RESEARCH AUSTRALIA

Head of Policy, Projects and Advocacy

Position description | Senior leadership

Reports to	**Chief Executive Officer**
Employment	Full-time, ongoing; flexible arrangements
Portfolio	Policy, advocacy, government relations, research and strategic projects
Direct reports	As determined by organisational structure

1. Position purpose

Provide strategic leadership of Research Australia's policy, advocacy, government relations and strategic project portfolio. Working with the CEO, the role advances member-informed national policy priorities, strengthens high-level relationships and ensures evidence and partnerships contribute to systemic reform, research impact and organisational sustainability.

2. Key accountabilities

Policy strategy and leadership

- Lead Research Australia's policy strategy and reform agenda, setting priorities aligned with the Strategic Plan and member interests.
- Advise the CEO and Board on policy opportunities, risks and strategic positioning; oversee the quality and influence of submissions, recommendations and briefings.
- Drive proactive, evidence-based reform proposals across research investment, innovation, workforce, equity and translation.

Government relations and strategic influence

- Provide strategic leadership of government relations and oversee implementation of the engagement strategy by the Policy and Government Relations Manager.
- Cultivate senior relationships with Ministers, parliamentarians, officials and decision-makers; represent Research Australia in significant policy and reform discussions.
- Advise the CEO on political and policy developments and evaluate the contribution of government engagement to advocacy outcomes.

Advocacy and sector leadership

- Set the strategic direction of national advocacy, including positioning, priorities and opportunities for influence.
- Lead high-level coalitions, sector partnerships and convening activities to advance shared reform priorities.
- Provide strategic direction on advocacy messaging in collaboration with the Communications Manager, who leads communications delivery.

Strategic projects and evidence

- Lead the strategic research, evaluation and advisory project portfolio, identifying funding opportunities, partnerships and priorities.
- Oversee project governance, quality, financial performance and risk, with day-to-day delivery managed by the Project Manager.
- Set priorities for evidence generation, opinion polling and thought leadership, ensuring findings inform policy, advocacy and practice.

Organisational and people leadership

- Provide portfolio leadership, strategic planning, performance reporting and advice to the CEO and Board.
- Guide managers and multidisciplinary teams, prioritise resources and promote collaboration across policy, projects, communications and membership.
- Oversee stakeholder and member engagement at a strategic level, ensuring community perspectives inform relevant work.

3. Key relationships

Internal: CEO, Board, Policy and Government Relations Manager, Project Manager, Communications Manager, membership and partnerships colleagues. External: Ministers and parliamentarians, government agencies, members, universities, medical research institutes, health services, industry, philanthropy and community organisations.

4. Selection criteria

- Senior-level policy leadership and demonstrated ability to influence public policy or systemic reform.
- Political acumen and experience managing high-level government and parliamentary relationships.
- Proven advocacy, coalition-building, executive communication and stakeholder leadership.
- Strong research and evidence synthesis skills, with experience overseeing strategic research or advisory portfolios.
- Sound financial, governance, risk and people leadership capability; knowledge of Australia's health and medical research ecosystem.
- Relevant tertiary qualifications or equivalent senior professional experience.

5. Key performance indicators

Annual targets are agreed with the CEO. Measures focus on strategic contribution and influence, not decisions controlled by government.

Strategic pillar	Head-level outcome
National influence, policy leadership and agenda setting	Quality of strategic policy direction; high-level government relationships; documented contribution to policy deliberations.
Sector leadership and activation	Strength of strategic partnerships, coalitions and sector convening outcomes.
Evidence-driven solutions	Strategic value, quality and financial performance of the research and advisory portfolio.
Consumer and community engagement	Meaningful inclusion of community perspectives and strengthened public-facing advocacy.
Sustainable operations	Portfolio governance, staff leadership, resource stewardship and organisational sustainability.

6. Decision-making authority

Exercises strategic judgement within approved delegations. Significant policy, reputational, financial and contractual commitments require appropriate CEO or Board approval. The Policy and Government Relations Manager leads operational policy and government engagement delivery; the Project Manager leads operational project delivery.