

June 5, 2026

Vice President Marketing and Communications, Florida State University

Dear Members of the Search Committee:

I am excited to submit my candidacy for the Vice President of Marketing and Communications at Florida State University. Having led marketing and communications divisions at two AAU, Research 1 universities—the University of Arizona and the University of Missouri (Mizzou)—I have developed a deep appreciation for the role strategic marketing and communications plays in advancing institutional priorities, strengthening public trust, and positioning universities for long-term success while providing tremendous results for each organization.

My experience aligns particularly well with FSU's need for a leader who can bring cohesion to a decentralized organization while elevating institutional visibility on a national stage.

When I joined the University of Arizona in 2015, the institution had recently established a central marketing and communications function consisting of less than 15 professionals. Three years later, after being promoted to Associate Vice President, I was charged with creating a model to integrate more than 150 marketers and communicators working across colleges, divisions, and administrative units. Rather than impose a centralized structure (where budget & HR lines move from units to central), the President preferred the "influence without authority" model - where unit marketers (and their budget & HR lines) continued to report to their current division lead. Those division leaders were expected to follow the central team's directive on marketing and communications matters. I led the rollout of this collaborative effort aligning communicators around shared institutional priorities while preserving the unique strengths and voices of each unit. The model worked well and gave marketers and communicators a pathway to advance.

That reorganization was built by relationship building and collaboration. For nearly three years, my team and I met department by department with directors, deans, and department heads to develop positioning statements that articulated each unit's unique value and contribution to the university's brand. Through transparency, listening, and partnership, I built trust across campus and ultimately created an integrated communications ecosystem that aligned unit priorities with institutional goals. The resulting framework strengthened collaboration, improved brand consistency, and created a sustainable model for enterprise-wide communications.

I have also demonstrated success elevating institutional reputation and visibility at the national level. During my tenure at Arizona, the university experienced year-over-year improvements in national rankings and recognition. The same occurred in Missouri. My team and I achieved this through building relationships with the media and the idea that the "local" university was one of global prominence. In a "flyover" city of Columbia, MO, one of the world's strongest research

reactors works day and night to cure cancer and extend lives across the globe. Deep in the Sonoran desert, Arizona researchers advance our sight into space (OSIRIS-REx). I continually push my team to maintain a global vision for our storytelling. My explicit expectation of thinking of each of these universities as a worldwide leader is why stories on these two initiatives were featured in the *New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, and other global news outlets.

My leadership philosophy centers on building modern, high-performing marketing and communications organizations capable of delivering measurable institutional outcomes. At Arizona, I led the development of the university's first comprehensive brand platform, *WONDER MAKES US*, creating a unified narrative that connected institutional identity, enrollment strategy, advancement priorities, and stakeholder engagement. The platform became so foundational to the university's strategic direction that it ultimately informed the naming and positioning of Arizona's capital campaign - *FUEL WONDER*. I did the same at Missouri - leaning into the need to peel back some midwest modesty, I launched *Can't Be Tamed* and subsequent capital campaign, *POWER THE ROAR*.

Across both Arizona and Missouri - each with an operating budget of \$5B+, I have consistently modernized communications functions by investing in digital engagement, audience-centered storytelling, marketing technology, analytics, and organizational alignment. At Arizona, I led an effort to best understand who our "customers" were - more specifically, where they lived. With a grad student and my deep economics training, we worked with foundation, alumni and enrollment data teams to understand where our best ZIP codes were. By identifying where our greatest concentration of brand ambassadors (alumni) overlapped with our greatest concentration of prospective students (enrollment data + census), we found the 17 most valuable ZIP codes for Arizona to increase donations and out-of-state enrollment. This empowered us to maximize our efficiency and effectiveness with advertising investments.

Throughout my leadership journey, I have worked closely with presidents, provosts, faculty leaders, governing boards, advancement teams, enrollment leaders, and external partners to build consensus and move complex initiatives forward. I believe the most successful communications leaders are not simply messengers; they are conveners, collaborators, and strategic advisors who help institutions navigate change while remaining grounded in their mission and values.

I am energized by the opportunity to bring this combination of strategic vision, organizational leadership, and collaborative problem-solving to your institution. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss how my experience leading transformational communications initiatives can help advance your goals and strengthen your impact in the years ahead.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
John

John N. Denker, D.B.A.