RICE

Vice President for Venture Pathways and Chief Commercialization Officer

LEADERSHIP PROFILE

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WittKieffer

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THE SEARCH

Rice University, one of the nation's elite universities for scholarly research and societal impact, seeks an entrepreneurial leader and deft administrator to serve as the institution's Vice President for Venture Pathways and Chief Commercialization Officer (CCO). The CCO will report directly to the Executive Vice President for Research. The CCO will activate and coordinate an enhanced commercialization ecosystem at Rice to maximize the translation of university-wide discoveries and inventions to foster concrete commercial success and ultimately contribute to the betterment of the world. Rice's Office of Venture Pathways (previously named the Office of Innovation) encompasses the end-to-end programs, processes, and partnerships required to translate Rice discoveries into startups, licensed technologies, and mission-aligned industry collaborations. The Office of Venture Pathways, led by the CCO, will aim to increase faculty and student participation in venture funding and technology licensing.

Possessing, in equal measure, the skills to envision *and* execute, the CCO will expand and oversee Rice's technology ventures and commercialization activities in support of the university's foundational research and educational mission. The CCO will cultivate an on-campus culture that is rooted in discovery and innovation, uniting individual faculty, post-docs, and students in the commercialization process via robust programming and a substantial service and support infrastructure. The CCO will align these efforts with broader venture creation efforts and educational programs located in Rice's Schools and academic departments. Importantly, the CCO will serve as the bridge between the university's impressive research enterprise and the broader innovation ecosystem at Rice and in Houston and the Gulf South region.

The successful CCO candidate will have the capability to serve as a strong strategic partner for research faculty, coupling entrepreneurial DNA with extensive experience in technology commercialization. In this role, the CCO will be eager to leverage Rice's world-class engineering and science research community, working within the broader Rice entrepreneurship ecosystem to advance and grow Rice's innovation portfolio.

Rice has retained the services of WittKieffer, a national executive search firm, to assist the search committee in its identification and review of candidates. Confidential inquiries, nominations, referrals, and resumes with cover letters should be directed in confidence as noted at the end of this document.

RICE UNIVERSITY

Founded in 1912, Rice is an independent, coeducational, nonsectarian, private, first-tier research university dedicated to rigorous undergraduate and graduate education, research, and professional training in selected disciplines. As a member of the Association of American Universities (AAU), Rice University is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), the recognized regional accrediting body in the 11 U.S. Southern states. Rice offers more than 50 undergraduate majors across seven divisions of study, including architecture, business, engineering, humanities, music, natural sciences, and social sciences, with multiple opportunities for research and collaboration. Currently, over 930 instructional faculty members are devoted to the instruction and training of approximately 4,200 undergraduate students and 3,900 graduate students. The undergraduate student-to-faculty ratio is six-to-one.

Rice is centrally located in Houston, the fourth-largest city in the U.S. and home to more Fortune 500 company headquarters than any city in the nation except New York. Rice is part of the Texas Medical Center (TMC), the world's largest medical complex, which is located across the street from Rice's main campus. Houston is the most diverse city in North America; such diversity not only makes Houston an exciting place to live, but it also represents a notable strength for Rice, as people of different backgrounds and interests work together in virtually all local, political, educational, professional, and social contexts.

The Rice endowment was valued at $8.5 billion for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025. Robust institutional resources have permitted Rice to offer an intellectually ambitious yet financially affordable education. The university has been nationally acclaimed by Kiplinger's as the "best value" in private higher education, with an undergraduate tuition price that is consistently lower than other leading private institutions. Rice was named the 15th most innovative school in the nation in the 2025 U.S. News and World Report rankings.

Rice Entrepreneurship

Rice has a growing reputation in entrepreneurship education and programming. The Liu Idea Lab for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (Lilie) has been ranked 1st in the country for graduate entrepreneurship by Princeton Review and Entrepreneur Magazine for seven years running, and was recently ranked 7th for MBA entrepreneurship programs by Poets & Quants for 2026. Rice was also named the top graduate school in the country for entrepreneurship studies in the 2026 Princeton Review rankings. Lilie administers all entrepreneurship resources, programming, and education for students across Rice's schools, as well as for faculty, staff, and alumni, with its tenure-track and clinical faculty holding appointments in the Business School. Lilie oversees Rice's newly launched undergraduate minor in Entrepreneurship and maintains incubator and co-working space for student and faculty use in the Cambridge Office Building and within the business school at McNair Hall. Lilie is also tasked with catalyzing the creation of new ventures on campus and accelerating their transition to the innovation ecosystem beyond the campus.

Together with the Office of the Provost and in partnership with Rice's Research Institutes, Lilie administers the Rice Innovation Fellows Program. Aimed at supporting graduate students and faculty in engineering and the natural sciences, the Innovation Fellows program provides the time, funding, training, and personalized mentorship from industry veterans to help accelerate research into world changing products.

The Rice Alliance for Technology and Entrepreneurship enjoys a significant reputation as a premier organizer of entrepreneurship-related events that bring together Rice and the surrounding community, including running the Rice Business Plan Competition, one of the largest graduate student business plan competitions in the world. The Rice Alliance, which is housed in the business school and the Ion, also hosts the Rice Venture Forums, which bring together startups, faculty, investors, and large corporations in various industry verticals on a regular basis on the Rice campus.

The Office of Technology Transfer

The Rice Office of Technology Transfer (OTT) will work in close partnership with the Office of Venture Pathways to propel cutting-edge discoveries out of Rice labs and into the marketplace. Together, they partner directly with Rice faculty, staff, and students to turn visionary ideas into reality. By managing a portfolio of over 600 active patent cases, OTT transforms these ideas into tangible opportunities through strategic licensing and commercialization. A dedicated licensing team provides expert guidance on resource allocation, market entry strategies, and the negotiation of commercialization agreements designed to maximize the societal and economic reach of Rice's intellectual property. The OTT team partners with researchers to ensure optimal IP protection and identify viable commercial pathways. Additionally, the office facilitates research agreements with industry partners, ensuring that Rice faculty can continue to build global research partnerships within a thriving, innovation-first environment.

The Ion

Rice is leading the creation of an innovation district for Houston, which will be home to startups and corporate innovation centers and will be key to Houston's emerging innovation ecosystem. The innovation district is anchored by the Ion, a 266,000-square foot structure designed to bring Houston's entrepreneurial, corporate, and academic communities together into collaborative spaces and programs. The discoveries, disclosures and patented technologies that emerge from Rice's labs have found their way into a range of commercial markets. Technology developed in the school is being utilized in numerous market sectors such as clinical trials for cancer therapy, manufacturing of low-cost solar cells, research and educational efforts in wireless technologies, drug discovery and regenerative medicine. Technologies are developed not just by faculty members, but also by graduate and undergraduate students, often in collaboration with TMC and other outside entities.

The Texas Medical Center (TMC)

The largest medical complex in the world, the TMC is a 2.1-square mile district in Houston comprising 54 medical institutions. Home to 21 hospitals, eight specialty institutions, eight academic and research institutions, four medical schools, three nursing schools, three public health organizations, two pharmacy schools, and a dental school, the TMC is noted for its significant treatment capacity, high level of research activity, and uncommonly high concentration of clinical facilities. The TMC's member institutions work together to produce a staggering collective impact in Houston and beyond. The TMC employs more than 120,000 people, performs over 180,000 surgeries annually, and logs 10 million patient encounters per year. In addition to robust treatment capabilities, the collaborative nature of the TMC gives rise to fruitful research partnerships in the biomedical sciences.

Rice Engineering and Computing

Since the founding of Rice Institute in 1912, engineering has been a central focus of the university. Guided by Edgar Odell Lovett's idea of "No Upper Limit," the George R. Brown School of Engineering continues to be globally recognized for groundbreaking research, teaching excellence and collaboration. Rice Engineering has earned a place among the top engineering schools in the country by empowering the next generation of leaders with strong technical and data-science skills, creative problem solving and the ability to work across disciplines to address pressing problems. The School of Engineering and Computing ranked No. 21 nationally among undergraduate engineering programs in the 2026 U.S. News & World Report rankings with several disciplines earning top marks, including biomedical engineering (No. 9) and environmental health engineering (No. 16).

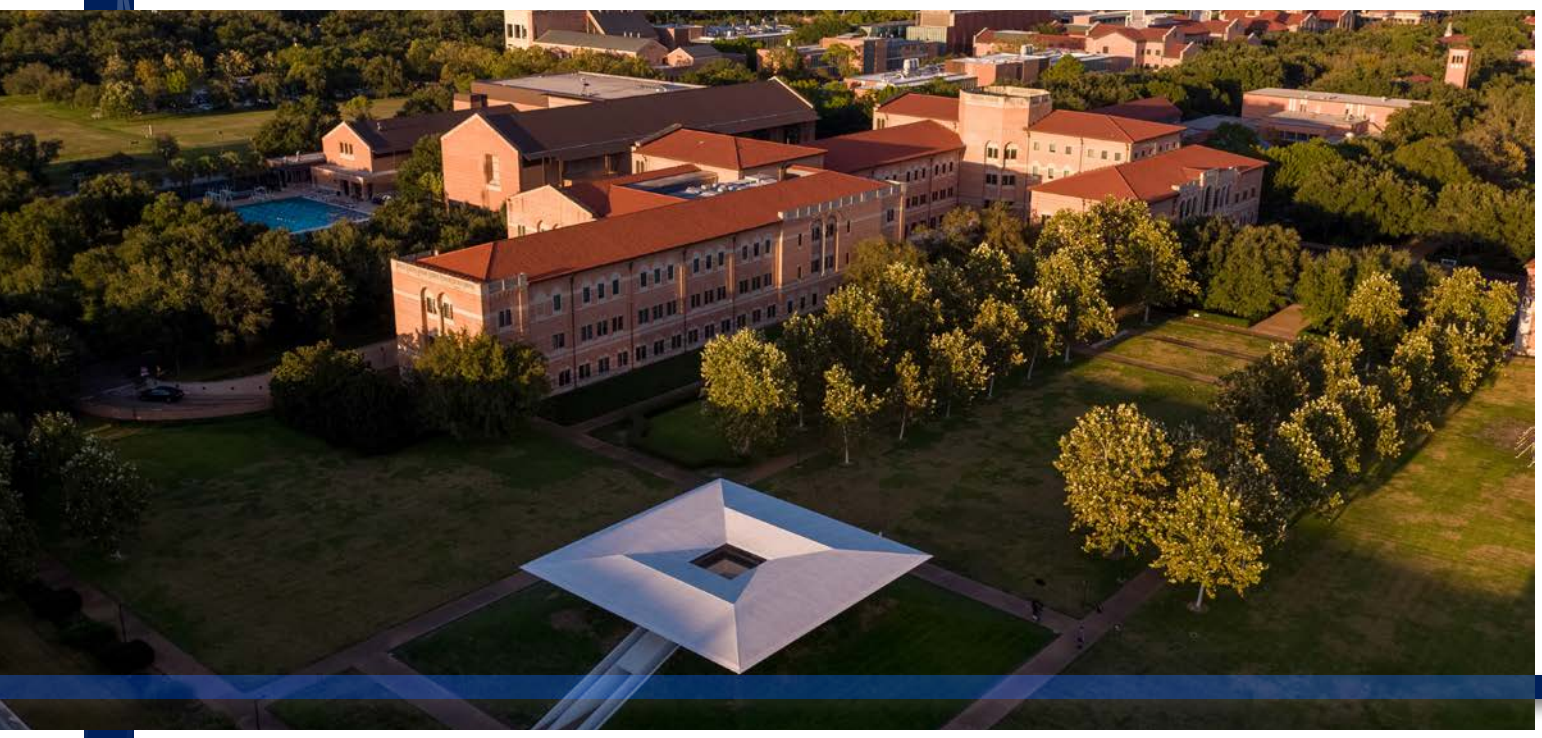
In addition to its undergraduate offerings, Rice engineering has 13 programs of study toward doctoral degrees, 13 professional master's programs (including three that are online), and two programs in the design, innovation, and engineering leadership areas. The school is ranked No. 25 overall among the nation's best graduate schools for engineering according to 2026 U.S. News & World Report Rankings, with several programs placing in the top 15, including environmental engineering (No. 11) and biomedical engineering/bioengineering (No. 12). Among the 140 tenured and tenure-track engineering faculty members are several elected to the national academies, including eight in engineering, three in science and three in medicine; two engineering faculty are members of all three national academies. Three emeritus faculty members also belong to national academies.

Rice Natural Sciences

The Wiess School of Natural Sciences advances the fundamental understanding of the natural world and improves the human condition through pioneering research while empowering the next generation of discoverers and leaders through unsurpassed education in a uniquely collaborative community. As an internationally recognized leader in key research areas, the Wiess School is known for outstanding, rigorous, and creative educational programs integrated with its research mission. The school leverages Houston's role as a center for the energy industry, medical research, space exploration and technology through educational and research collaborations with organizations in the Texas Medical Center, the Gulf Coast Consortia and NASA and program specializations in atomic, molecular, and optical physics (No. 8), theoretical chemistry (No. 11) and earth sciences (No. 20). Internationally renowned faculty at the school include a Nobel laureate, a Wolf Prize winner, nine members of the National Academy of Sciences, 10 members of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, a Guggenheim Fellow, six Packard Fellows and numerous winners of CAREER and PECASE awards.

Rice Business

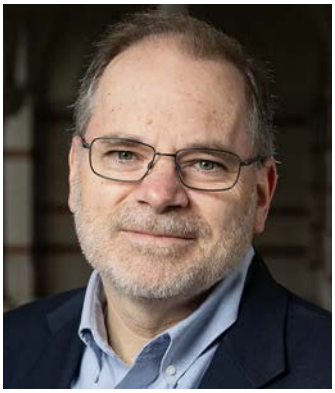
Named in honor of the late Jesse H. Jones, a prominent Houston business and civic leader, Rice Business is consistently ranked among the nation's top business schools and is typically ranked within the top five Business Schools in the country for Entrepreneurship. Degree programs include the full-time MBA, online MBA, Professional MBA, Executive MBA, coordinated MBAs in engineering or professional science, a dual MD/MBA with Baylor College of Medicine, a Ph.D. program, an undergraduate business minor and major, and an undergraduate minor in entrepreneurship joint with the School of Engineering. Rice Business also offers a full schedule of executive education, certificate programs, and customized courses for business and industry. Rice Business is recruiting heavily for additional tenure-track and clinical faculty in entrepreneurship and innovation to support the anticipated expansion of entrepreneurship and commercialization education and training for students, faculty, and research staff across campus.



RICE LEADERSHIP

Rice University President Reginald DesRoches, the university's eighth president and a professor of civil, environmental, and mechanical engineering, leads its 8,600 students, eight schools and over 900 faculty with a focus on elevating Rice's national and global research reputation, strengthening graduate programs, and expanding interdisciplinary collaboration and innovation. Previously serving as provost and dean of engineering, DesRoches guided the university through the COVID-19 transition to remote learning, expanded research funding, launched new academic programs and interdisciplinary initiatives, and oversaw Rice's first major undergraduate expansion in over a decade. Before joining Rice in 2017, he held leadership roles at Georgia Tech, where he improved rankings, facilities and fundraising. An expert in resilient infrastructure and smart materials, DesRoches has contributed to disaster response efforts like the 2010 Haiti earthquake, advised policymakers, and earned numerous honors, including election to the National Academy of Engineering.

Under DesRoches' leadership, Rice is undertaking its most ambitious expansion in decades, growing its undergraduate population by 30% to about 5,200 students by 2028 while attracting record demand — more than 36,000 applications annually — alongside a $1.5 billion investment in financial aid, a surge in graduate enrollment and research activity, and the largest faculty hiring push in the university's history.



Executive Vice President for Research David Sholl is an internationally recognized leader in research strategy, clean energy, and scientific innovation, overseeing Rice's Office of Research and its key units supporting innovation, technology transfer, sponsored projects, compliance and research security. Prior to joining Rice, he served as executive director and vice provost of the University of Tennessee–Oak Ridge Innovation Institute, where he also led major initiatives in decarbonization and advised the U.S. Department of Energy. A member of the National Academy of Engineering, Sholl previously chaired the School of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering at Georgia Tech and has held prominent editorial and fellowship roles within leading scientific organizations. His research focuses on materials modeling for chemical separations and energy applications, with more than 400 peer-reviewed publications and several books to his name.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Rice's commercialization ecosystem has the potential to grow significantly to fully realize the impact of the university's research discoveries. Primary opportunities and challenges for the CCO include the following:

Develop, support, and sustain a culture of venture creation and impact on campus

The CCO will build upon Rice's existing resources in the entrepreneurship and commercialization space, including the Liu Idea Lab for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, the Office of Technology Transfer, the Rice Alliance and others, to harness the university's research assets to catalyze and nourish a pervasive culture of innovation on campus that is embraced by administrators, faculty, students, and alumni. The CCO will proactively promote communication among all partners on campus involved in venture creation and technology development, including educational activities located in Rice's Schools and academic departments.

Provide clear channels of communication for internal and external researchers and partners

The CCO will ensure that clear lines of communication exist for Rice faculty and students engaged in research at all stages of entrepreneurship and venture creation. Similarly, the CCO will work closely with others at Rice to provide clarity in communication to potential external partners of all kinds, including venture funders, potential technology licensees, and alumni. Achieving this goal will require strong collaboration across multiple campus organizations, including but not limited to the Office of Technology Transfer. The CCO will serve as a key convening presence, helping to align efforts and model effective collaboration to strengthen Rice's entrepreneurial and commercialization environment.

Enhance research translation and transfer systems and policies

The CCO will employ their previous domain knowledge and technology transfer experience to enhance Rice's overarching research translation and commercialization strategies and policies in close partnership with Rice's Office of Technology Transfer. By continuously seeking to improve these processes, the CCO will reduce bureaucratic barriers present in the commercialization process. In doing so, the CCO will also ensure that Rice is an effective partner to external entities, overcoming obstacles that hinder collaboration and clearly defining mission-critical policies; this will involve the education of current and potential partners to better understand how best to engage with Rice's internal innovation ecosystem.

Create conduits for faculty and graduate students to pursue venture creation

The CCO will ensure that Rice faculty members are well-supported in commercialization activities with the Office of Technology Transfer, positioning the Office of Venture Pathways to serve as a strategic resource for researchers seeking to translate discoveries into real-world applications. The CCO will also work proactively with Rice's Schools and academic departments to identify commercially relevant technologies and encourage a broader number of faculty and graduate students to pursue venture creation associated with these technologies. Through these efforts, the CCO will help expand participation in Rice's innovation ecosystem and strengthen pathways for bringing university discoveries to market.

Execute strategies to engage and amplify external partners

The CCO will work closely with the broader Rice entrepreneurial ecosystem to build and stengthen relationships outside of Rice's own internal innovation ecosystem, developing external partnerships, capital markets, startups, and established enterprises while providing a path for Rice's academic entrepreneurs to engage directly with the broader economy. The CCO will leverage Rice's proximity to, and partnership with, the adjacent Texas Medical Center, Houston's status of the nation's energy capital, a growing Houston innovation community, an active base of alumni, and other government, industry, and philanthropic stakeholders to expand the institution's commercial ties to industries central to the regional and national economy. On an international scale, the CCO will work with Rice's Vice President Global Strategy to capitalize on Rice's reputation to develop global partnerships and other opportunities for collaboration around innovation and impact.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The CCO will be regarded as the key thought leader on matters of technology ventures and commercialization arising from Rice's research enterprise, and as such, must bring the requisite expertise and gravitas to inspire confidence within the institution as a whole and among its external partners.

A suitable candidate will have extensive industry expertise in commercialization of technology and research, investment experience and acumen in funding the development of new technology and science/engineering-based startups, or experience translating and commercializing technology emerging from within the academic setting.

The CCO will possess a passion for innovation and education and will demonstrate a strong understanding of how to effectively navigate complex dynamics within a university environment, as well as an understanding of the compliance issues related to innovation and commercialization.

The candidate must be highly collaborative and able to develop relationships built on trust with a diverse set of legal, compliance, business, and academic partners.

The search committee understands that no single candidate may have all the ideal qualifications, but prefers candidates with the following characteristics and qualifications:

- Experience identifying and evaluating market opportunities for technology commercialization in a public or private sector environment
- A track record of bringing new technology-enabled ideas to market
- Strong and diverse networks of relationships in the venture creation and business world
- A proven history of creating and negotiating corporate and industry partnerships
- Experience working with a technology transfer office to manage the risk and opportunities that come with intellectual property commercialization
- Excellent team communication and management skills, including a proven ability to coordinate highly interdisciplinary teams
- Exceptional relationship building abilities, including the ability to create and manage effective intra- and inter-institutional coalitions that produce meaningful outcomes
- A track record of working across sectors and in multi-stakeholder environments
- Graduate degree or equivalent experience
- At least eight (8) years of relevant experience in industry or academia, including a demonstrated track record in a leadership role

PROCEDURE FOR CANDIDACY

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

WittKieffer is assisting Rice University in this search, which will remain open until an appointment is made.

Application materials, nominations, and inquiries can be directed to:

Andrew Bean, Ph.D.
Principal
abean@wittkieffer.com

Suzanne Teer
Senior Partner
suzanne.teer@wittkieffer.com

Ayesha Price
Consultant
aprice@wittkieffer.com

Rice University is an Equal Opportunity Employer with commitment to diversity at all levels, and considers for employment qualified applicants without regard to race, color, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national or ethnic origin, genetic information, disability or protected veteran status.

Rice University is committed to ensuring Equal Employment Opportunity and the full inclusion of all qualified persons in the workplace. This commitment includes providing reasonable accommodations to persons with disabilities. For applicants with disabilities who require a reasonable accommodation for any part of the application or hiring process, please contact Rice University's Disability Resource Center at 713-348-5841 or adarice@rice.edu for support.

The material presented in this leadership profile should be relied on for informational purposes only. This material has been copied, compiled, or quoted in part from Rice University documents and personal interviews and is believed to be reliable. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information, the original source documents and factual situations govern.

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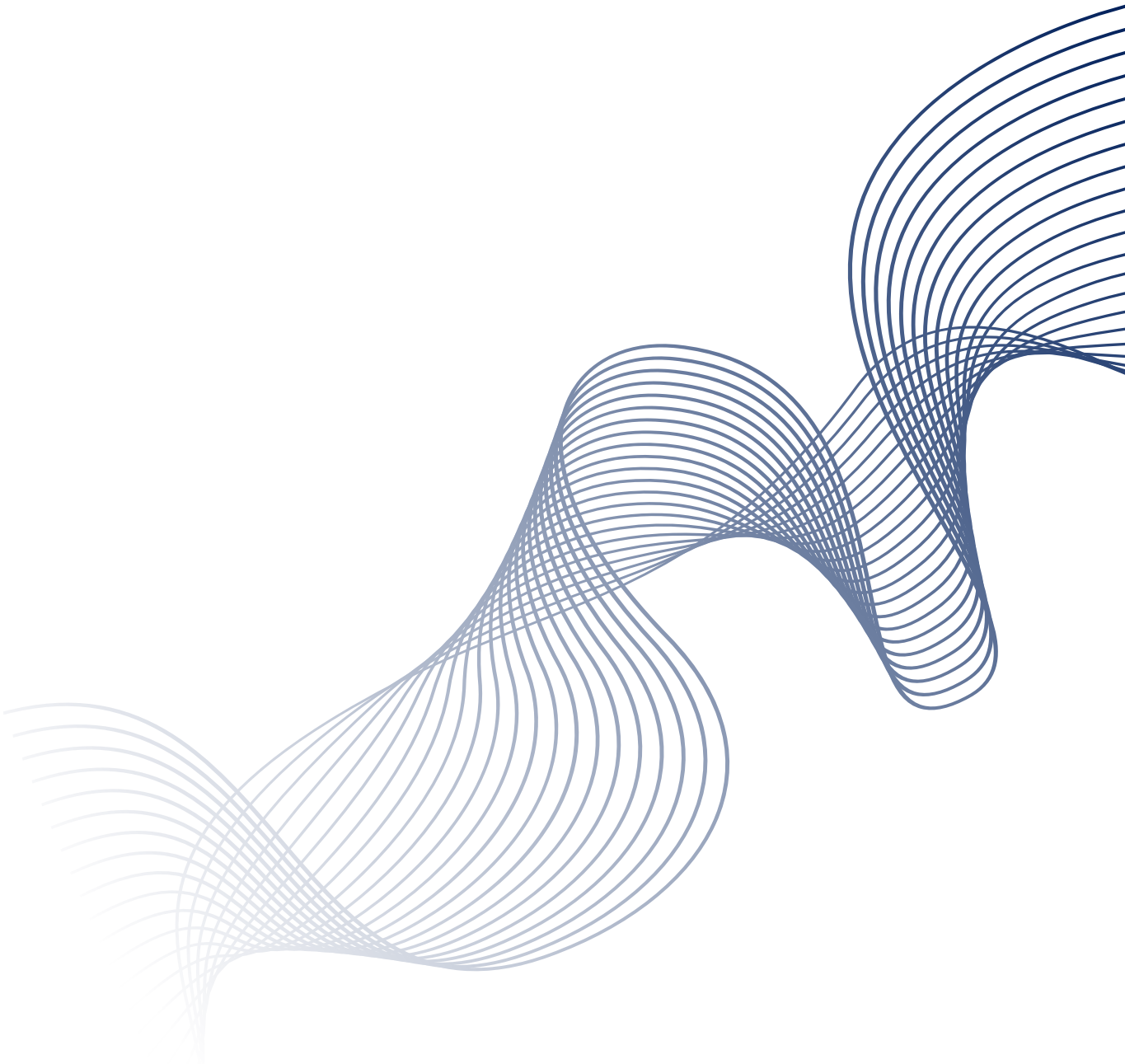

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