as the RF, along with any other state or federal requirements. All activity at a campus location takes place with the oversight of the RF Operations Manager who has designated authority to conduct RF business at their campus. In FY 22, SUNY reported nearly \$1.1 billion in total research activity support and filed 271 patents. The [RF System Dashboard](#) displays expenditures and other key metrics for research and innovation activity at SUNY campuses through the RF.

## **Technology Transfer and Management of Intellectual Property**

The RF provides SUNY faculty, staff and students intellectual property and technology transfer services that fuel innovation and move ideas and inventions to the marketplace. Services include:

- Discovery
- Disclosure
- Evaluation
- Intellectual Property Protection
- Customer Discovery
- Marketing
- Partnership Management
- Asset Management
- Patent Drafting and Prosecution
- Business Development and Licensing
- New Venture Support

## About The State University of New York

The State University of New York is an educational powerhouse, boasting 64 institutions, a mix of 29 State operated campuses and five statutory colleges—including research universities, liberal arts colleges, specialized and technical colleges, health science centers, and land-grant colleges—and 30 community colleges. These institutions serve 1.3 million students annually in more than 7,500 degree, certificate, and continuing education programs across New York State. The University also operates hospitals and numerous research institutes. As a system, SUNY is unparalleled in its educational reach and impact, boasting bachelor and graduate graduation rates that are higher than the national median.

SUNY's size and the diversity of its institutions amplify its potential for impact through education, research and scholarship, workforce development, K-12 partnerships, and job creation. SUNY is embedded in virtually every community in New York State. Remarkably, 93% of New Yorkers live within 15 miles of a SUNY campus, and nearly 100% live within 30 miles. In many communities, SUNY is also the region's largest employer. While SUNY students are predominantly New York State residents, hailing from every one of the State's 62 counties, the University also draws students from every state in the United States, the District of Columbia, four U.S. territories, and 160 nations. One out of three New York State high school graduates chooses SUNY, and the total enrollment of nearly 363,650 full- and part-time students represents 31% of New York State's higher education student population. SUNY employs 87,000 faculty and staff and counts more than three million living alumni who reside in New York State and throughout the world.

### Leadership

#### **Dr. Melur "Ram" Ramasubramanian, President, The Research Foundation for SUNY**



Dr. Ramasubramanian joined The Research Foundation for SUNY from the University of Virginia, where he was vice president for research and professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering. There, he developed and led a strategy to grow research focused on five key areas: democracy, digital technology and society, environmental resilience and sustainability, brain and neuroscience, and precision medicine. The strategy yielded significant gains in research expenditures for UVA from a base of \$397 million in FY2016 to \$611 million in FY2021, which led to a rise in the university's ranking by the National Science Foundation during that time from 56 to 48. In addition, new awards rose from \$353 million in FY2017 to \$532 million in FY2023, a record for UVA. To date, nearly \$1 billion has been committed by UVA for 66 different strategic initiatives including research infrastructure, professorships, scholarships, and large investments in the five strategic focus areas.

At the same time, Dr. Ramasubramanian directed key investments to expand UVA's capacity in the areas of brain and neurosciences, environmental resilience, digital technology and society, and precision health. He also developed and directed a seed-funding program to support early-stage interdisciplinary research concepts that provided funding for 77 teams across schools of three faculty members each, granting each team \$60K per project, including student support. He also developed and executed an annual faculty awards program to recognize excellence in research and scholarship.



Prior to his years at UVA, Dr. Ramasubramanian was program director for engineering research centers at the National Science Foundation's Division of Engineering Education and Centers. He was a faculty member at Clemson University as a D.W. Reynolds Distinguished Professor and department chair for mechanical engineering. He started his career as an assistant professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering at North Carolina State University.

Dr. Ramasubramanian is a first-generation graduate who arrived in the United States with modest financial resources after earning his bachelor's in mechanical engineering from the National Institute of Technology in Durgapur, India. He received a master's degree in applied science from Miami University and a doctorate in mechanical engineering from Syracuse University.

## 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 the Research Foundation for SUNY in this search. Review of candidate materials has begun, and interested applicants are encouraged to apply as soon as possible. Application materials should be submitted using WittKieffer's [candidate portal](#).

Nominations and inquiries can be directed to:

Robin Mamlet, Lauren Bruce-Stets, and Kim Migoya  
[RFforSUNY-COO@wittkieffer.com](mailto:RFforSUNY-COO@wittkieffer.com)

*The salary range for this position is \$300,000 - \$350,000.*

*As an Equal Opportunity / Affirmative Action Employer, The Research Foundation for SUNY will not discriminate in its employment practices due to an applicant's race, color, creed, religion, sex, pregnancy-related conditions, reproductive health decisions, childbirth or related medical conditions, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, transgender status, age, national origin or ancestry, marital status, familial status, citizenship, physical and mental disability, prior arrest or conviction record, genetic characteristics/genetic information, predisposition or carrier status, domestic violence victim status, military status or service, veteran status, or any other characteristics protected under federal, state or local law. The Company will not discharge or in any other manner discriminate against employees or applicants because they have inquired about, discussed, or disclosed their own pay or the pay of another employee or applicant.*

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*Review of applications will begin immediately and continue until the position is filled.*

*The Research Foundation for the State University of New York is not an agency or instrumentality of the State of New York. Employees of the Research Foundation for the State University of New York are not state employees, do not participate in any state retirement system, and do not receive state fringe benefits. The Research Foundation for the State University of New York operates under a contract with The State University of New York and receives no directly appropriated state funding.*