

**DIANE HIRSHBERG, PhD**

June 5, 2026

Chancellor Search Committee  
University of Alaska Anchorage  
3211 Providence Drive  
Anchorage, AK 99508

Dear Search Committee Members:

It is my pleasure to apply for the position of Chancellor of the University of Alaska Anchorage. I believe that my background, experience, and demonstrated commitment to UAA and Alaska have prepared me to succeed in this role and to tackle some of the pressing issues facing UAA in these extraordinary times.

As a 22-year veteran of UAA and ISER, I understand deeply the context within which UAA operates. While not an economist, I have studied state fiscal issues, especially around education, but also more broadly around the state financing of public institutions and the revenues that underlie this. I know the social, cultural, and political environments of Alaska, as well as the challenges faced by people living in both rural and Indigenous communities and in urban places in the state. I also know many of the key players across the state; I have good relationships with state legislators on both sides of the aisle and have worked with the current governor in several contexts. What also positions me well for the chancellor role is that, in addition to my research and policy accomplishments, I have built a strong set of skills, understandings, and relationships for navigating political, administrative, budgetary, and bureaucratic issues and processes across the university, the UA system, and the State. My participation in the HERS Leadership Institute, along with in-state trainings, gives me both depth and breadth in understanding higher education leadership. I served on the Chancellor's Planning & Budget Advisory Council (PBAC) for several years, as well as on the Academic Task Force when UAA underwent a Program Prioritization process. And I served as UAA Faculty President, which entailed a three-year engagement in faculty governance. I have been the director of ISER since late in 2021, where I have rebuilt the faculty and staff and helped the institute regain recognition for the critical role it plays in informing policymaking and community decisions across the state. In all of these settings and through my policy research, I have worked closely with Regents, Presidents, Provosts, and Chancellors across the UA system on structural, budget, and policy issues.

As a faculty member at UAA, I developed a strong public policy research program, building from early work on Alaska education policy to a broader focus on Arctic education and

sustainable development issues. I have brought in, alone or in collaboration with other ISER researchers, over \$2 million in research grants and contracts, including UA Foundation monies for the founding of the Center for Alaska Education Policy Research. I have established a reputation as an expert on Alaska education policy issues and have built a portfolio in circumpolar education and the broader Arctic policy realm. I collaborate on research across the UA system, in particular with the UAF Alaska Center for Energy. I also work with colleagues across the Arctic and hold leadership roles around Arctic education and research, including as Vice President-Academic for the University of the Arctic (UARctic). In addition, many of my research and service activities are collaborations with Indigenous individuals and organizations, in Alaska and beyond. I've worked with Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC), the Inuit Circumpolar Council of Alaska (ICC Alaska), the North Slope Borough School District, the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN), and the First Alaskans Institute (FAI) on research and evaluation projects as well as community events such as the Alaska Outmigration Summit on which ISER partnered with FAI, AFN, and Rep. Mary Peltola.

The mission of UAA is to transform lives through our teaching, research, community engagement, and creative expression. Our aspirations are to put students first, embrace our role as a trusted and respected community partner, positively impact communities and the world through innovation, and accelerate excellence through continuous improvement. The role of the chancellor is to enable the university to achieve its mission and goals, and also to guide changes to these when a shift is needed, whether due to changing circumstances or simply to reinvigorate the institution. And, while the UAA family has worked hard to recover from the damages of state budget cuts and the COVID-19 pandemic, now is one of those times to think differently and proactively about how we better meet our mission and serve our students, community, and state so that we can thrive and not just survive. I have many ideas that I look forward to discussing with the committee, but I will share just a few here.

First, we need to ensure that the needs of our students are being met so that they can thrive. One key is addressing the shortage of student housing, through thinking beyond UAA student-only housing to partnerships with the hospitals and the municipality to develop housing in the U-Med district that meets the needs of medical professionals and administrators alongside students and low-income residents experiencing homelessness. UAA has land where we could build, and if we develop more housing in the area, we likely will bring more services to an under-resourced area.

We also need to continue efforts at building more vibrancy on campus. If we want students and staff on campus, we need more services open for more hours, from food and coffee options later in the day or in the summer to more stores as well as events that draw the community in. Food and coffee may need to be a loss-leader for a while, but the payoff to bringing more staff back and getting local community members onto the campus will generate dividends for the long run. We have room, and need to be more creative in using unused spaces (e.g., Cuddy Hall) to provide services.

Community engagement and community partnerships are an underdeveloped area of opportunity for the university. This is an area where I already have a broad network to build on, thanks to my time working with the Center for Community Engagement and Learning (CCEL),

as CAEPR and ISER director, and through active participation in civic activities and community-engaged research for over two decades. My work with the Consortium of University Public Service Organizations (CUPSO) also provides me with models from leading public institutions across the nation for what we can do differently and better. For example, our full-time students should have co-op, work-study, research, and internship opportunities across the region from the day they step on to our campus. So many of our students hold down jobs, often multiple, to finance their studies. We should strive to better help them prepare for their future and while supporting local businesses in developing their workforce; this takes a coordinated effort across UAA colleges and units and our community partners, current and future.

UAA should be engaged with economic development more proactively and consistently, both through the Center for Economic Development and SBDC and academic and research units. We need to collaborate more closely with the Anchorage Economic Development Corporation, the Municipality, and leading organizations like Alaska Communications on how UAA can support efforts to create a new future for Alaska. Across our programs, we should be talking with the business community about both their workforce gaps and the professional development needs of their current employees to ensure that employers can recruit, retain, and advance staff in Alaska. Our graduate programs should be full of local workers seeking new skills and opportunities for advancement. And we also need the community to understand the impact UAA has on Anchorage's and Alaska's economic and social well-being. Both are considerable but not well-known. It's been several years since we documented the return on investment in research or the overall impact of UAA on the local and state economy, and we should be broadcasting that widely, from welcoming banners at the Ted Stevens International Airport to PSAs on public radio and social media. UAA does amazing work; we should celebrate it and enable more.

Research is another area where there is untapped potential. UAA has many talented researchers doing very good work, but there needs to be a far greater investment in support structures across the entire research enterprise, from assisting researchers in identifying funders, preparing proposals, and acquiring and managing technology to promoting our research to the broader community and to potential funders. For example, much of our research at UAA is community-engaged, but we need to do better at sharing the stories and outcomes. ISER struggles to keep its web presence functional and updated, and has almost no support for proactively pushing out news about its projects and publications.

The research mission is central to achieving the goals of UAA 2027 Aspiration #3, to positively impact communities and the world through innovation. However, UAA's Arctic scholarship, service, and teaching have not been consistently supported, and the UAA's leadership in Arctic research, policymaking, and teaching has largely been overlooked in recent years, other than around the huge achievement of receiving funding for a new iteration of the Arctic Domain Awareness Center. While UAF continues to be a leader in Arctic research, UAA also is a global leader in applied Arctic research, from public health in the north to economics, education, and Arts and Design. We need to share proactively this work and frame it not as competing with UAF but as complementing their work, and also emphasize how often we collaborate with our sister institution to the north.

All of the work I've described above, and indeed the operation of UAA as a whole, has to be done in partnership with faculty, staff, and students. Shared governance is not just a decision-making tool; it's an opportunity to build shared ownership for the outcomes of the institution. And I know that while I have many ideas for strengthening our university, there are many more ideas that our staff, faculty, and students have, which I'd love to hear and act on. UAA has struggled recently with low faculty and staff morale, and while community-building events are helpful, meaningful improvement to the campus climate requires bringing leadership from all our constituencies together and problem-solving collectively. If we build a stronger sense of job security among our employees as well as our students, create more pathways for advancement for all staff, and ensure that everyone feels valued for their contributions, I am confident that our community will find new and exciting ways to make our institution more vibrant and welcoming for all.

We are in a time of great uncertainty and threat. But with threat comes opportunity, and UAA has endless opportunities to transform the lives of students and create change for the better for all Alaskans. I look forward to being a part of that good work.

Sincerely,

Diane Hirshberg, PhD.