

# KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Search for the Chief Information Security Officer

Kansas State University

Manhattan, KS

## THE SEARCH

Kansas State University (“K-State”) seeks a collaborative, strategic, and experienced leader to serve as Chief Information Security Officer (“CISO”). The CISO will join the university at a time of tremendous growth and opportunity as the institution expands its reach, research enterprise, and national reputation. Reporting to the Chief Information Officer (“CIO”), the CISO will provide university-wide leadership for developing, strengthening, advancing, and continuously improving K-State’s information security program to ensure that institutional information assets are protected while partnering with the campus community and enabling the university’s mission of teaching, research, and service. The CISO will be a proven and approachable leader who is comfortable recruiting, mentoring, and building a modern security organization in a complex academic environment. This individual will bring experience as a security strategist, organizational builder, and trusted institutional partner, helping to shape security practices that support innovation and collaboration across the university. Working closely with campus leaders, faculty researchers, IT professionals, and administrative partners, the CISO will position cybersecurity as an enabler of institutional success, ensuring that security practices support academic and research objectives. The CISO will cultivate strong relationships across the university community, serving as a connector, educator, and strategic advisor on matters of cybersecurity risk, compliance, and resilience. The role requires an individual who is comfortable building partnerships and fostering a culture of shared responsibility for information security. Through collaboration and clear communication, the CISO will ensure that faculty, staff, and researchers feel supported and empowered to protect sensitive information while advancing their work.

In 2023, Kansas State University launched a bold new strategic plan, Next-Gen K-State, reflecting the institution’s dynamic vision for the future of higher education. The plan outlines how K-State will serve new kinds of learners, address grand global challenges, and contribute to the economic prosperity of the state of Kansas. A major component of the plan is expanding the university’s research enterprise, with a goal of reaching \$300 million in annual research expenditures by 2030. The CISO will play a critical role in supporting this ambition by ensuring that cybersecurity practices enable secure, compliant, and efficient research operations while maintaining strong protections for institutional data and systems.

K-State is a land-grant, public research university with more than 19,000 students, 1,300 faculty members, and 2,900 staff across campuses in Manhattan, Salina, and Olathe. The CISO will join a proud and engaged community dedicated to its mission as the nation's first operational land-grant university, positively impacting society and transforming lives in Kansas and around the world.

The ideal candidate is a strategic thinker, consensus builder, and collaborative leader who understands the balance between security, research enablement, and institutional agility. They will bring experience working within complex organizations—ideally within higher education—and will demonstrate success in developing security operations, programs, building teams, and aligning cybersecurity strategy with institutional priorities. The successful CISO will champion the understanding that information security is a shared institutional responsibility, helping leaders and community members understand both risks and opportunities. They will maintain awareness of evolving threats, regulatory requirements, and industry best practices while implementing practical and sustainable security measures. Through thoughtful leadership, the CISO will continue strengthening K-State's cybersecurity posture while enabling the university community to pursue innovation, research excellence, and operational effectiveness.

Kansas State University has retained the national search firm Isaacson, Miller to assist in recruiting its Chief Information Security Officer. Please direct all inquiries, nominations, and applications to Isaacson, Miller as indicated at the end of this document.

## **KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY**

Founded in 1863 as the nation's first operational land-grant university, the mission of Kansas State University is to foster excellent teaching, research, and service that develop a highly skilled and educated citizenry necessary to advancing the well-being of Kansas, the nation, and the international community. The university encourages engagement that is committed to the discovery of knowledge, the education of undergraduate and graduate students, and improvement in the quality of life and standard of living of those they serve.

K-State has nine colleges, offering more than 400 degrees and options, from bachelor's to doctoral degrees. K-State's colleges and academic units includes the College of Agriculture, the College of Architecture, Planning, and Design, the College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Business Administration, the College of Education, the Carl R. Ice College of Engineering, the College of Health and Human Services, the College of Health and Human Sciences, the College of Veterinary Medicine, and the Graduate School. The Graduate School has 40 doctoral programs, 4 educational doctoral programs, 78 master's programs, and 53 graduate certificates. K-State also offers "K-State Online" which provides over 100 programs and boasts a 97 percent job placement rate.

K-State has an annual budget of more than \$900 million. Private giving to the university is around \$200 million per year, and the KSU Foundation has an investment pool and endowment of more than \$950

million. The university and foundation recently completed a major fundraising campaign that raised \$1.6 billion.

In FY24, K-State received \$264.9 million in research and development expenditures. This is a 21.5 percent jump from the prior year, which was nearly three times the national average growth rate among research universities. To stimulate such research, K-State is home to more than 90 research centers and institutes, including the 3,487-hectare [Konza Prairie Biological Station](#) and the [Biosecurity Research Institute](#), which focuses on infectious diseases, as well as plant and food-borne pathogens. The Office of Research Development promotes and facilitates the research, education, and outreach missions of the university by supporting and administering activities involving extramurally sponsored programs. Additionally, K-State Research and Extension is a division that works with scientists, educators and volunteers in each of the state's 105 counties, with the goal of making the university's research and scientific accomplishments accessible and relevant across Kansas.

In 2025, Princeton Review ranked K-State No. 1 for "Friendliest Students." K-State prides itself on a welcoming environment and connected community of difference-makers, dream-chasers, and problem-solvers. With over 400 student organizations, on-campus housing options, Big 12 sports, and a vibrant arts scene, K-State provides a dynamic student experience. Further, K-State offers a wide array of opportunities for undergraduate and graduate research with support for students to find funding and connect with distinguished professors. K-State is known for the passion and pride of its alumni. With more than 200,000 living graduates, the K-State Alumni Association has been ranked No. 1 in the Big 12 Conference for more than 25 years, based on the percentage of graduates who are members.

## **THE DIVISION OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

Kansas State University's Division of Information Technology, led by the Associate Vice President and CIO, Thomas Bunton, is committed to providing excellent IT services to the K-State community in support of the teaching, learning, research, and service missions. They offer a wide range of information, technology, and communications services. They provide leadership for developing and delivering computing and digital resources to K-State students, faculty and staff. In addition to the operation and management of IT Services, the Division comprises the administrative service functions of HR, finance, and communications. The Division coordinates and manages central IT business services including Enterprise Systems, Portfolio & Project Governance, Infrastructure & Operations, Academic Applications, Information Security, and Academic IT, and Research Technology.

Dr. Thomas Bunton was named Chief Information Officer in 2023 and serves as the university's senior information technology executive and leads the Division of Information Technology. He provides oversight for information technology across all campuses and supports the university-wide strategic use of information technology in support of K-State's teaching, research, and service missions. Prior to K-State, Dr. Bunton served as the Associate Vice President and CIO at New Mexico State University. Dr. Bunton holds a doctorate in organizational communication from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, a

master's degree in computer and information technology from Purdue University, and bachelor's degrees in pre-law and psychology from Purdue University.

### **ROLE OF THE CHIEF INFORMATION SECURITY OFFICER**

Reporting to the Associate Vice President and CIO, the CISO will provide the necessary vision and leadership to develop and implement a strategic technological security operations unit and associated plan for strengthening K-State's IT infrastructure and systems. As part of the CIO's leadership team, the CISO will work closely with other senior leaders and oversee the implementation and expansion of technologies across campus, establish and maintain IT and security best practices, and effectively communicate risk and necessary risk-prevention measures to all members of the community. The CISO will recruit and mentor a team consisting of a Director of Data Security and Privacy, Cyber Security Risk and Compliance Analyst, six full-time security engineers, and 4-5 student workers and will promote an organizational culture committed to timely, effective, and user-friendly customer service. The CISO will possess robust skills in budget planning, financial oversight, and resource management tailored to information security operations.

The CISO will lead day-to-day detection and response technologies to improve the university's cyber posture. They will lead system improvements related to research that will reduce redundancies, provide efficiencies, promote collaboration, improve response timeliness, and enhance the integrity of the data. The CISO will work with third-party security vendors and threat-detection platforms to maximize the benefits of these purchases. Developing a maturing a security operations group and concert with working in collaboration with the Academic IT Directors within each college, the VP of Research, the Office of Information Technology leadership team, and research faculty across the institution will be key to the CISO's success. The CISO will also collaborate with necessary vendor partners to safeguard K-State data and resources and ensure compliance with the changing laws and applicable government policies regulating K-State's security and data protection.

### **KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE CHIEF INFORMATION SECURITY OFFICER**

The CISO will bring strategic and proactive leadership to K-State's technology security function, and, specifically, will work to address the following opportunities and challenges:

#### ***Craft a vision and strategic priorities for K-State's information security***

One of the CISO's most critical opportunities will be developing a strategic and sustainable roadmap for enhancing cybersecurity measures, including the recruitment, training, and onboarding of a the security operations team. The CISO will build upon the university's academic and administrative strategic goals to establish cybersecurity as a key enabler in driving innovation and research output at K-State. The moment is ripe for advancing cybersecurity enhancements across campus. Being mindful of possible future security incidents, the CISO will conduct risk assessments and technology trend analysis to guide cybersecurity

policy, tools selection, and infrastructure planning. The CISO will lead with influence to obtain buy-in and support from constituents across the units in order for this vision to come to fruition and be successful.

***Manage the operations and implementation of enhanced security, creating a “security-first” campus culture***

Information security should be a responsibility that everyone at K-State respects and has top-of-mind when engaging with protected data. This is the culture the next CISO will promote and embed across campus. The CISO will underscore to the campus community the necessity of maintaining robust, effective, information security and a disaster recovery plan. To this end, the CISO will lead the construction of the university’s information security policy, ensuring comprehensive cybersecurity measures protect against threats to both cloud and on-premises resources. They will ensure K-State has a privacy protocol framed around industry best practices and the needs of the university. With the constantly evolving and expanding threat landscape, the next CISO will bring a proven track record of managing organizations to promote high security standards. They will ensure that quality assurance and data security are optimized, oversee audits and risk management reviews, and provide the necessary support for prevention and mitigation actions.

***Provide efficient, effective, and safe research support***

The next CISO must understand the value, importance, and challenges of supporting world-class researchers while meeting the complex regulatory requirements of a research university. The CISO will need to analyze the existing processes and systems within the university and work closely with research administrators and faculty researchers to improve processes to provide maximum benefit to research units. The CISO will help determine what technological enhancements will make the greatest positive impact on the research enterprise. An advocate for a security-first approach, the CISO will balance promoting innovation with ensuring the differing needs of various units are met with the imperative to maintain compliance and protect university information assets. The next CISO will have the capacity to improve operational efficiency and the effectiveness of security service delivery to support the university’s ambitious research goals.

***Build strong collaborations across K-State and serve as an external spokesperson***

The CISO will build strong working relationships with key internal partners through open, direct, and transparent communication. Key partnerships with the IT Directors in each college, leaders within central IT, and research administrators across major institutes and centers, will be essential to establishing a shared vision and executing the next chapter of technology security at K-State. The CISO will collaborate with IT teams and academic and administrative departments to ensure the seamless integration and consistent application of cybersecurity standards and practice across all environments. The successful CISO must be a leader who can build bridges, problem-solve effectively, communicate regularly, and establish healthy relationships across constituencies. Establishing a collaborative customer service culture

within their own team will also be critical to making strides in this space. To facilitate informed decision-making, the next CISO will provide expert advice to senior campus administration on cybersecurity trends, threats, and mitigation strategies. The CISO must also manage relationships with cybersecurity service providers in order to ensure that service level agreements are met and that services align with university needs. As research continues to grow at K-State, it is even more important for the CISO to be the external spokesperson for security on campus, communicating with funding agencies the level of security and standards of excellence that K-State embodies when it comes to securing their data.

### ***Lead, recruit, and retain the Information Security Team***

As the leader of the Information Security staff, the CISO should have a keen eye toward promoting skills and advancement in cybersecurity technologies, operations, and best practices. The CISO will leverage the skills and expertise of the team, provide opportunities for ongoing professional development, and make strategic decisions about staffing models. The CISO will promote the work their team is doing and encourage constituents to give focus and attention to their team's efforts. It is essential that the CISO be a vocal advocate for the team's ongoing endeavors in order to improve buy-in and compliance across campus. The CISO will foster a culture of security awareness, continuous learning, and adaptability within the team, aligning skill development with strategic needs and emerging threats. To be successful across campus, the Information Security team should be innovative, responsive, flexible, and committed to excellent customer service. There is increasing competition for technology professionals, and the CISO will be an experienced and successful recruiter of staff, seeking IT minds committed to furthering the success of K-State and being a member of the campus community.

### **QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS**

The successful candidate will have a bachelor's degree (master's preferred) in Computer Science, Information Systems, Cybersecurity, or a related field. They will also have many, if not all, of the following characteristics and qualifications:

- Extensive experience in developing and managing comprehensive information security programs, including but not limited to cybersecurity strategies, risk management, data protection, and compliance frameworks;
- Strong leadership and team development skills, with a proven ability to build, manage, and mentor multidisciplinary cybersecurity teams;
- Deep understanding of information security technologies, trends, best practices, and regulatory requirements, with experience in designing and implementing detection and response security controls and measures;
- Experience working in top tier research environments;
- Excellent project management skills, capable of leading complex information security projects, including security infrastructure enhancements, policy development, and response plans;

- Experience in vendor and stakeholder management, including service level agreement negotiation, and partnership development to support security initiatives;
- Strong analytical, strategic planning, and communication skills, with the ability to articulate complex security concepts to non-technical stakeholders and influence decision-making at the executive level;
- Demonstrated ability to foster a culture of security awareness, innovation, and continuous improvement within the IT department and across the organization;
- Excellent oral and written communication skills, with an ability to convey complex security issues to a non-technical audience. Proven ability to establish rapport, influence decision-making, and facilitate cohesive communication across all levels of the organization;
- Additional certifications in information security (e.g., CISSP, CISM, CEH, GIAC) are highly preferred.

## LOCATION

### About Manhattan

Situated in the heart of northeast Kansas' scenic Flint Hills, Manhattan's 56,000 citizens enjoy a dynamic community with shopping, dining, entertainment and nightlife. Manhattan is affectionately known as the "Little Apple," a nod to its East Coast namesake, but has a vibrant culture all its own. Manhattan residents enjoy a vibrant, revitalized downtown area with fine dining options and local boutiques. Manhattan is home to the Flint Hills Discover Center, the Sunset Zoo, and the Gardens of K-State. The city also offers several recreational opportunities such as the Kona Prairie, Tuttle Creek State Park, and Linear Park Trail. Further, the McCain Performance Series hosts acclaimed Broadway musicals, comedians, and musicians. Manhattan has excellent K-12 education with Manhattan High School ranking among the top five percent of U.S. High schools.

## COMPENSATION

The compensation range for this search is \$175,000 - \$240,000.

## APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and resumes with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website for the search: <https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/kansas-state-university/assistant-vice-president-and-chief-information-security>. Electronic submission of materials is strongly encouraged.

Lindsay Gold, Dan Rodas, Kristen Andersen, and Julia Hochner  
Isaacson, Miller

*Kansas State University is an Equal Opportunity Employer. All applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, age, national origin, disability, or status as a protected veteran.*

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