



Vice President of Research
Heartland Forward

Heartland Forward seeks a strategic leader to serve as Vice President of Research based in Bentonville, Arkansas.

About the Organization:

Heartland Forward is a first of its kind think-and-do-tank focused on the heartland – the 20 states in the middle of the country that make up the third largest economy in the world. Heartland Forward’s goal – accelerate economic growth and help change the narrative in the middle of the country, accelerate economic growth and help change the narrative in the middle of the country and generate \$500M in economic impact by 2030.

The Heartland Forward team is focused on impact and scale. Heartland Forward is building the capacity, talent and network to operate not just as a thought leader, but as a builder connecting policymakers, entrepreneurs, philanthropists and civic leaders around a shared agenda: unlocking the full potential of the middle of the country. This is about translating insight into implementation, driving regional competitiveness, advancing education, workforce and healthy communities. This requires solutions that are practical, replicable and nationally relevant. At its core, Heartland Forward is a convener of uncommon alignment, bridging sectors, geographies and ideologies to drive progress where it matters most. By deepening its research excellence directly into applied solutions, the organization is shaping a new model for impact: one that is agile, entrepreneurial and grounded in results.

Heartland Forward is not just advocating for the heartland, it is actively collaborating with leaders, communities and investors to drive economic success. The ambition is clear: to ensure the heartland’s economic future is balanced, resilient and a leader for the entire country.

For more information about Heartland Forward, visit their website at:

<https://heartlandforward.org>

About the Position:

Heartland Forward seeks a Vice President of Research to lead and scale its work at the intersection of economics, policy and community impact. This leader will not only generate rigorous research but actively translate ideas into action, building a dynamic network of academic excellence and ensuring that insights drive tangible outcomes across the heartland.

The Vice President of Research will serve as a connector and catalyst, linking leading scholars, practitioners and policymakers to advance Heartland Forward's mission. This individual will bring a strong orientation toward execution, building a high-performing team and fostering a culture that moves seamlessly from insight to implementation. Reporting directly to the President, the Vice President of Research will lead an integrated research function, spanning internal staff, external fellows and a broader network of academic partners. This leader will ensure that Heartland Forward's research is rigorous, deeply actionable, influencing policy, informing programs and strengthening economic outcomes across the region.

This role is central to advancing Heartland Forward's think-and-do model, bridging academic excellence with real-world application. The Vice President of Research will build and mobilize a network of leading universities, researchers and institutions, positioning Heartland Forward as a hub for applied research and innovation. As a member of the senior leadership team, the Vice President of Research will work closely with the President, Board and colleagues across the organization to help shape strategy, strengthen execution and support the continued growth and evolution of Heartland Forward.

The broad goals and responsibilities facing the Vice President of Research are the following:

Responsibilities

- Design and execute a research strategy that prioritizes practical application, delivering insights that directly inform policy, programs and economic development outcomes.
- Develop and manage a robust network of university partners, research fellows and subject-matter experts, ensuring Heartland Forward is connected to leading-edge thinking and talent.
- Recruit, mentor and manage a mission-driven research team, fostering a culture of collaboration, accountability and impact.
- Ensure research outputs are actionable, accessible and aligned with implementation, collaborating closely with internal teams to bring ideas to life in communities across the heartland.
- Serve as a trusted advisor and thought partner to the President and Board, contributing to strategic decisions and organizational direction.

- Represent Heartland Forward as a leader in the field, engaging policymakers, media, funders and stakeholders to shape national conversations around economic growth.
- Oversee the research budget and align investments with strategic priorities and impact goals.

The ideal professional qualifications and personal attributes of the Vice President of Research consist of the following:

Professional Qualifications

- A Minimum of 10 years leading high-impact research initiatives with a strong record of translating analysis into real-world outcomes.
- Ph.D., in economics, public policy, regional development or a related field (or equivalent experience), highly preferred.
- Proven ability to build, manage and inspire high-performing teams in complex, fast-paced environments.
- Experience working across organizations and functions, aligning research with broader strategic and operational goals.
- Strong record of building relationships across sectors, including academia, government, philanthropy and business.
- Deep grounding in quantitative and qualitative methods, economic analysis and policy research.
- Familiarity with the economic and social dynamics of the heartland.
- Experience securing funding and managing research grants.

Personal Characteristics:

- Entrepreneurial mindset with a bias toward action.
- Collaborative, team-oriented leadership style.
- Intellectual curiosity paired with practical execution.
- Ability to operate and communicate effectively in a dynamic, growing organization.
- Strong interpersonal skills and sound judgment.
- Resilient, adaptable, and solutions oriented.
- Commitment to the highest standards of ethics, rigor, and professionalism.

Compensation

Compensation for the Vice President of Research includes a comprehensive compensation and benefits package.

How to Apply

Interested candidates should submit a cover letter describing how their skills and background fit this position along with a resume to Daniel Sherman, President, Explore Company at resumes@explorecompany.com. Refer to HF/VPR in the subject line. No phone inquiries please.

Heartland Forward is an Equal Opportunity Employer and welcomes a diverse pool of candidates for this search. All correspondence will remain confidential.