UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Search for the Associate Vice President of Federal Relations
University of Minnesota
Washington, D.C.

THE SEARCH

The University of Minnesota (the University or UMN) – one of the most prestigious comprehensive, public land-grant research universities in the nation – seeks a strategic and experienced leader to serve as its Associate Vice President (AVP) of Federal Relations, based in Washington, D.C. The Associate Vice President will join the University at an exciting moment in time and will help shape its next chapter. Under the leadership of University President Dr. Rebecca Cunningham, a new strategic plan was recently launched, titled Elevate Extraordinary 2030. The University is poised to deepen its commitment to research, teaching, and service, open access to opportunity, and advance innovation in support of its land-grant mission and further expand its impact nationally and internationally.

Reporting to the Vice President for Government and Community Relations, this senior-level position is responsible for directing the University's federal advocacy agenda, cultivating relationships with policymakers and stakeholders, and providing strategic counsel on federal issues affecting higher education and research. The Associate Vice President plays a key role in positioning the University as a national leader in research, education, and public service. Amid rapidly shifting public policy landscapes in higher education, the AVP will play a pivotal role in articulating the University's value and strategy, securing essential resources, engaging and inspiring action among a broad array of stakeholders, and strengthening public trust in the University of Minnesota.

The University's impact in national and international spheres can be measured by its $1.41 billion in research funding. The National Science Foundation ranks the University 12th among U.S. public research universities, and *US News and World Report* ranks UMN 24th in Top Public Schools nationally. The University's service to the state is measured across multiple areas: its five campuses serve just over 72,000 undergraduate and graduate students; its over 650,000 alumni (62 percent of whom live in Minnesota) contribute to its economy; its healthcare enterprise serves over 1.1 million patients annually in hospitals and clinics across the state; and its extension programs provide solutions, practical education, and training for all Minnesotans. UMN is home to approximately 4,900 faculty and over 27,000 non-academic staff.

UMN faculty are world-recognized for their research, teaching, clinical and engagement accomplishments. UMN currently boasts 26 Nobel Prize recipients and recipients of prestigious awards such as the Guggenheim and MacArthur Fellowships, and many other highly prestigious awards & honors and members of the National Academies.

The AVP role is a new position in the Office of Government and Community Relations. As a newly created leadership position, the Associate Vice President will have a rare opportunity to help design and build the University's federal relations strategy, structure, and influence in Washington. The AVP will establish priorities, strengthen institutional coordination, cultivate strategic relationships, and help define how one of the nation's largest and most comprehensive public research universities engages with the federal government for years to come.

The successful candidate is an experienced federal relations professional with a demonstrated ability to advance organizational priorities in Washington. While experience in higher education is valuable, the University welcomes candidates from other complex, research-intensive and mission-driven environments, including healthcare systems, academic medical centers, research institutes, scientific organizations, federal agencies, associations, and related organizations, where they have built successful careers in federal relations, government affairs, public policy, or advocacy.

The AVP will bring significant experience navigating federal agencies, executive branch processes, and federal research funding ecosystems, coupled with the ability to cultivate senior relationships across agencies such as NIH, NSF, DOE, DOW, and other research-focused federal entities. Experience working with Congress and national associations is important, but deep engagement with federal agencies and regulatory environments will be particularly valuable in this role. Equally important, they will be a strategic advisor and collaborative partner who can translate a rapidly evolving federal landscape into actionable opportunities, aligning advocacy efforts with the University’s mission while elevating its voice and influence on national policy issues.

Success in this role will require the ability to understand and connect a remarkably diverse portfolio of institutional strengths, including agriculture, health sciences, academic medicine, engineering, energy, national security, workforce development, public health, extension, and basic research. The AVP will help translate these strengths into compelling federal engagement and funding opportunities.

The University of Minnesota has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national search firm, to assist in this important search. All inquiries, applications, and nominations for this opportunity should be directed in confidence to the University or search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

ROLE OF THE ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT

The Associate Vice President of Federal Relations serves as the University of Minnesota's chief advocate in Washington, D.C., leading the development and execution of a comprehensive federal relations strategy that advances the University's priorities in research, education, health, innovation, and public

service. The role is responsible for building and sustaining relationships with federal agencies, members of Congress, higher education associations, and other key stakeholders while ensuring the University's federal engagement efforts remain coordinated, proactive, and effective. Given the University's extensive research enterprise, particular emphasis will be placed on cultivating relationships with agency leadership, program officers, and other federal decision-makers whose priorities and funding decisions influence research, healthcare, educational attainment, and innovation outcomes. The AVP supervises the Director of Federal Relations and supports the Vice President for Government & Community Relations in selecting and managing external lobbying partnerships.

The following are the key responsibilities of the Associate Vice President of Federal Relations:

Strategic Advocacy & Policy Leadership

- Strategy Development & Execution: Lead the development and execution of a comprehensive federal relations strategy to advance the University's priorities, including research funding, student financial aid, innovation, and regulatory matters.
- Legislative & Policy Analysis: Monitor, analyze, and provide strategic insights on federal legislation, executive actions, and budget proposals that impact higher education institutions.
- Direct Advocacy & Government Relations: Advocate for institutional priorities through direct engagement with the legislative and executive branches, including appropriations, authorizations, and regulatory affairs.
- Policy Communications & Materials: Coordinate with Marketing and Communications to draft policy briefs, testimonies, and advocacy materials to support the University's positions.
- Federal Intelligence & Opportunity Identification: Monitor and advise on federal priorities, agency initiatives, regulatory developments, and funding opportunities, positioning the University to act proactively rather than reactively.

Federal Engagement & External Relations

- Bipartisan Advocacy & Coalition Building: Build and maintain strong bipartisan relationships with members of Congress, congressional staff, federal agencies, and other partners to advance institutional priorities.
- Strategic Executive Placement: Proactively identify, nominate, and position University leaders, deans, and subject-matter experts onto federal agency advisory committees (FACA), task forces, study sections, and agency boards (e.g., NIH, NSF, DOE, DOW, OSTP) to shape national research agendas and elevate institutional leadership.
- Association Representation: Represent the University in key national higher education associations and policy groups (e.g., AAU, APLU, National Academies) and actively lead in working groups focused on federal policy and regulatory issues.
- High-Level Convenings & Briefings: Coordinate strategic meetings, delegations, campus site visits, and briefings involving federal officials, University executive leadership, faculty experts, and key alumni network leaders.

- Expert Testimony & Consultations: Facilitate faculty testimony, expert briefings, and participation in congressional roundtables, committee hearings, and executive branch consultations to position the University as a premier resource for federal decision-makers.

Internal Coordination & Institutional Alignment

- Executive & Academic Advisement: Advise senior leadership, administrators, and faculty on federal trends, opportunities, and challenges relevant to institutional objectives.
- Cross-Functional Alignment: Collaborate with academic and administrative units across the University to align advocacy efforts with strategic priorities.
- Research Portfolio Navigation: Develop a strong understanding of the University's expansive research and public service portfolio and connect institutional experts with emerging federal priorities, partnerships, and funding opportunities.
- Stakeholder Engagement: Develop and implement federal engagement strategies for university faculty and staff on key priority areas.

QUALIFICATIONS & CHARACTERISTICS

While no one candidate will embody every quality, the successful candidate will bring many of the following professional qualifications and personal attributes:

- Bachelor's degree required; advanced degree in public policy, law, or a related field preferred.
- Minimum of 10–15 years of progressive experience in federal government relations, higher education policy, or legislative affairs.
- Deep and demonstrated experience working directly with federal agencies (e.g., NIH, NSF, DOE, DOW, OSTP, Department of Education), with a proven track record of navigating executive branch processes, agency leadership, and regulatory frameworks.
- Strong background navigating both Congress and the executive branch, with particular strength cultivating relationships within federal agencies and influencing policy, regulatory, and funding conversations outside traditional legislative channels.
- Demonstrated success in developing and executing impactful advocacy strategies at the federal level.
- Exceptional communication skills, with the ability to distill complex policies into clear, persuasive arguments.
- Strong interpersonal skills and the ability to build collaborative relationships across organizational and political boundaries.
- A strong sense of integrity and ability to navigate complex institutional environments.

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

The Associate Vice President of Federal Relations is a 100% time, 12-month, professional and administrative (P&A) appointment based in Washington, D.C. Salary is commensurate with education and experience, with an anticipated salary range of $210,000 - $250,000.

The University of Minnesota offers excellent benefits. Please visit the Office of Human Resources website for more information regarding benefit eligibility.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website.

Ivan Ceballos, Managing Associate
Alexis Lynton, Managing Search Coordinator
Dylan Kahn, Associate
Isaacson, Miller

The University recognizes and values the importance of diversity and inclusion in enriching the employment experience of its employees and in supporting the academic mission. The University is committed to attracting and retaining employees with varying identities and backgrounds.

The University of Minnesota provides equal access to and opportunity in its programs, facilities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. To learn more about diversity at the U: http://diversity.umn.edu

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