EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

# Vice Provost for Research and Chief Research Officer

*Leadership Profile*

Research TRAILBLAZER

# The Opportunity

East Tennessee State University (ETSU) invites applications and nominations for its next Vice Provost for Research and Chief Research Officer (VPR/CRO). This is an exceptional opportunity for a collaborative, relational, and strategic leader to build upon a period of remarkable growth and help shape the next era of research, scholarship, creative activity, innovation, and sponsored programs at a regional public research university.

ETSU was founded in 1911 with a singular purpose: to improve the quality of life for people in the region and beyond. More than a century later, that purpose remains central to the university's identity. ETSU recognizes that research, scholarship, creative activity, and sponsored programs are essential ways through which a regional public university fulfills its responsibility to the people and communities it serves.

ETSU's research enterprise has experienced extraordinary growth. Over the past decade, annual research expenditures have grown from approximately $6.9 million to nearly $50 million, while the university has climbed more than 120 positions in the National Science Foundation Higher Education Research and Development (HERD) rankings. Since 2020, research and development expenditures have increased by more than 200%, and annual sponsored awards have exceeded $70 million in four out of the past five years.

Importantly, development of a research culture grounded in relationships, trust, faculty development, collaboration, celebration, and impact has accompanied research growth. ETSU has intentionally invested in the people who conduct research and scholarship, including establishing Associate Deans for Research in multiple colleges, expanding research professional development, creating university-level awards recognizing research achievement, and increasing the visibility and celebration of scholarship and creative activity across disciplines.

The next VPR/CRO will inherit this momentum at a consequential moment. ETSU has adopted a new five-year Research Strategic Plan for FY2027-FY2031 with a vision that the university be recognized, through funding, rankings, and impact, as one of the premier regional public research universities in the nation. The next VPR/CRO will have the opportunity and responsibility to turn that vision into reality.

# East Tennessee State University

Located in Johnson City in the Appalachian Highlands of Northeast Tennessee, East Tennessee State University is a comprehensive public university serving approximately 14,000 students. ETSU combines the educational mission and accessibility of a regional public institution with a growing research enterprise, substantial health sciences assets, nationally recognized programs, and a deep commitment to the communities of Appalachia.

The university's academic portfolio spans five health colleges (College of Health Sciences, College of Nursing, College of Public Health, Gatton College of Pharmacy, Quillen College of Medicine) that comprise the Academic Health Science Center (ETSU Health). Additionally, the Phil and Martha Bachman College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Business and Technology, the Clemmer College of Education and Human Development, the Honors College, and the Graduate School round out the academic enterprise. ETSU's interprofessional health sciences environment and longstanding commitment to rural and Appalachian communities provide distinctive opportunities for research that translates discovery into tangible improvements in people's lives.

ETSU enters its next chapter from a position of institutional strength. Recent university indicators show upward trends in enrollment, retention, graduation rates, sponsored awards, financial reserves, employee compensation, and on-campus living. ETSU, an R2 institution, also holds the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification. At ETSU, research excellence and community impact are complementary rather than competing aspirations.

# A Research Enterprise with Momentum

The next VPR/CRO will step into a research enterprise dramatically different in scale and ambition from the one that existed a decade ago. Recent growth reflects an intentional institutional effort to create an environment in which faculty and staff can pursue excellence in teaching, research, and engagement. ETSU also recognizes that meaningful scholarly accomplishment takes different forms across disciplines. Competitive external funding is essential to the university's continued trajectory, but it is not the only measure of success. Scholarship and creative activity in the arts, humanities, professional disciplines, education, and other fields are integral to ETSU's research identity.

The next VPR/CRO will be expected to preserve this broad and inclusive conception of research while continuing to increase ETSU's competitiveness for external funding and national research recognition.

# The Next Chapter: Trailblazing Research at ETSU

ETSU's recently released Research Strategic Plan establishes the framework for the next stage of the university's development.

The plan is organized around four strategic pillars:

- Research Vision and Identity - establishing a clear, mission-aligned research identity and strategic emphasis areas.
- Infrastructure, Systems, and Investment - strengthening the administrative, compliance, physical, and operational foundations necessary to sustain research growth and innovation.
- Student Success Through Research Engagement - expanding opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to participate in research and using research engagement to strengthen recruitment, retention, learning, and career preparation.
- Community, Industry, and External Partnerships - deepening and coordinating relationships that advance research, innovation, economic development, and regional impact.

The plan identifies five areas of strategic research emphasis:

- Applied Technology and Engineering
- Biomedical Sciences and Clinical Translation
- Environmental Systems, Hazards, and the Outdoors
- Rural Health and Appalachian Thriving
- The Science of Education and Engagement

These emphasis areas are intended to build upon existing strengths while positioning ETSU to capitalize on emerging academic programs, regional needs, external partnerships, and funding opportunities. The next VPR/CRO will provide executive leadership for implementing this plan while ensuring that excellent research, scholarship, and creative activity continue to flourish.

# The Role

Reporting primarily to the Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Vice Provost for Research and Chief Research Officer also works closely with the President and serves as a member of the President's Cabinet. The VPR/CRO meets regularly with the President, serves on the Provost's Leadership Team, University Council, Academic Council, and Graduate Council, and chairs the University Research Council. This Cabinet-level role and close relationship with the Provost and President reflect the strategic importance ETSU places on research and sponsored programs and provide significant access to institutional decision-making.

The VPR/CRO is the university's senior executive responsible for research, scholarship, creative activity, sponsored programs, and the integrity and compliance of the research enterprise. As Chief Research Officer, the VPR/CRO also holds significant institutional responsibilities related to sponsored programs, research integrity and misconduct, human subjects protection, animal research oversight, biosafety, and chemical safety, research security and compliance, intellectual property, faculty startup investments, internal research funding, and the broader infrastructure necessary to support a responsible and growing research enterprise.

The VPR/CRO provides leadership for the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs Administration (ORSPA), the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP), the Office of the Vice Provost for Research, and faculty and staff associated with the Center for Community Outreach, the Child and Family Health Institute, and the Strong BRAIN Institute. The VPR/CRO currently has seven direct reports, and approximately 80 faculty and staff report directly or indirectly through the VPR/CRO. The reporting units' annual portfolio is approximately $15–$20 million, inclusive of extramurally funded activity within reporting centers and institutes.

The position requires an executive who is simultaneously a strategist, advocate, relationship builder, faculty and staff champion, organizational leader, and steward of research integrity.

# Leadership Opportunities and Priorities

### Implement the Research Strategic Plan and sustain ETSU's trajectory

The foremost responsibility of the next VPR/CRO will be translating ETSU's new Research Strategic Plan from aspiration to implementation. The leader will work with the President, Provost, Deans, Associate Deans for Research, the ETSU Research Corporation, faculty, staff, centers and institutes, and external partners to establish priorities, align investments, measure progress, and sustain momentum toward ETSU's vision of becoming one of the nation's premier regional public research universities.

Success will require continued growth in external funding and research expenditures, but the university's ambitions extend beyond financial metrics. The VPR/CRO must keep funding, rankings, and impact in balance and ensure that growth advances ETSU's academic mission and improves quality of life in the region and beyond.

## Preserve and deepen a culture of trust and collaboration

Relationships and trust have been foundational to ETSU's research growth. The next VPR/CRO must understand that sustainable research growth at a regional public university is built collaboratively with faculty and all campus units. ETSU's colleges and disciplines are at different stages of research development and possess different scholarly traditions, funding opportunities, and infrastructure needs. The VPR/CRO must possess the judgment to challenge units appropriately while providing the support, investment, encouragement, and patience necessary to develop sustainable research cultures. This leader must be highly visible, accessible, and willing to invest substantial time in relationships with faculty, staff, Deans, Department Chairs, Associate Deans for Research, senior leaders, students, and external partners. The next VPR/CRO must recognize and celebrate excellence in research, scholarship, creative activity, sponsored programs, and community impact.

## Build infrastructure commensurate with ETSU's research

ETSU's rapid growth creates both an opportunity and an imperative to ensure that its research infrastructure keeps pace. The VPR/CRO will assess and strengthen the people, systems, administrative processes, compliance infrastructure, research facilities, core resources, and other capabilities required to support an increasingly sophisticated research enterprise. The successful candidate will recognize that infrastructure is not an end in itself. Its purpose is to make excellent research possible, reduce unnecessary administrative burdens, protect research participants and the institution, support faculty competitiveness, and enable future growth.

## Expand student research engagement and strengthen research training

The next VPR/CRO will work with Deans, faculty, and undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs to expand meaningful student participation in research, scholarship, and creative activity. Priorities include strengthening connections between students and faculty mentors, supporting research training and experiential opportunities, and reducing barriers to participation across disciplines. The VPR/CRO will help develop coordinated pathways through which students can build research skills, contribute to scholarly work, and present or publish their findings. In collaboration with academic leaders, the VPR/CRO will assess how research engagement contributes to student recruitment, retention, career preparation, and progression to advanced study.

## Leverage ETSU's distinctive health sciences assets

Few regional public universities possess an Academic Health Science Center, a concentration of health professions programs, and connections to the health needs of rural and Appalachian communities. The next VPR/CRO will work closely with university leadership, health sciences deans, faculty, ETSU Health, and regional health systems to capitalize more fully on these assets. Opportunities exist to deepen relationships with health-system partners, strengthen the infrastructure supporting clinical and translational research, expand the university's clinical trials portfolio, facilitate interdisciplinary health research, and position ETSU as the premier national contributor to rural and Appalachian health.

## Expand partnerships and translate discovery into impact

The VPR/CRO will strengthen relationships with federal and state agencies, health systems, industry, other universities, nonprofit organizations, community partners, foundations, and economic development organizations. In partnership with the ETSU Research Corporation, the leader will also advance intellectual property, technology transfer, innovation, and commercialization where appropriate. For ETSU, impact may mean a licensed technology or new company. It may also mean a healthier rural community, a stronger school system, a better-prepared workforce, an improved clinical practice, a new artistic work, or knowledge that helps a community address a difficult problem. Building on investments in engineering and related academic programs, the VPR/CRO will connect applied research, technology development, and student engagement with regional employers' technological and workforce needs. Partnerships will also advance research and innovation in education and other disciplines, consistent with ETSU's strategic research emphasis areas.

# Key Responsibilities

- Provide vision and executive leadership for research, scholarship, creative activity, sponsored programs, and innovation; lead implementation and periodic assessment of the FY2027–FY2031 Research Strategic Plan.
- Advise the President, Provost, Deans, and other senior leaders; chair the University Research Council and participate actively in university governance and leadership.
- Increase external funding, research expenditures, scholarly quality and impact, interdisciplinary collaboration, and national recognition while supporting faculty research development and competitiveness, including multi-investigator proposals.
- Serve as the university's authorized institutional official for sponsored programs and oversee pre-award and post-award research administration.
- Ensure research integrity and responsible conduct, oversee research misconduct responsibilities, and provide executive oversight of compliance, including human subjects protection, animal research, biosafety, chemical safety, research security, and conflicts of interest and commitment.
- Strategically deploy faculty startup funding and internal research investments; strengthen infrastructure, facilities, administrative capacity, policies, and systems as research activity grows.
- Lead centers and institutes reporting to the VPR/CRO and recruit, develop, retain, and support an outstanding research administration and compliance workforce.

- Build productive relationships across academic units and strengthen a culture of trust, faculty and staff development, and recognition of research, scholarship, creative activity, sponsored programs, and community impact.
- Expand undergraduate, graduate, and professional student engagement in research, scholarship, and creative activity through mentoring, training, and opportunities to present or publish findings.
- Build partnerships with government, health systems, industry, foundations, nonprofits, communities, and other universities; advocate for ETSU research, expand clinical and translational research and clinical trials, and advance intellectual property, technology transfer, and commercialization in partnership with the ETSU Research Corporation.

# Qualifications and Experience

ETSU seeks a leader with the experience, credibility, judgment, and relational abilities necessary to lead a complex and rapidly developing research enterprise.

## Required Qualifications

- An earned terminal degree or equivalent combination of advanced education and substantial relevant professional experience appropriate for senior research leadership.
- Significant progressively responsible leadership experience related to research, sponsored programs, research administration, academic research leadership, or a closely related area.
- First-hand experience competing for external funding and a record of success in securing sponsored support.
- Demonstrated knowledge of the opportunities and challenges facing faculty and staff engaged in research, scholarship, and sponsored programs.
- Knowledge of the regulatory, compliance, integrity, security, and administrative responsibilities associated with a university research enterprise.
- Demonstrated experience developing productive relationships across organizational and disciplinary boundaries.
- Evidence of effective leadership of people, programs, budgets, and organizational change.
- Exceptional interpersonal, communication, and collaborative leadership skills.

## Preferred Qualifications and Leadership Characteristics

- Experience in research leadership at a comprehensive public, regional public, R2, R1, academic health, governmental, or similarly complex research environment.
- Experience developing and implementing research strategy and translating institutional aspirations into measurable action. Strategic judgment to distinguish opportunities that advance ETSU's mission and research priorities.
- A record of helping faculty and research teams increase their competitiveness for external funding.
- Experience developing interdisciplinary research initiatives and partnerships. A collaborative approach that builds through influence and partnership and shares ownership of success.
- Experience working effectively with academic deans, department chairs, research administrators, faculty, and senior university leaders. The ability to build trust through transparency, listening, accessibility, consistency, and follow-through, and to support units and investigators at different stages of research development.
- Understanding of clinical, biomedical, translational, or health-related research and the opportunities associated with partnerships between universities and health systems.
- Understanding of intellectual property, technology transfer, innovation, commercialization, and university-industry partnerships.
- Experience developing relationships with federal agencies, state government, industry, foundations, health systems, or other external partners. The ability to represent ETSU effectively with external stakeholders and potential research partners.

- Appreciation for undergraduate and graduate student participation in research as an important component of student success.
- A demonstrated commitment to supporting scholarship and creative activity across the full range of academic disciplines. Recognition of scholarly and creative contributions that may not generate sponsored funding.
- Experience building or sustaining a high-performing research administration organization.
- The ability to operate successfully in a resource-conscious environment and make strategic choices among competing opportunities. The ability to pursue ambitious goals while recognizing institutional capacity, resources, and competing priorities.
- An understanding of the distinctive role of regional public universities in translating knowledge into economic, health, educational, cultural, and community impact. A commitment to research growth that serves the university's mission and improves quality of life.

## Johnson City and the Appalachian Highlands

ETSU is located in Johnson City, Tennessee, in the heart of the Appalachian Highlands. The region provides a distinctive environment in which to lead a public research university: large enough to support sophisticated health care, industry, entrepreneurship, arts, and cultural activity, while maintaining remarkably close connections among the university, community, employers, health systems, and civic organizations.

The region itself also serves as an important setting for ETSU's research mission. Questions involving rural health, education, economic development, environmental systems, outdoor recreation, community resilience, workforce development, and Appalachian communities are not abstract subjects at ETSU. They are challenges and opportunities visible in the communities surrounding the university.

ETSU increasingly describes itself as the flagship institution for Appalachia, reflecting an ambition to combine regional responsibility with national significance.

For the next VPR/CRO, Northeast Tennessee offers an opportunity to see the effects of a university's research enterprise in the lives of the people it serves.

# Application and Nomination Process

Candidates should submit a curriculum vitae and letter of interest describing qualifications, leadership experience, and interest in the position here. Application review will begin on November 30, 2026, and continue until the position is filled. Nominations and inquiries may be directed to Dr. Joe Bidwell, Chair of the Search Committee, at bidwell@etsu.edu.