

Personal Statement, Mahlea Babjak

Nominee for Region VII Member-at-Large

Hello Region VII Jackalopes!

I am very excited to submit a nomination for the Region VII Member-at-Large role. As someone who came into research administration from a policy and academic research background, I quickly realized how much depth, complexity, and opportunity this field holds, and how valuable it is to have a community like NCURA that offers guidance, support, and a shared sense of purpose.

NCURA has been instrumental not just in building my technical knowledge, but in helping me and my team feel part of something larger. NCURA has been a fantastic network to celebrate the wins (big and small) that come with supporting world-changing research. Whether through webinars or conversations sparked with regional institutions, NCURA has helped me grow as a leader, mentor, and collaborator.

I am currently the Research Operations Manager at the University of Colorado Boulder, where I lead a 12-person research administration team and co-lead our institution's community of practice for research administrators. Prior to this, I worked in the global research and policy sector, where I directed international research support and policy teams. I've developed a strong appreciation for the often-invisible work research administrators do and the importance of making that work more visible, valued, and connected.

I'm especially passionate about supporting our profession through times of policy and regulatory change. As the federal research landscape evolves, so do the challenges and opportunities facing institutions of all sizes. I believe Region VII can play a vital leadership role in equipping our members to adapt to change, to advocate, and to support one another through it.

If elected, I would be honored to support the Region VII Executive Committee in developing programming that advances NCURA's mission, amplifies diverse voices, and facilitates innovation across our region.

Thank you for your consideration, and for the chance to continue learning, growing, and contributing alongside such an incredible network of peers.

Warmly,
Mahlea Babjak

Mahlea Babjak, PhD

720-751-4194

mahleababjak@gmail.com

EXPERIENCE

Research Operations Manager - *University of Colorado Boulder*

JANUARY 2024 - PRESENT; BOULDER, CO

- Manage a 12-person research operations team, improving outcomes and fostering a culture of excellence through ongoing mentorship, performance coaching, and values-driven leadership.
- Co-lead an institutional community of practice for research administrators to enhance training, process improvement, and cross-unit collaboration.

Senior Manager, Knowledge Exchange and Impact - *The Open University*

DECEMBER 2021 - DECEMBER 2023; MILTON KEYNES, UK

- Directed a pre and post-award research operations team in an international context.
- Led the development of a public affairs strategy for a pedagogical research center, including upskilling researchers on policy engagement.
- Co-led a research project on refugee student outcomes that resulted in securing external funding for 12 full scholarships and 50 educational course vouchers.
 - Secured national designation for the university as a 'University of Sanctuary,' recognizing institutional commitment to equitable access to education.

London Project Manager - *Migrants' Rights Network*

MAY 2020 - DECEMBER 2021; LONDON, UK

- Managed strategic partnerships with education, government, and nonprofit leaders to advance legislative outcomes. Included direct engagement with the Education Minister.
- Drafted institutional policy responses and briefings for Parliament, focusing on data-driven human rights reform and international student protections.
- Provided strategic insight during urgent policy developments, supporting the CEO with rapid research and decision-making materials.

Research Consultant - *Centre for Sustainable Fashion, University of the Arts London*

FEBRUARY 2020 - MAY 2020; FEBRUARY 2022 - APRIL 2022; LONDON, UK

- Advised senior university leadership on institutional engagement strategies for environmental justice and small business inclusion in sustainability efforts.

Emerging Fields Researcher - *Love Justice International*

NOVEMBER 2014 - OCTOBER 2019; EDINBURGH, UK

Global Operations | Strategic Growth

- Led government relations and research efforts across 14+ countries to support anti-trafficking policy and youth development initiatives. Included partnership development with dozens of universities across 5 continents.

- Advised the CEO on country expansion strategies; directly contributed to the successful establishment of operations in 9 new countries, exceeding 5-year growth targets within 2 years.

VOLUNTARY

Director (Board of Directors); Trustee (Board of Trustees) - *JustRight Knowhow and JustRight Scotland*

MAY 2021 - DECEMBER 2023; GLASGOW, UK

- Drove organization-wide, governance change for an EdTech social enterprise and its human rights legal centre subsidiary

Advisory Consultant - *Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre*

SEPT 2022 - DEC 2023; LONDON, UK

- Provided strategic advice on federal human rights research programs, evaluating research design, resource allocation, and impact metrics.

Teacher - *LEAD UK*

MAY 2014 - MAY 2019; EDINBURGH, UK

- Managed a 20-person volunteer team delivering student leadership programming in high schools.

EDUCATION

PhD International Development - *University of Edinburgh*

JANUARY 2017 - NOVEMBER 2021; EDINBURGH, UK

- Research findings informed Australia's Modern Slavery Act (2018), UK's Modern Slavery Victim Support Bill, cross-party legislative working committees, and Scottish Equality legislation.

MA by Research, South Asian Studies (Political Science) - *University of Edinburgh*

SEPTEMBER 2015 - AUGUST 2016; EDINBURGH, UK

MA (Honors) International Relations and Social Anthropology - *University of St Andrews*

SEPTEMBER 2011 - AUGUST 2015; ST ANDREWS, UK