

POSITION ANNOUNCEMENT

Executive Director

Grand Rapids, Mich.



**DOROTHY A. JOHNSON
CENTER FOR
PHILANTHROPY**
GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY®

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy (Johnson Center) is an externally-oriented academic center of Grand Valley State University (GVSU). The center works with nonprofit and foundation practitioners, scholars and students, and partners in business and government to bridge the gap between the information and skills communities need and the change they want to make.

The Johnson Center was established at GVSU in 1992 with support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Through our professional education offerings; research, evaluation, and strategic services; and bold thinking to advance the field, we support a philanthropic ecosystem defined by effective philanthropy, strong nonprofits, and informed community change.

The Johnson Center now seeks nominations and applications for executive director.

Ideal candidates will have a passion for and a deep understanding of the intricate ecosystem of philanthropy, as well as senior-level career experience within philanthropy and the nonprofit sector. They will combine not only a nuanced understanding of the history and evolution of philanthropy, but also its current practice and evolution, including its equity-focused work. A graduate-level degree is required.

The Johnson Center is committed to inclusion and equity and encourages candidates with diverse lived experience and perspectives from underrepresented communities to apply. The ideal candidate will have experience working effectively across a diverse and broad range of stakeholders, must be comfortable navigating in complex environments, and must be able to demonstrate how they can contribute to and help extend a culture of inclusivity within our organization and the broader field.



Learn more about the Johnson Center at johnsoncenter.org.

ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy

In the early 1990s, Dr. Russell Mawby (president and CEO of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 1970–1995) and Arend D. Lubbers (president of GVSU, 1969–2001) shared a vision to establish an anchor institution of higher education and applied research on philanthropy in Michigan. The center of excellence they established at GVSU in 1992 as the Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership was renamed for Dorothy A. Johnson (trailblazer and founding president of the Council of Michigan Foundations) in 1999.

For more than 30 years, the Johnson Center has served as a bridge between research and practice, ensuring that changemakers have access to the cutting-edge knowledge, guidance, and supports they need to build a world where everyone can thrive. Today, the Johnson Center's areas of expertise, partnerships, and audiences extend well beyond Michigan to communities and countries around the world.

The Johnson Center is home to the nation's first endowed chairs in both family (Frey Foundation Chair for Family Philanthropy) and community (W.K. Kellogg Community Philanthropy Chair) philanthropy, as well as the first and only peer-reviewed journal of philanthropy, *The Foundation Review*, and publishes the *11 Trends in Philanthropy* report. Our groundbreaking research on giving circles, donor-advised funds, limited-life philanthropy, and other studies provide transformative insights for the field. And unparalleled professional development offerings for grantmakers elevate practice nationwide.

Grand Valley State University

Grand Valley State University (GVSU), established in 1960, is a four-year public university attracting more than 22,000 students with its high-quality programs and state-of-the-art facilities. GVSU provides a fully accredited liberal undergraduate and graduate education and has campuses in Allendale and Grand Rapids, and regional centers in Detroit, Holland, Muskegon, and Traverse City, Michigan. The Johnson Center is located on GVSU's City Campus in downtown Grand Rapids.

GVSU serves students with undergraduate and graduate degree programs in 300+ areas of study. Especially relevant to the work of the Johnson Center, GVSU currently offers undergraduate degrees in Public and Nonprofit Administration, a graduate certificate in Nonprofit Leadership, and a masters in Philanthropic and Nonprofit Leadership.

The university is dedicated to individual student achievement, going beyond the traditional classroom experience with research opportunities and business partnerships. GVSU employs more than 3,000 people and is committed to providing a fair and equitable environment for the continued success of all.

POSITION DESCRIPTION

Serving as the adaptive and visionary leader of the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy, the executive director shapes and advances the field of philanthropy in Michigan and across the nation. This role is the center's primary external face, cultivating relationships with foundations, philanthropic organizations, policymakers, practitioners, and academic partners to meaningfully advance effective philanthropy.

The executive director champions the center's thought leadership by translating its research, programming, and convening power into insights that inform the broader philanthropic sector. This includes authoring and amplifying ideas through publications, conferences, policy conversations, and public discourse — positioning the Johnson Center as an indispensable resource and catalyst for the field.

Equally critical, the executive director serves as the primary conduit between the Johnson Center and GVSU, building and stewarding relationships across colleges, university leadership, and faculty to ensure the center is well integrated into the broader institutional community and positioned to leverage the full resources and reach of the university in service of its mission.

Internally, the executive director provides decisive leadership and oversees the overall administration and management of the center's operations, aligning strategy, planning, evaluation, communications, and personnel management to ensure outcomes are achieved. This leader is also responsible for the center's long-term financial health, including fundraising, budget management, endowment stewardship, and revenue growth in partnership with the Johnson Center's Leadership Council and GVSU's Provost and University Development offices. This leader fosters a collaborative culture that reflects the integrative nature of the center's mission — ensuring that its internal work is always in service of its larger role as a convener, connector, and thought leader for philanthropy.

Primary Duties

1. Strategic Visioning

- Represent and promote a unified vision for the Johnson Center's areas of activity. Develop organizational goals and objectives that advance the center's mission to provide leadership training, applied research, and innovative resources for strengthening community-serving organizations.
- Lead the development of programming, research, and revenue strategies, ensuring alignment with the center's mission, donor intent, and strategic goals. Make timely, informed decisions that keep the center moving forward with clarity and purpose and oversee the effective and accurate implementation of related systems and strategies.

- Establish and enhance accountability systems to measure and track the center's effectiveness and overall impact.
- Serve as a key liaison and partner to the GVSU community and administration, representing the center's interests and integrating its work within the university's academic mission.

2. External Communication and Field Building

- Steward the Johnson Center's history, culture, reputation, and strategic vision in regional, national, and philanthropic communities.
- Serve as the primary spokesperson and thought leader for the center, effectively representing it in local, regional, and national settings, including media outlets, conferences, and public discourse.
- Communicate the center's work strategically to inspire philanthropic and partnership support.
- Collaborate effectively with foundation leaders, peer institutions, and philanthropic partners to advance the field and expand the center's reach and impact.

3. Team Leadership

- Foster and maintain a culture of teamwork, mutual respect, and collaboration among staff.
- Support the center's directors in their roles, promote professional development, and actively participate as a member of the Johnson Center's leadership team, relevant university and academic affairs committees, and as lead liaison to the Johnson Center's external Leadership Council.

4. Financial Sustainability

- Lead and diversify revenue growth through grants, gifts, earned income opportunities, and fundraising initiatives, working closely with the Johnson Center's Leadership Council and GVSU's Provost and University Development offices.
- Oversee budget development and management, ensuring sound fiscal practices and alignment with the center's strategic priorities.
- Manage and steward the center's endowment funds, ensuring responsible investment oversight and adherence to donor intent, in partnership with University Development.

5. Perform other duties required/assigned by leadership

Required Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

- A graduate-level degree from an accredited college or university.
- Successful executive leadership experience, including developing and communicating a shared organizational vision and making decisive, strategic decisions in complex environments.
- Demonstrated experience working within or in close partnership with a college or university, including an understanding of academic culture and the ability to build effective relationships with faculty, academic leadership, and administrative offices.
- Substantial experience in the philanthropic sector, with deep knowledge of its challenges, opportunities, and best practices, and an established presence in the field.
- A demonstrated commitment to and passion for the advancement of philanthropy, with a deep interest in strengthening the nonprofit sector.
- Proven ability to serve as a thought leader and spokesperson, with excellent written and verbal communication and diplomatic skills suited to diverse audiences and settings.
- Fundraising acumen, evidenced by leadership or significant participation in major campaigns, grant acquisition, and earned income development.
- Proficiency in budget development, financial management, and endowment stewardship.
- A professional history marked by strong relationship-building, active community involvement, and the ability to cultivate and leverage networks to advance organizational and sector goals.
- Demonstrated ability to work collaboratively across internal teams, university partners, and external stakeholders, fostering cooperation, consensus, and meaningful engagement.
- Proficiency in personnel oversight, project management, and leadership volunteer engagement.
- Proven experience in overseeing the development and refinement of programmatic offerings, informed by sector knowledge and stakeholder engagement.
- Understanding of applied social research and the strategic use of data in the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors.
- An entrepreneurial mindset with the ability to navigate and thrive within both university and community-based environments.

GVSU COMPETENCIES

Innovator Mentality • Fosters Inclusive and Equitable Community • Well-Being Oriented
Asset Mindset • Acts with Integrity • Emotionally Intelligent • Collaborative Teamwork • Empowering

Preferred Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

- A Ph.D., M.B.A., or other terminal degree relevant to the fields of philanthropy, nonprofit management, public administration, or the social sciences.
- An established national reputation in the philanthropic field, including a record of published scholarship, keynote or conference leadership, and/or recognized policy contributions.
- Experience leading or significantly growing an academic center, institute, or similarly structured unit or organization.
- An existing network of relationships with major foundations, philanthropic intermediaries, and national nonprofit sector organizations.
- A demonstrated record of donor stewardship and championing long-term financial sustainability, including cultivating lasting donor relationships and securing resources that ensure organizational resilience.
- Familiarity with the Michigan philanthropic and nonprofit landscape.
- Experience designing or overseeing applied research initiatives, including the development of publications, reports, or resources with broad sector impact.
- A record of successful major gift fundraising and donor cultivation at the leadership level.

Working Conditions

Normal office environment. Some travel may be required. The requirements listed are representative of the knowledge, skill and/or ability required.

Physical Demands: To perform this job successfully, an individual must be able to perform each essential duty satisfactorily. Must have the physical stamina to work long hours and/or more than 5 days per week. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.

The information contained in this job description is for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act as amended by the ADA Amendment Act (2008), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and other applicable federal and state laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability. GVSU will provide reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals with disabilities upon request.

Salary and Benefits

Minimum starting salary of \$150,000, commensurate with experience. Comprehensive benefits package including medical, vision, dental, life insurance, generous employer retirement contributions, wellness resources, and tuition waiver effective on date of hire.

HOW TO APPLY

[Apply online here](#) or visit jobs.gvsu.edu and type “Johnson Center” in the search bar. Attach your cover letter and resume. Applications missing required documents will not be considered. The system will allow you to attach these documents electronically. If you have questions about the position or the posting, please contact [Elizabeth Dale](#). If you need technical assistance, please contact GVSU Human Resources at hro@gvsu.edu or call (616) 331-2215.

Application Deadline: Application review begins May 1, 2026, and this posting may be closed at any time at the discretion of the University.

Grand Valley State University is an Antidiscrimination/Equal Opportunity Employer, which includes providing equal opportunity for protected veterans and individuals with disabilities. University policy extends protections to additional identities.



For more information about Grand Valley State University, visit www.gvsu.edu.

Grand Valley State University is an EOE which includes protected veterans and individuals with disabilities. See <http://www.gvsu.edu/affirmative/>. TDD Callers: Call Michigan Relay Center **1-800-649-3777**.