

February 2026

## Strategic Consulting for the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research: **Final Report**

### Overview

Urban Impact Advisors (UIA) is pleased to provide this final report to the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW). This report summarizes project findings and outlines a set of recommendations for how the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research (OVCR) can develop an inspiring and achievable strategic vision and focus and advance the University's research enterprise within the next several years.

The information and perspectives shared in this report follow the completion of three phases of work completed over nine months, as follows:

- **Existing conditions analysis:** UIA built a thorough understanding of current internal and external perspectives and relevant information. This phase of work included a review of existing internal documents, materials and data provided by OVCR; gathering and analyzing the perspectives of nearly 100 key UW stakeholders; and external benchmarking of peer institutions. Peers were selected by UW. Research and interviews were conducted by UIA.
- **Visioning and goal setting:** UIA engaged the UW team to ideate and test options for vision, mission and strategic initiatives, as identified and influenced by learnings from Phase 1.
- **Testing and finalizing:** UIA drafted and finalized deliverables, guided by project goals, and utilizing input and decisioning in previous phases.

More detailed information from our quantitative analysis and review of peer institutions can be found in the appendix of this report.

### Key findings

UW is one of the great research universities of the world. Its strength reflects great faculty, excellent students and remarkable research facilities. The challenge is to maintain UW's current position against formidable competitors that have inherent advantages that UW cannot match. UCLA, for example, has local fundraising potential which is much greater than UW. UCSD has a

remarkable climate. Despite these facts, we believe UW has great opportunity to grow the impact of its research endeavors. Doing so, however, will require careful consideration of the current landscape and stakeholder feedback, which strongly suggests that the University and OVCR must make significant changes in order to achieve this vision.

Comparative data makes it very clear that UW's major competitive challenge, vis-a-vis the other great public research universities of America, is the relatively low level of medical school research. Compared to its peers, UW receives \$250-350M less in research funding annually. Closing this gap is a major priority of the new Dean of Medicine and Public Health and much work is currently underway, including examining the funds flow between clinical medicine and research. None of the very top tier medical research institutions can achieve greatness without a very large flow of resources from clinical practice to research.

While this work is going on, much remains to be done, both by the University and the OVCR. RSP, a program that touches all funded faculty members, is in need of great improvement. This conclusion was stressed in the majority of our interviews and reflected in University wide surveys. There is also much skepticism about whether the WARF grant is being best used to advance UW's goals. This is a complex issue and certain multi-year commitments constrain the ability to make short-term changes, but the perception needs to be addressed and progress made. The University must become less risk-averse if it wants to achieve its goal of greater industrial support.

To become the interdisciplinary research leader that UW needs, OVCR needs to change as well. We believe the organizational structure of the office should be significantly revised, moving closer to the UCLA and Northwestern model and moving from a reliance on part-time faculty to more full-time leaders. The office and its leadership needs to focus on interdisciplinary research, building support with Deans and Associate Deans for Research and supporting the most promising new ideas. In order to perform this role, we recommend that a new unit be established inside the office to support faculty in developing ideas that have the potential for large-scale impact.

Lastly, a set clear success metrics should be developed that give visibility to the impact of all OVCR investments, including through the WARF grant. OVCR needs to explain to all where OVCR investments are going and why and what the impact has been. Special attention should be on proactively identifying applied research opportunities that aid the State of Wisconsin, as they are a major investor in the University's budget.

## KEY FINDINGS

- 1 Medical research is underfunded**
  - A total funding gap exists in comparison to peers
  - More investment from the healthcare system is needed
- 2 Programs need improvement**
  - The perception of RSP implementation needs to improve
  - WARF is a unique opportunity that should create more value
- 3 OVCR changes are in order**
  - Adapt structure to more closely align with peers
  - Reduce reliance on part-time faculty
  - Relationship building with Deans must be a key VC role
  - Establish a new unit to support interdisciplinary research ideas
- 4 Investment case must be made**
  - Develop clear success metrics for all programs & investments
  - Make the case for who and why investments are being made
  - Look for applied research opportunities that aid the state

## Quantitative analysis

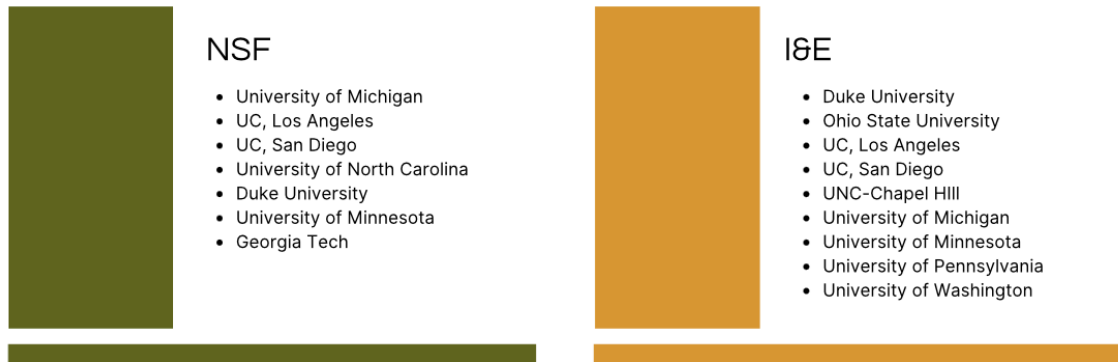
The following analysis was developed after a careful review of National Science Foundation (NSF) data for UW and seven peer universities. In addition, UIA assessed the innovation & entrepreneurship (I&E) performance for UW and these same seven peers plus a few additional institutions. Detailed charts are provided in the appendix of this document.

We discovered the following in our review:

From 2020 to 2023, UW's research funding grew by \$352 million. This tracked close to the average of its peer institutions. UW outperformed growth at the University of Michigan during this period, lagged well behind faster-growing peers such as Georgia Tech and the University of North Carolina, and was broadly comparable to most others in its cohort.

While growth has been steady and impressive, it has not been sufficient to materially change UW's relative standing among top research universities. UW has, for many years, ranked between 5th and 8th in total research funding among American universities.

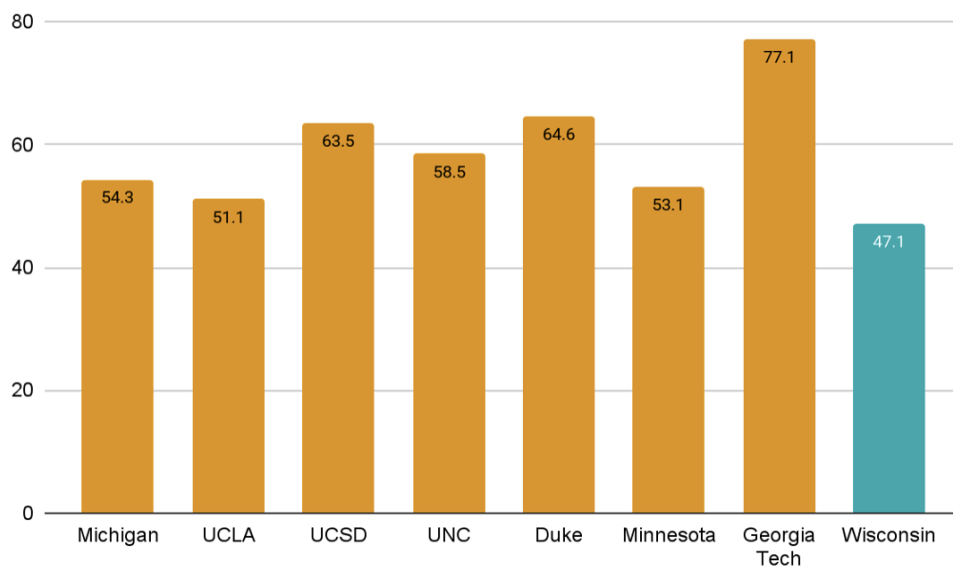
# PEER ANALYSIS



The composition of UW's research funding differs markedly from that of its peers. UW has by far the lowest share of federally sponsored research and also trails peers in industry-sponsored funding.

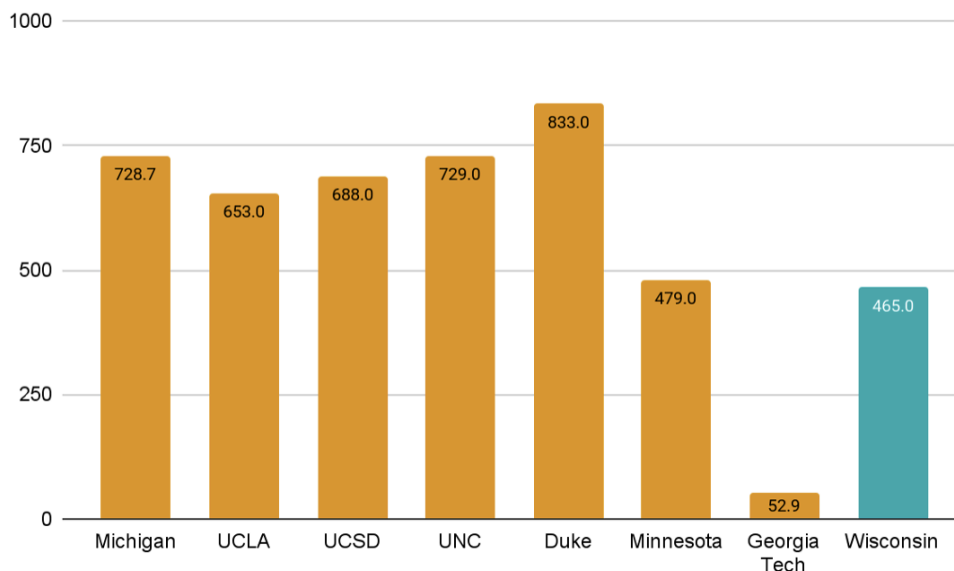
In contrast, it receives substantially higher-than-average support from institutional sources and from state and local government. This pattern suggests that UW's research enterprise must continue to pay more attention to their home state's priorities than is typical among its peers. In FY23, UW research support from state and local sources was \$125.5M. The high degree of institutional support likely reflects contributions from out-of-state student tuition.

## Percent of dollars from Federal sources: UW and peers



The most significant threat to UW's ability to retain its national ranking is its noticeable underperformance in funding from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). With the exception of Minnesota and Georgia Tech (which lacks a medical school), all peers generate approximately \$200–\$350 million more than UW in annual HHS research funding.

## 2023 HHS funding (in millions): UW and peers



Although UW performs well in funding from the Department of Energy, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the National Science Foundation—ranking in the top two among peers for each—these strengths are insufficient to offset the HHS shortfall.

UW also ranks slightly below the peer median in Department of Defense (DOD) funding, particularly when compared to Georgia Tech, which receives nearly seven times more DOD funding than any other institution.

Finally, despite its strong research legacy, UW underperforms peers across most measures of entrepreneurial activity, an unexpected finding given the university's history and the reputation of WARF. It is worth noting, however, that among the original seven peers we reviewed, only Duke received over \$30M in revenue from entrepreneurial activity. While there are a few institutions that receive very large payouts in some years (i.e Penn in recent years), these extraordinary successes are rare and very episodic.

**In short:** UW–Madison's research funding growth is very good but structurally constrained by an unusually low share of federal—especially HHS—funding, which limits its ability to keep pace with leading peers despite very strong performance in other agencies.

## Benchmarking

As a key component of assessing UW's existing conditions, UIA compared the performance of the OVCR with offices at seven benchmark universities. One university –UCSD– was not responsive to requests for information.

The following represents conclusions from our comparative analysis of the remaining six, which included a review of quantitative information and interviews. We also describe some of the achievements of each institution and provide organizational charts for selected institutions in the appendix of this document.

### Key learnings from peers

Interviews with peer institutions and a review of their VPR organizations point to a consistent model for effective research leadership. At peer institutions, the Office of Research is typically organized to give the VPR both strategic influence at the executive level and clear operational leverage over the research enterprise. Strong VPRs are deeply embedded in senior leadership decision-making while maintaining close, active ties to schools, departments, and major research centers. This dual positioning enables them to translate institutional priorities into coordinated academic and research initiatives.

Across peers, VPR portfolios are broad but intentionally structured. In addition to compliance and research administration functions, VPRs commonly oversee innovation and entrepreneurship, corporate partnerships, and in some cases economic development and government relations— all areas that are notably absent from UW's OVCR reporting structure.

UW's OVCR office is highly decentralized. Many back-office, centers, and communications functions report directly to the VCR, where they more typically report to a VPR subordinate at peer institutions. While UW's VCR has a large number of direct reports, relatively few are tied to innovation, commercialization, or external engagement, making the institution an outlier among its peers.

Peer institutions also exhibit a much stronger "lab-to-market" orientation. Their organizational charts reflect a clear mandate to drive technology commercialization, foster corporate partnerships, and connect basic research to use-inspired and applied outcomes. This structural clarity allows for tighter coordination across the research lifecycle—from discovery to translation—and positions the VPR as a central integrator of academic, industry, and funding relationships. At UW, the absence of these functions within OVCR limits connectivity across the research enterprise and constrains the VPR's ability to influence downstream impact.

Consistent with these structural differences, VPRs at peer institutions devote substantial time to leading major academic initiatives, including clinical trials expansion, interdisciplinary program development, and the creation of new schools and institutes. They are uniformly senior faculty members supported by relatively few other faculty in senior OVCR roles. Most also control flexible institutional funds that can be deployed as start-up or seed investments to catalyze new ideas, assemble interdisciplinary teams, and support large, complex research proposals.

Externally, VPRs frequently serve as visible university spokespersons, actively engaging funders, policymakers, and industry partners. Examples from peers underscore how structure and authority translate into impact.

For instance:

- At **The University of Minnesota**, the VPR's office established a Clinical Research Support Center that functions as a one-stop shop for IRB review, controlled substances oversight, pre-approvals, and grant support. The office also played a major role in launching the Institute for Engineering in Medicine and investing directly in faculty-led program growth.
- At **UNC**, the VPR's office coordinates large, multi-site clinical trials, provides up to \$500,000 in planning grants to cross-school faculty teams, and operates a professional research development office staffed with program managers that support faculty teams.
- **Georgia Tech's** Office of Research manages the Georgia Tech Research Institute, a UARC responsible for roughly \$900 million of the university's total research volume.
- **UCLA's** VPR office sets institution-wide research goals and was instrumental in planning the bioengineering and data programs.
- **Duke's** VPR office has built a layered internal grants program to systematically support faculty research development.

In our view, UW's unique VCR role and decentralized reporting lines dilute the strategic coherence typically seen in peer VPR offices.

## Key stakeholder interviews

To complete the existing conditions analysis phase of this project, UIA interviewed nearly 100 members of the university community to gather perspectives about the OVCR in semi-structured conversations. Interviewees included nearly all Dean's, large center directors, all OVCR leaders, many senior staff, the Chancellor and her Chief of Staff, and a number of research faculty. We investigated deeply held perceptions from faculty and other leaders. No students were interviewed.

We found insights grouped into two major categories: University issues and OVCR issues. The following is a summary of the major themes within those categories from our interviews:

### University issues

Stakeholder interviews surfaced a consistent set of concerns about UW's research agenda and its ability to adapt to a rapidly changing external environment. Foremost among these is deep anxiety about the future of federal research funding. Interviewees emphasized that shifting federal policies have created significant uncertainty and administrative strain across the institution, with particularly acute pressure on the OVCR.

Stakeholders also pointed to challenges in the University's partnership with UW Hospitals and Clinics. Medical School leaders expressed concern that the health system does not view the academic excellence of university physicians as central to its brand or long-term strategy. Financially, many questioned the size and target (school versus department) of the health system's annual contribution to the Medical School. Also of concern were the limited strategic partnerships between the medical school and the core campus.

A lack of a clear, institution-wide research strategy emerged as another major theme. Many academic leaders reported that the University does not have clearly articulated research priorities, even while acknowledging that UW's highly democratic culture and strength across many disciplines makes it difficult to impose a centralized strategy.

This absence of strategic clarity is compounded by structural and cultural barriers to change. Interviewees described UW as having an unusually flat organizational structure, very strong faculty governance, very limited budgetary authority at the provost level, and a historical lack of accountability for deans—all contributing to what many characterized as a low-control environment in which meaningful change is difficult to execute.

Risk aversion and institutional inertia were frequently cited as consequences of this environment. Many stakeholders perceive UW as unusually risk averse, and the vast majority believe this conservatism hinders innovation and corporate partnerships.

Relatedly, there is a widespread perception that academic programs are rarely, if ever, sunsetted, making it difficult to reallocate resources, invest in emerging areas, or launch new programs. Concerns about insufficient staffing further exacerbate these issues, with many staff reporting that current staffing levels are inadequate to provide high-quality service to faculty and students.

Finally, interviewees highlighted the complexity of state politics as a constraint on the University's research agenda. The relationship between UW and the Wisconsin state legislature is widely viewed as strained, shaped in part by distrust stemming from the University's perceived political orientation.

Legislators are seen as prioritizing education for Wisconsin residents and applied research that drives economic development, supports key state industries, and creates jobs, rather than basic research. Several stakeholders argued that the University—and particularly the VCR—could do more to demonstrate UW's value to the state and to align elements of the research agenda with economic development goals. While challenging, many interviewees viewed this dynamic as an opportunity for the administration to better articulate how external-facing narratives and initiatives can strengthen state support for the University's broader research mission.

### University issues

- Federal funding concerns
- University-Hospital partnership
- Lack of clear research strategy
- Difficulty of change-making
- Risk aversion
- Perception of perpetuity
- Insufficient staffing
- Complex state politics

**Main takeaway:** Stakeholders see UW's research agenda as constrained by external uncertainty and internal inertia—marked by federal funding anxiety, weak alignment with the health system and the state, unclear strategic priorities, and a highly risk-averse, low-control governance environment that makes meaningful change difficult.

## OVCR issues

Interviews with university stakeholders revealed a broadly mixed assessment of OVCR's performance, shaped by operational concerns, uncertainty about the office's institutional influence and concerns about the use of the WARF grant.

Perceptions of OVCR appear to be strongly influenced by its history. Many interviewees characterized the office as having been weak or ineffective under prior leadership, and this legacy continues to shape expectations. The current VCR is widely viewed as capable, but many stakeholders are reserving judgment until tangible changes are implemented. Several noted a sense of urgency and expressed a desire to see visible action sooner rather than later.

A recurring theme was OVCR's perceived lack of institutional influence. The office is often described as insufficiently empowered or too peripheral to major university initiatives, with its limited role in RISE frequently cited as evidence. While the RISE initiative is viewed as perhaps no more controversial than other administration-led efforts, many academic leaders questioned its transparency and strategic coherence, and several expressed concern that OVCR has not clearly shaped or owned the initiative. More broadly, stakeholders see data analytics and computing as a critical area where UW must sustain its historic strengths, presenting both a risk and an opportunity for OVCR leadership.

Given this perspective, stakeholders indicated that OVCR would benefit from being clearly accountable for a major, high-profile initiative that demonstrates its strategic value. Relatedly, OVCR has historically been viewed as siloed from the Chancellor and Provost. While there is evidence this is no longer the case, interviewees emphasized the importance of visibly demonstrating coordination and alignment with senior leadership.

In addition, stakeholders expressed mixed views about OVCR's organizational model, particularly the reliance on senior faculty serving as part-time Associate Vice Chancellors. Many argued that a greater number of full-time leaders focused on service and execution—rather than balancing OVCR duties with personal academic goals—would improve effectiveness, a concern also voiced by external partners. Others acknowledged that the current model provides an important mechanism for faculty oversight, underscoring a core tension between efficiency and shared governance at UW.

The most consistent and urgent criticism centered on long-standing operational issues in RSP. These concerns were widespread and persistent, with particularly strong dissatisfaction expressed by the School of Medicine and Public Health. Despite increased staffing, RSP service ratings declined between 2022 and 2024, reinforcing perceptions that operational performance has not kept pace with need. Many interviewees warned that these issues are eroding trust in OVCR and undermining confidence in its ability to pursue more ambitious strategic goals.



There was little consensus regarding the role of OVCR-managed research centers. While most stakeholders believe the centers do very strong work, some deans questioned whether certain centers would be better housed within schools. Looking forward, stakeholders broadly supported the creation of a project management office within OVCR to help faculty compete for very large, complex grants, though several emphasized that addressing core operational deficiencies must be the immediate priority.

Finally, many leaders highlighted an unmet opportunity for OVCR to act as a convener—bringing together faculty with shared interests across schools to foster interdisciplinary collaboration—citing models such as the University of Chicago's workshop series as particularly effective.

### OVCR issues

- RISE and computing concerns
- Previous ineffectiveness
- Perceived lack of influence
- Siloed from other leaders
- Organizational model
- Long-standing operational concerns
- Role of OVCR research centers
- Project management support
- Need to convene

**Main takeaway:** Stakeholders see OVCR as a well-intentioned but historically underpowered office whose credibility and influence are constrained by persistent operational challenges, unclear ownership of major initiatives, and an organizational model that limits its ability to lead strategically—making visible execution, improved core services, and clearer alignment with university leadership urgent priorities.

## Recommendations for action

The following recommendations aim to strengthen UW's research enterprise within the next several years, by leveraging learnings from effective peers and addressing key issues and barriers to success -at both the University and OVCR level- raised by stakeholders. Please note that the distinction between University issues and OVCR issues is not always clear. OVCR must be a player in University decision making and often other units must contribute for OVCR to be successful.

### University action plan (0-2.5 years)

The University action plan will strengthen UW's research enterprise by improving financial alignment, clarifying strategic priorities, reducing risk aversion, and modernizing incentives and governance to support large-scale, interdisciplinary research.

#### 1. Strengthen the UW Health–University partnership

**Objective:** Increase sustainable revenue to support the School of Medicine and Public Health and improve alignment between clinical and academic missions.

##### Key Actions

- Maximize the financial relationship between UW Health and the University to increase annual research contribution.
- Ensure academic excellence and research productivity are explicitly reflected in the health system's strategy and brand.
- Coordinate research priorities between School of Medicine and Public Health and the rest of campus

**Ownership:** Chancellor and Dean of the School of Medicine and Public Health

**Status:** Currently underway

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#### 2. Develop 3-5 University research priorities

**Objective:** Provide strategic focus and guide investment decisions across the research enterprise.

##### Key Actions

- Lead a structured, inclusive process that engages faculty, deans, and shared governance bodies in evaluating options and making decisions

**Ownership:** OVCR (process lead), in partnership with the Provost and Deans

**Key Consideration:** Any strategic planning process risks becoming very divisive. Success depends on transparency, broad participation, and careful facilitation. In an institution like UW where academic strength is very widespread, it is critical that areas that are not among the top 3-5 priorities continue to be supported.

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### 3. Reduce institutional risk aversion

**Objective:** Support innovation and corporate partnerships by aligning UW's risk policies and practices with those of peer research universities.

#### Key Actions

- Appoint a Chancellor-led committee representing faculty, administration, legal counsel, and other key stakeholders.
- Review formal policies, approval processes, legal constraints, and faculty experiences that contribute to risk-averse behavior.
- Recommend changes to bring UW in line with peer norms while managing institutional risk.

**Ownership:** Chancellor

**Deliverable:** Policy and practice recommendations with peer benchmarking.

**Status:** Currently underway

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### 4. Redesign faculty incentives to reward large-scale grant proposals

**Objective:** Increase competition for major interdisciplinary and multi-investigator awards.

#### Key Actions

- Establish a formal Provost-led process to provide course release time for faculty preparing large, interdisciplinary grant proposals.
- Clarify that release time for grant preparation benefiting a single school should be supported at the dean level.

**Ownership:** Provost (policy and process), Deans (school-level implementation)

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## 5. Define a University strategy for innovation & entrepreneurship

**Objective:** Increase the flow of commercial products produced by the University.

**Key actions:**

- Determine go-forward strategy for I&E organization that more tightly integrates functions with basic research priorities.

**Considerations:** We see two options for improving I&E at UW. The first, consistent with many peer institutions, is to integrate I&E into the OVCR. The second is to create a new Vice Chancellor for Innovation and Entrepreneurship and Economic Development. Either path would strengthen coordination with WARF. Integrating I&E into OVCR strengthens the tie to University research. Creating a separate Vice Chancellor aids visibility and connects directly to economic development. The recent hiring of a AVC for I&E reporting to the Provost, confuses the situation somewhat. Even if the separate Vice Chancellor path is chosen, it is critical to integrate commercialization, corporate engagement, and use-inspired research with basic research priorities.

**Ownership:** Chancellor

### University action plan (0-2.5 years)

GOAL	OBJECTIVE	KEY ACTIONS	OWNER
Strengthen UW Health–University partnership	Increase sustainable revenue to support the School of Medicine and Public Health and improve alignment between clinical and academic missions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximize the financial relationship between UW Health and the University to increase annual research contribution.</li> <li>• Ensure academic excellence and research productivity are explicitly reflected in the health system’s strategy and brand.</li> </ul>	Chancellor & Deans of SOM and PH
Develop 3-5 University research priorities	Provide strategic focus and guide investment decisions across the research enterprise.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead a structured, inclusive process that engages faculty, deans, and shared governance bodies in evaluating options and making decisions.</li> </ul>	OVCR (process lead), Provost & Deans
Reduce institutional risk aversion	Support innovation and corporate partnerships by aligning UW’s policies and practices with those of peer research universities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appoint a Chancellor-led committee representing faculty, administration, legal counsel, and other key stakeholders.</li> <li>• Review formal policies, approval processes, legal constraints, and faculty experiences that contribute to risk-averse behavior.</li> <li>• Recommend changes to bring UW in line with peer norms while managing institutional risk.</li> </ul>	Chancellor
Redesign faculty incentives to reward large-scale grant proposals	Increase competition for major interdisciplinary and multi-investigator awards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a formal Provost-led process to provide course release time for faculty preparing large, interdisciplinary grant proposals.</li> <li>• Clarify that release time for grant preparation benefiting a single school should be supported at the dean level.</li> </ul>	Provost (policy) & Deans (school implementation)
Define a University strategy for innovation & entrepreneurship	Increase the flow of commercial products produced by the University.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine go-forward strategy for I&amp;E organization that more tightly integrates functions with basic research priorities.</li> </ul>	Chancellor

## OVCR action plan (0-24 months)

The OVCR action plan will strengthen the research enterprise by restoring confidence in OVCR's operational performance, clarifying its strategic role, and positioning the office to lead high-impact, interdisciplinary research and external engagement on behalf of the University.

### Phase I: (0-9 months)

#### 1. Enhance RSP Services

**Objective:** Restore trust by delivering reliable, high-quality service in grant administration.

##### Key Actions

- Publicly acknowledge the severity of performance challenges in RSP.
- Make operational improvements in RSP the OVCR's top near-term priority.
- Publish clear, regular performance data for all OVCR process functions, including but not limited to RSP.
- Implement a proactive communication strategy to set expectations and demonstrate progress.

**Considerations:** RSP is not an entirely OVCR owned process. Information comes from the Schools to OVCR to be processed. Our strong sense is that the RSP issues noted reflect, in many cases, problems at many parts of the process flow. Improved performance will require intense work within RSP and other units as well

**Ownership:** VCR

**Priority:** Highest — foundational to all other reforms

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#### 2. Restructure OVCR to improve faculty service and research oversight

**Objective:** Reorganize OVCR to emphasize research services and operations according to the details at the end of this document.

##### Key Actions:

- Explain to campus and external stakeholders that these actions are occurring so that faculty can receive better service from the office and so the OVCR can provide greater oversight of research strategy.

- Redo job descriptions of Associate Vice Chancellors as needed and reorganize staff according to the new collections of duties.
- See page 21 for a proposed new organizational chart
- The proposed new organization reduces the number of AVC's from 8 to 5. Because the number of the current AVC's are part-time, the decline in FTEs is from 5.73 to 5.

**Ownership:** VCR

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### **3. Redesign the WARF grant program**

**Objective:** Increase support for transformative research.

#### **Key Actions**

- Restructure the WARF grant program to emphasize large scale, interdisciplinarity, and transformational investments. This is the priority of WARF leadership and has the potential to unlock additional funding.
- Widely communicate the reality that much of WARF's existing funding is fixed in the short-term and essential to support key university priorities. Major changes will come over time and with incremental funding.
- Continue the current level (adjusted for inflation) of WARF funding for Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences.

**Ownership:** VCR, in partnership with WARF leadership

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### **4. Build capacity for UW to obtain large interdisciplinary grants**

**Objective:** Improve competitiveness for major public and private awards.

#### **Key Actions**

- Establish a dedicated office, reporting to an Associate Vice Chancellor, and support program within OVCR to assist faculty teams pursuing large interdisciplinary grants.
- Provide professional project management, proposal development, and coordination support.
- Sequence implementation to follow initial stabilization of grant-processing operations.

**Ownership:** OVCR leadership

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## **5. Increase engagement with deans and research leadership in the schools.**

**Objective:** Strengthen alignment and coordination across schools.

### **Key Actions**

- It is essential that the OVCR is fully integrated with and in constant touch with UW's academic units. Establish standing monthly meetings between OVCR and Deans and Associate Deans for Research in all schools.
- Treat these meetings as mandatory for the VCR.
- Ensure meetings are personally led by the VCR to signal importance and accountability.

**Ownership:** VCR

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## **6. Measure and communicate OVCR impact**

**Objective:** Demonstrate the logic and value of OVCR investments and activities.

### **Key Actions**

- Develop and implement a system to track outcomes and impacts from all OVCR-managed grant programs and investments, including from WARF and fall competition.
- Publish the results widely.
- Require school communications officers to share press releases and related material on research with OVCR so that a university-wide research message can be shared
- Use results to inform future funding decisions and external communications.
- This recommendation will require additional communications staff within OVCR

**Ownership:** OVCR

## OVCR action plan: Phase I (0-9 months)

GOAL	OBJECTIVE	KEY ACTIONS	OWNER
Fix RSP	Restore trust by delivering reliable, high-quality service in grant administration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Publicly acknowledge the severity of performance challenges in RSP.</li> <li>Make improvements in RSP the OVCR's top near-term priority.</li> <li>Publish clear, regular performance data for all of OVCR.</li> <li>Implement proactive comms strategy to demonstrate progress.</li> </ul>	VCR
Restructure OVCR to improve faculty service and research oversight	Reorganize OVCR to emphasize research services and operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Redo job descriptions of Associate Vice Chancellors as needed and reorganize staff according to the new collections of duties.</li> <li>Develop communications strategy to explain rationale.</li> </ul>	VCR
Redesign the WARF grant program	Increase support for transformative research.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emphasis on large scale, interdisciplinary, transformational.</li> <li>Widely communicate constraints of the current reality Make major changes over time and with incremental funding.</li> <li>Continue the current level (adjusted for inflation) of WARF funding for Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences.</li> </ul>	VCR, in partnership with WARF leadership
Build capacity for UW to obtain large interdisciplinary grants	Improve competitiveness for major public and private awards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a dedicated office and support program within OVCR to assist faculty teams pursuing large interdisciplinary grants.</li> <li>Provide professional project management, proposal development, and coordination support.</li> <li>Sequence implementation to follow initial stabilization of grant-processing operations.</li> </ul>	OVCR leadership
Increase engagement with deans and school research leaders	Strengthen alignment and coordination across schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish standing monthly meetings between OVCR and Deans and Associate Deans for Research in all schools.</li> <li>Treat these meetings as mandatory for the VCR.</li> <li>Ensure meetings are personally led by the VCR.</li> </ul>	VCR
Measure and communicate OVCR impact	Demonstrate the logic and value of OVCR investments and activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and implement a system to track outcomes and impacts .</li> <li>Publish the results widely.</li> <li>Develop a university-wide research message with comms officers.</li> <li>Use results to inform future funding decisions and external comms.</li> </ul>	OVCR

## Phase II: (9–24 Months)

### 7. Establish the VCR as a state-facing research leader

**Objective:** Strengthen the University's relationship with the State of Wisconsin by clearly articulating the public value of UW research.

#### Key Actions

- Position the VCR as a visible spokesperson on research impact to state leaders and the public.
- Coordinate planning and messaging with the University Relations Office.
- Emphasize applied research outcomes in areas such as health care access, agriculture, job creation, new company formation, public education, and government efficiency.

**Ownership:** VCR, in coordination with University Relations

## 8. Advance applied research in service to Wisconsin

**Objective:** Align elements of the research agenda with state priorities and public benefit.

### Key Actions

- Systematically identify and promote opportunities for applied research that directly serve Wisconsin residents.
- Integrate these opportunities into OVCR planning, communications, and investment decisions.

**Ownership:** OVCR

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## 9. Grow the DOD and USDA research portfolios

**Objective:** Diversify federal funding sources and build durable research pipelines.

### Key Actions

- Invest strategically in expanding DOD and USDA research. These are both areas where UW has academic strengths that could be very valuable to the agencies.
- Recognize that success often depends on relationships rather than traditional competitive grant cycles.
- Prioritize long-term hiring of UW leaders with deep agency experience and established connections.

**Ownership:** OVCR, in partnership with Deans

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## 10. Actively contribute to RISE and other major University planning processes

**Objective:** Ensure OVCR plays a substantive, visible role in a major University initiative.

### Key Actions

- Engage proactively in RISE planning and implementation.
- Clarify OVCR's responsibilities and contributions to the initiative.

- The efforts of the new school of computing offer an important opportunity for involvement
- Some of this is now occurring

**Ownership:** VCR

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## **11. Provide planning grants for large research proposals**

**Objective:** Enable faculty teams to compete for major external funding.

### **Key Actions**

- Offer competitive grants to interdisciplinary faculty groups to develop large-scale proposals for submission to public or private funders.
- Fund these grants exclusively through WARF resources.

**Ownership:** OVCR and WARF

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## **12. Define and track research success**

**Objective:** Building off the measures developed under number 6, create a shared, externally credible framework for assessing research performance across the University.

### **Key Actions**

- Develop a concise set of research success metrics, with particular attention to measures valued by the State of Wisconsin.
- Use these metrics to guide University wide decision-making, communications, and accountability.
- Extensive work with Deans and ADR's required

**Ownership:** OVCR

## OVCR action plan: Phase II (9-24 months)

GOAL	OBJECTIVE	KEY ACTIONS	OWNER
Establish the VCR as a state-facing research leader	Strengthen the University's relationship with the State of Wisconsin by clearly articulating the public value of research.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Position VCR as research impact spokesperson to state and public.</li> <li>Coordinate plan and message with the University Relations Office.</li> <li>Emphasize applied research outcomes in areas such as health care access, agriculture, job creation, new company formation, public education, and government efficiency.</li> </ul>	VCR, in coordination with University Relations
Advance applied research in service to Wisconsin	Align elements of the research agenda with state priorities and public benefit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Systematically identify and promote opportunities for applied research that directly serve Wisconsin residents.</li> <li>Integrate these opportunities into OVCR planning, communications, and investment decisions.</li> </ul>	OVCR
Grow the DOD and USDA research portfolios	Diversify federal funding sources and build durable research pipelines.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invest strategically in expanding DOD and USDA research, recognizing that success often depends on relationships rather than traditional competitive grant cycles.</li> <li>Prioritize long-term hiring of leaders with deep agency experience and established connections.</li> </ul>	OVCR, in partnership with Deans
Actively contribute to the RISE planning process	Ensure OVCR plays a substantive, visible role in a major University initiative.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage proactively in RISE planning and implementation.</li> <li>Clarify OVCR's responsibilities and contributions to the initiative.</li> </ul>	VCR
Provide planning grants for large research proposals	Enable faculty teams to compete for major external funding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer competitive grants to interdisciplinary faculty groups to develop large-scale proposals for submission to public or private funders.</li> <li>Fund these grants exclusively through WARF resources.</li> </ul>	OVCR and WARF
Define and track research success	Create a shared, externally credible framework for assessing research performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a concise set of research success metrics, with particular attention to measures valued by the State of Wisconsin.</li> <li>Use metrics to guide decision-making, comms, and accountability.</li> </ul>	OVCR

## Organizational chart evolution

The OVCR administers one of the country's great research portfolios and an unusual, beneficial relationship with WARF. The university remains in the top 5 in NSF HERD rankings with an extraordinary volume of research transactions and compliance burden.

While the fall competition funding is popular with those who receive it, it has come to dominate the perception of OVCR. Further, the perception of the research services functions of the office is significantly strained, as discussed. Therefore, our recommendation is to visibly and conspicuously reorient the office towards two efforts: leading on the WARF relationship and delivering outstanding service to the campus. The WARF relationship is fully in the hands of the VCR, so the remainder of this discussion focuses on the reorganization of the office to emphasize faculty service.

OVCR has an unusually large number of part-time faculty AVCs compared to its peers, where most of the AVCs are full-time employees. The benefit of having full-time administrators in these roles is to shift the focus more towards operations.

Based on peer organizations surveyed, we recommend five AVCs plus a Chief of Staff position with the following portfolios as a starting point for our discussions:

1. **AVC for Research Compliance.** IACUC, IRB, COI, Research Integrity, and Export Controls.
2. **AVC for Sponsored Programs.** Contracts and grants (both pre-and post-award), subcontracts management, IT systems for research support.
3. **AVC for Finance and Business.** Financial administration, HR administration.
4. **AVC for Strategic Programs and Research Development.** Strategic WARF programming; faculty fellowships; primary contact for/engagement with the council of ADRs and URC; research and talent development.
5. **AVC for Interdisciplinary Research and Partnerships.** OVCR centers; RISE HQs; corporate, philanthropy and national labs partnerships; cores and WARF cores support programs; Fall competition; intellectual property; faculty recruitment and retention.
6. **Chief of Staff.** Coordinates day-to-day function of the office. Keeps track timelines of OVCR commitments and operations fixes. Keeps stakeholders apprised of progress. Fields "over the transom" matters so AVCs are not deviated from their operations responsibilities. Can attend meetings when the VCR is not available or take calls that come in for her and brief her later. Fields complaints that come in and works the phones to unstick processes.

## Conclusions / Looking ahead

The OVCR at UW oversees one of the greatest research portfolios in American higher education. The office is relatively new compared to peers, and many key functions have been collected and begun. However, the perception of the OVCR on campus related to research services and its role in setting strategy requires change. We have recommended here the changes that we believe would be responsive to the feedback we received and the position of the office in relation to peers. With these improvements, UW can maintain and strengthen its standing as one of the truly great public research institutions in the United States.

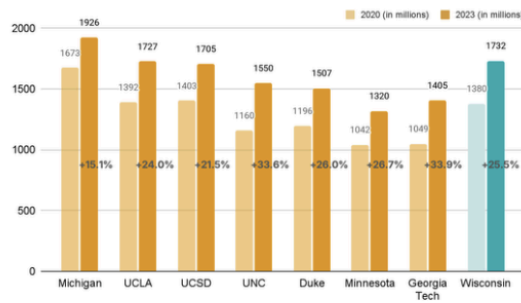


# Appendix

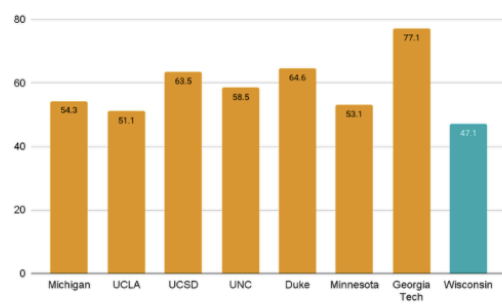
## Quantitative analysis

# National Science Foundation data Comparative analysis

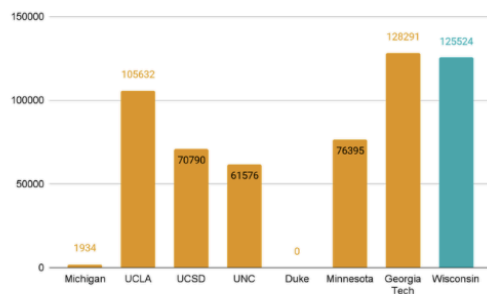
Total research dollars: UW and Peer Institutions



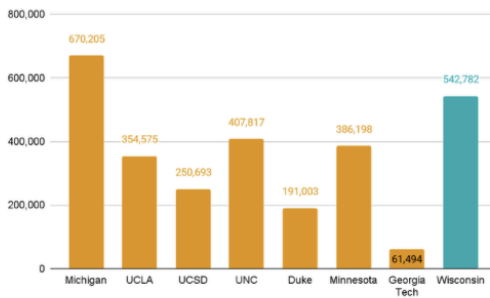
Percent of dollars from Federal sources: UW and peers



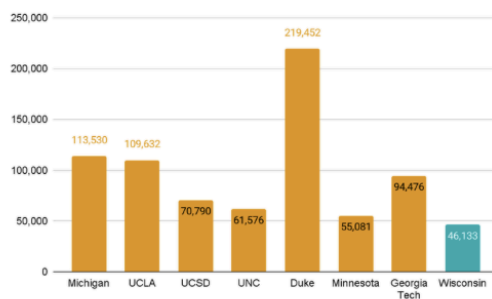
Total dollars from state and local sources (in millions)



Total dollars from institutional sources (in millions)



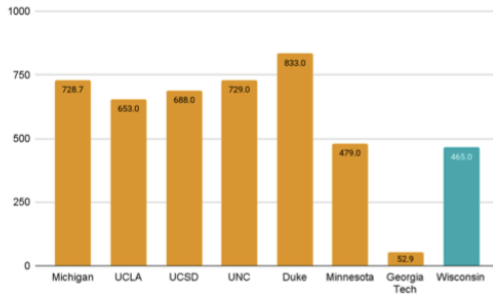
Total dollars from business sources (in millions)



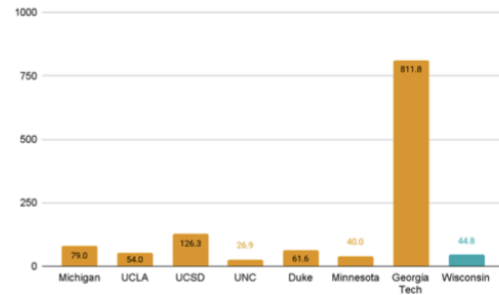
# National Science Foundation data

## Comparative analysis

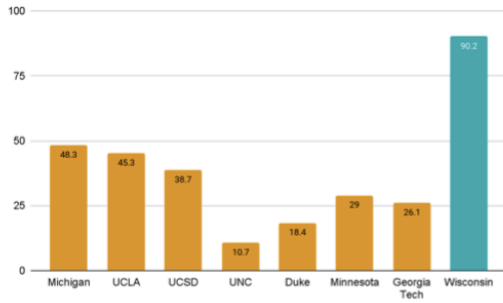
2023 HHS funding (in millions): UW and Peer Institutions



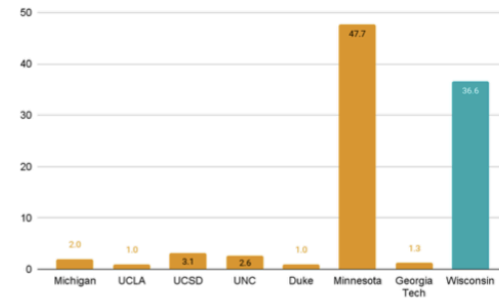
2023 DOD funding (in millions): UW and Peer Institutions



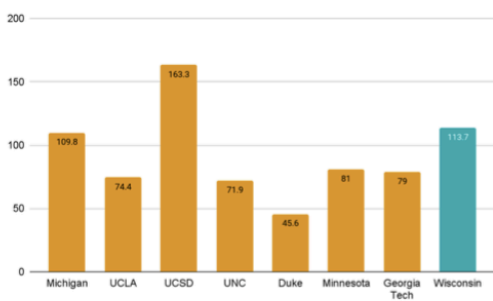
2023 DOE funding (in millions): UW and Peer Institutions



2023 Department of Agriculture (in millions): UW and Peer



2023 NSF funding (in millions): UW and Peer Institutions

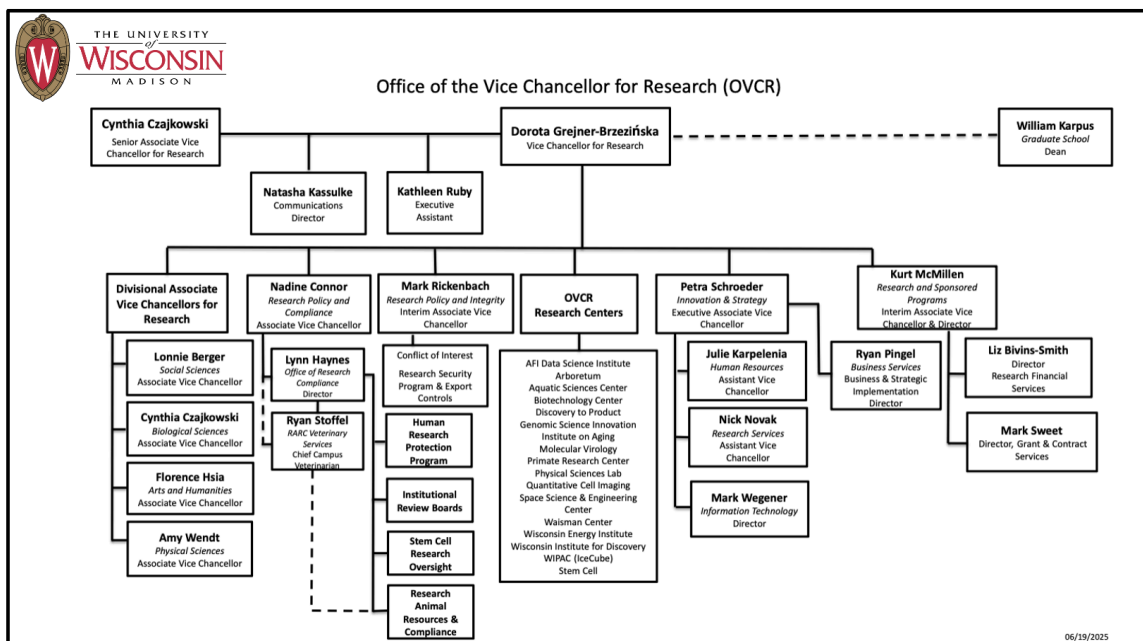


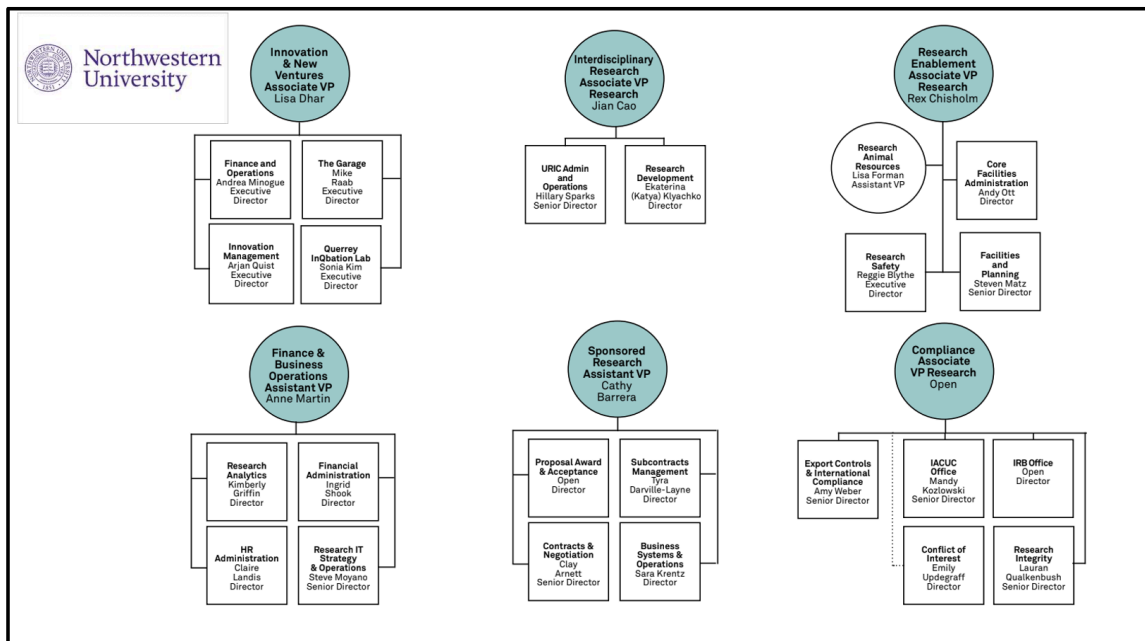
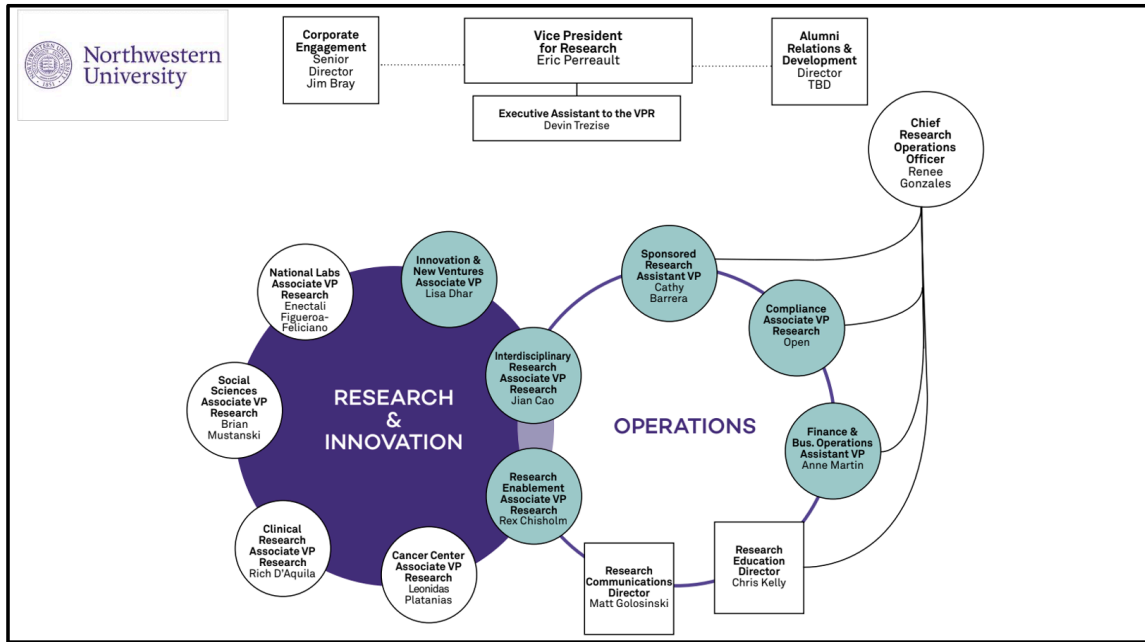
# Innovation & Entrepreneurship Performance

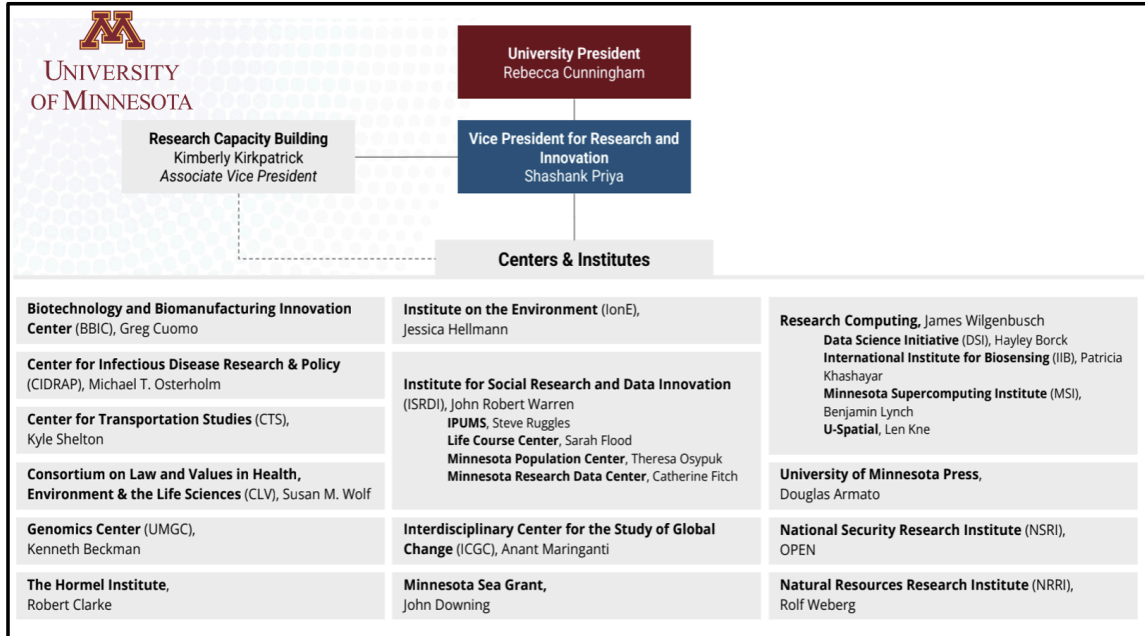
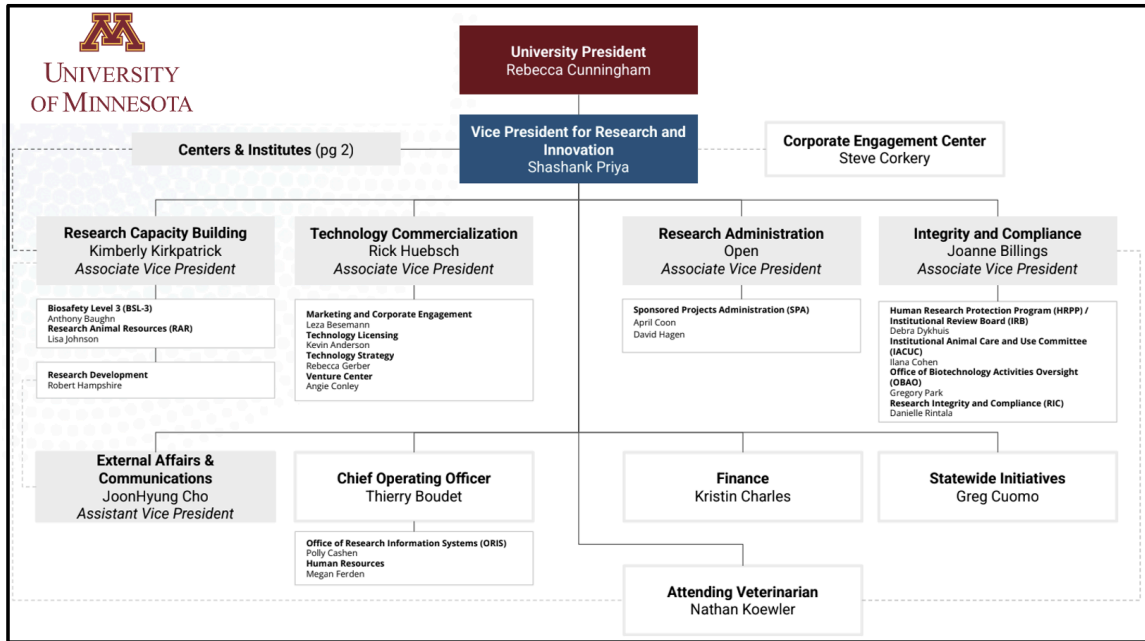
## UW & Peer Institutions: Average

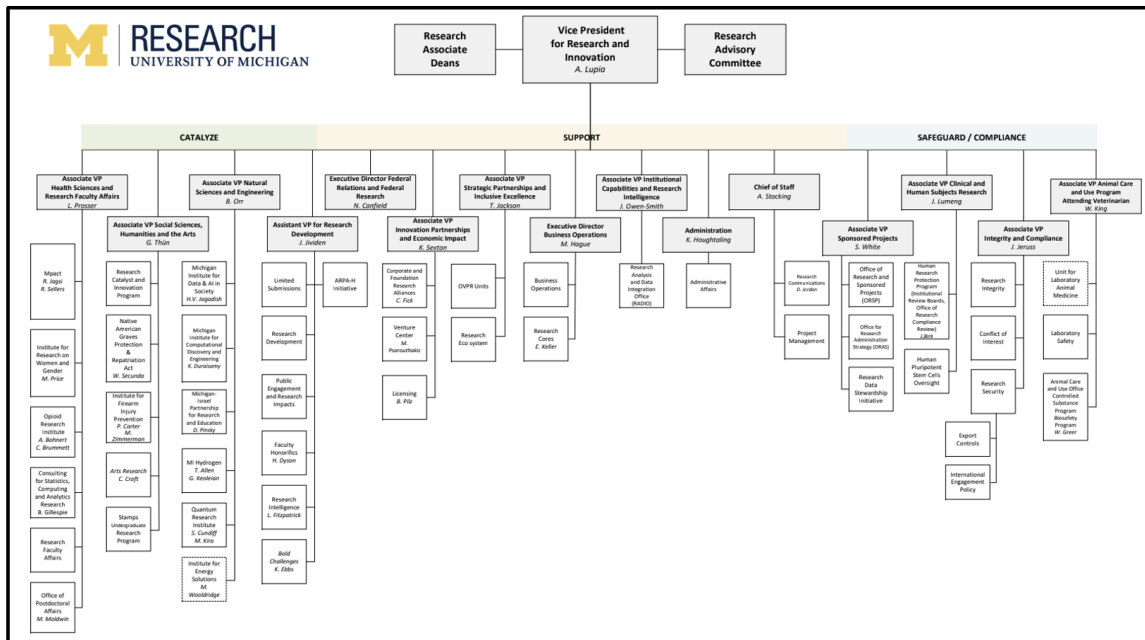
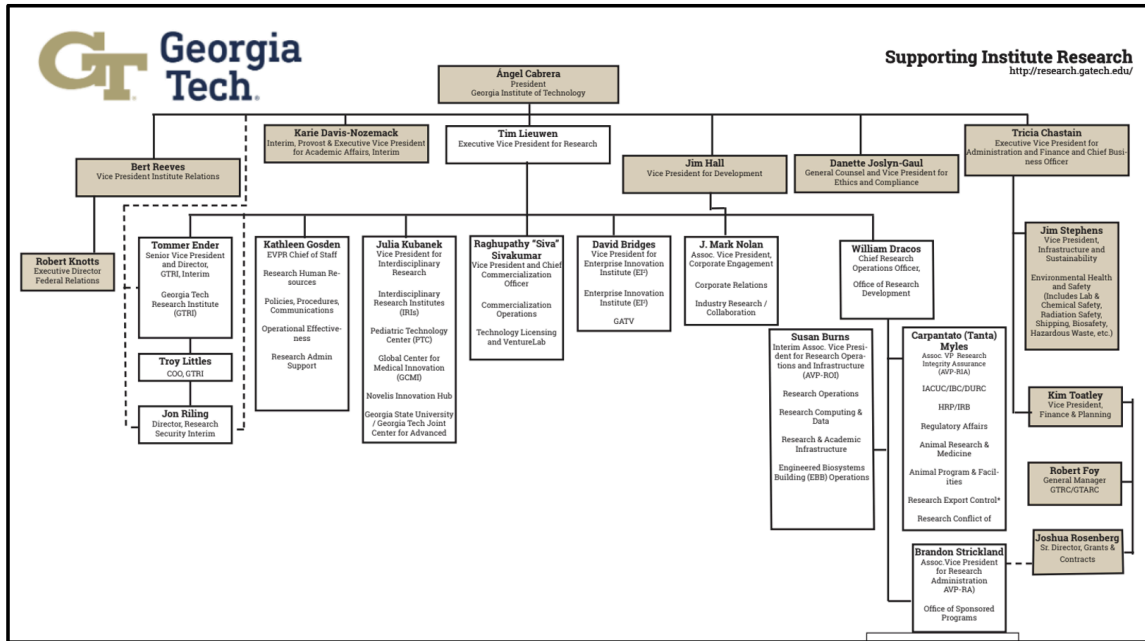
	Total Research Expenditures	Disclosures	New Patent Applications	Total Patent Licenses	Startups	Adjusted Gross Income
UC, Los Angeles	\$ 1,690,924,000.00	269.67	163.00	34.67	13.00	\$ 6,191,699
University of Pennsylvania	\$ 1,214,813,009.00	353.20	184.80	105.20	19.60	\$ 642,845,837
UC, San Diego	\$ 1,703,576,666.67	400.33	173.67	74.33	15.67	\$ 25,905,597
Ohio State University	\$ 1,333,174,658.60	370.00	239.60	29.60	7.20	\$ 8,934,030
University of Michigan	\$ 1,776,701,969.00	487.40	270.20	118.80	23.00	\$ 29,817,623
University of Washington	\$ 1,723,815,000.00	282.4	152	181.2	7.4	\$ 30,429,407
Duke University	\$ 1,210,459,000.00	346.00	158.80	43.60	13.00	\$ 87,007,569
UNC-Chapel Hill	\$ 1,084,670,863.40	183.60	99.40	63.40	8.80	\$ 9,608,589
University of Minnesota	\$ 1,237,119,800.00	355.80	146.00	165.40	21.80	\$ 16,350,517
<b>UW</b>	<b>\$ 1,497,772,500.00</b>	<b>380.8</b>	<b>139.6</b>	<b>37.2</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>\$ 17,142,138</b>
<b>UWI rank amongst peers</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>

## Organizational charts

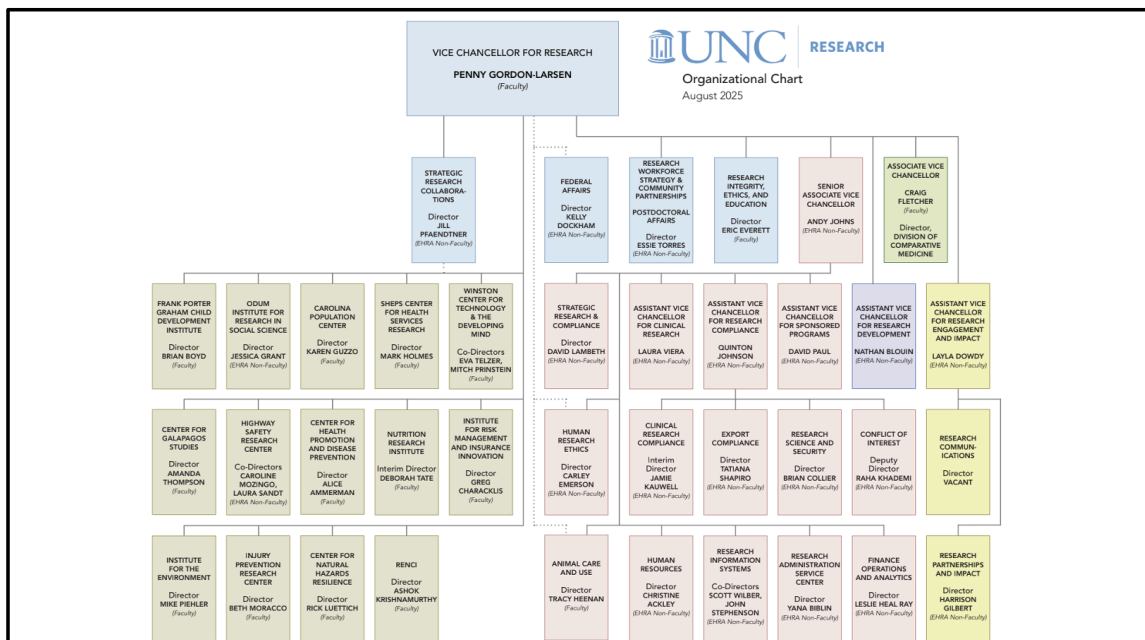
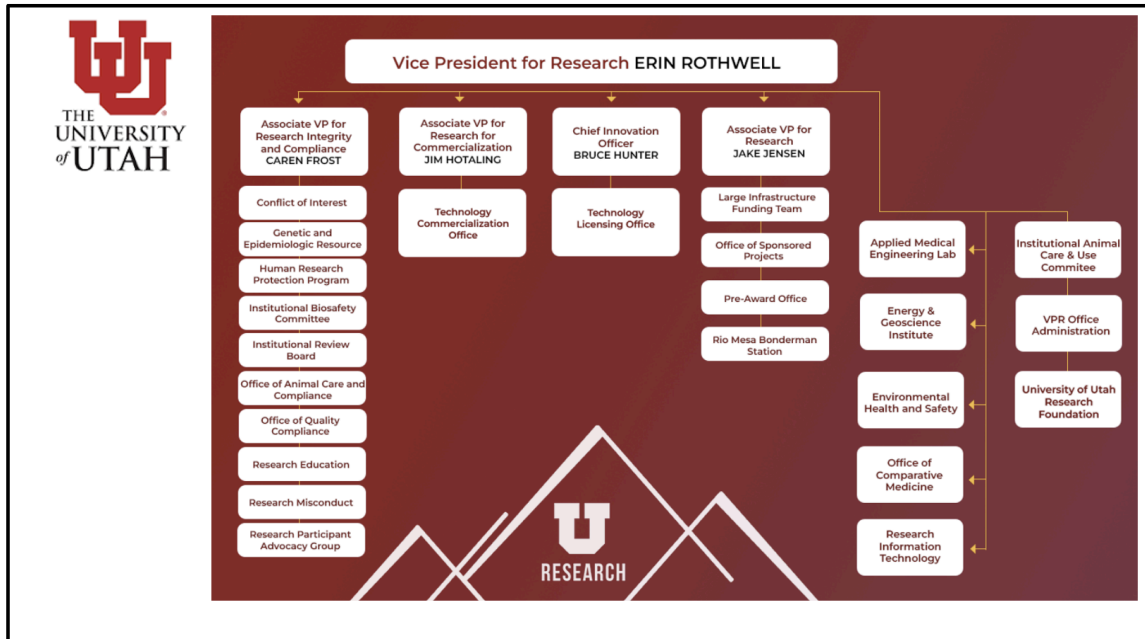












## About Urban Impact Advisors

UIA is a boutique strategic consulting firm with a national reach. We help colleges and universities, innovation districts, and urban developers work through complex analytical and implementation issues to achieve breakthrough goals. Many of our projects bridge across our three areas of focus.

UIA was founded in St. Louis, Missouri in December 2021 by Hank Webber, upon his retirement as Executive Vice Chancellor from Washington University in St. Louis. Holden Thorp, Editor-in-Chief of the *Science* family of journals, joined the firm as a Principal early in 2022. Holden is the former Provost at Washington University in St. Louis and Chancellor at University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. Hank or Holden lead all of the major projects of the firm.

In early 2024, Jillian Guenther joined the firm as a Senior Consultant, bringing nearly 15 years of progressive experience in strategic planning, strategy execution, and performance monitoring within community and economic development organizations. Also in 2024, Brian Phillips joined the firm as a Senior Consultant, bringing 25 years of experience in fostering impactful university-community partnerships and long-term neighborhood stabilization and revitalization. As a boutique firm, we regularly and intentionally augment the capacity of our core staff through strategic partnerships with other firms to meet the specific needs of our clients and projects.

At UIA, we believe that great institutions can enrich the quality of human life and build a better future. After decades of helping to lead several of America's finest universities and driving change in cities and regions, we founded UIA to partner with ambitious institutions to solve important problems. We only seek or accept projects where we have confidence that we can add significant value and where we believe our clients will make a significant contribution to enriching human life.

## Project team summary

- Principals:** Henry S. Webber | Founder & Managing Principal, UIA  
Former Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Administrative Officer,  
Washington University in St. Louis  
Former Vice President for Community & Government Affairs,  
University of Chicago
- Holden Thorp | Principal  
Editor-in-Chief, *Science* family of journals  
Former Provost, Washington University in St. Louis  
Former Chancellor, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill
- Team:** Teresa Woodruff | Team Member, UIA  
MSU Foundation Professor of Obstetrics, Gynecology, Reproductive  
Biology and Biomedical Engineering, Michigan State University  
President Emerita, Michigan State University
- Eric Tomasini | Team Member, UIA  
Managing Director, Research, Huron Consulting Group  
Former Director, AMC Practice PriceWaterhouseCoopers  
Former Director, Research Operations, Mass General Hospital
- Daniel Goetzel | Team Member, UIA  
Former Director, Strategic Partnerships Office, National Science  
Foundation (NSF) + Entrepreneurial Lead for NSF's Regional  
Innovation Engines  
Former Executive Director, Cyber NYC Inventors to Founders &  
Director of Industry Partnerships Office, Columbia University
- Jillian Guenther | Senior Consultant, UIA  
Former Chief Strategy Officer, U.S. Bancorp Impact Finance  
Former Chief Community Building Officer, Beyond Housing