

# **Nicole Kinsman**

Alaska Regional Advisor with the National Geodetic Survey, NOAA



## **What is your current occupation?**

Alaska Regional Advisor with the National Geodetic Survey, part of the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration.

In this role I serve as the central point of contact for National Geodetic Survey activities in Alaska, with an emphasis on providing geopositioning support for mapping and charting, navigation, flood risk determination, transportation, land use, infrastructure development, and ecosystem management. My responsibilities include providing technical and policy support to NOAA leadership, the White House, agency partners, and the general public on topics such as geodetic control, geospatial data collection, inundation mapping, and coastal resilience. I am also responsible for scientific reviews, educational outreach, and partnership development to advance equitable geospatial data access in a manner consistent with the specialized needs of our nation's vast Arctic state.

## **What is your educational background?**

I hold a BA in Geology from Colgate University and a PhD in Earth Sciences from University of California Santa Cruz. In my free time I have been pursuing a post-baccalaureate certificate in Legal Studies from University of Alaska Anchorage.

**A key message for students is that the geoscience workforce is dynamic, and boundaries between sectors and occupations are fluid. How has this been true in your career?**

One of the things that I love about working in geoscience is how inherently interdisciplinary the field is and that my most rewarding professional experiences have been problem-solving alongside non-geoscientists. I have followed a career path that has taken me from academic research to science delivery and into science policy; along the way I have gotten on-the-job training in everything from surveying and engineering to disaster mitigation and public administration. I enjoy that the foundational critical thinking and geospatial skills inherent to an earth science degree have resulted in me never feeling pigeon-holed in any one career track or any one sector.

**Where do you see your sector moving in future years? How would you advise students to prepare to be competitive job applicants and successful employees?**

Science policy around natural resources and geohazards are increasingly important as communities are needing to adapt to accelerating changes in our environment. Flood, drought, wildfire, and extreme heat events are occurring with greater frequency and severity, and government scientists are critical to ensuring that access to the best available data and tools is equitably available to all those in need of this information.

A career in public service is all about creative ways to do as much as possible with whatever resources are available, so strong project management skills that promote efficiency and sound budgeting are invaluable for success. For everyone, but especially those interested in working in policy, I encourage students to continually hone their writing skills with practice in many different writing styles (expository scientific and technical, legal, creative, and persuasive) to better meet the needs of the many types of audiences you're sure to encounter in your career.

**What is the role of networking in your sector? Do you have advice for a student who is just beginning to build their network? What is the best way for students to get their foot in the door?**

Networking is important in any sector, but in public policy some of the most important networking you can do is cross-sector because diverse relationships are required channels for understanding different perspectives. The primary advice I have for students just starting to build their professional networks is to value every person that takes the time to share their perspective with you, regardless of title or formal training.

One thing I wish that had been shared with me when I was a student are the magic words "informational interview." A request for an informational interview is a way to quickly ask for a brief and low stakes conversation with someone that is in a position or career path you would like to learn more about. It provides you with an opportunity, outside of the formality of a job interview or the commitment of an internship, a way to learn more about an individual's background, professional philosophy, job duties, and to gather career advice.

**What does a “typical” day of work look like for you?**

A typical day of work for me and my current position is best characterized by a lack of predictability—because I serve in a public facing advisor role, I never know who I will hear from. I might be asked to provide technical assistance on draft federal legislation in the morning and be contacted by a professional land surveyor in Nome, Alaska in the afternoon. I love the fast pace and continual learning that comes from being able to support so many different needs.

**What is the best part of your job?**

The magic moments in my job are when I am able to connect people to new contacts or new information (or both!) in a way that brings added insight or ignites new energy within the very real day-to-day problem solving associated with complex societal challenges like sea level rise.

**Do you have any other comments or advice for students looking to enter your sector of the geoscience workforce?**

If you’re looking to pursue a science policy career, my best advice would be to not restrict yourself to any one sector, and in the public sector to not limit yourself to any one type of government. Some of the most effective federal science advisors that I have met possess a mix of private, academic, and NGO experience in some form (even if brief), and have spent at least some time working within tribal, state, territorial, or local government.

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