

CHIEF EXTERNAL RELATIONS OFFICER

Build partnerships. Advance priorities. Strengthen VSU's public impact.

Institution	Valdosta State University
FLSA Status	Exempt (Executive)
Job Type	Full Time
Posting Details	Posted: October 15, 2026 Application Due: Open Until Filled Apply: [Click here]

THE OPPORTUNITY

Valdosta State University seeks an accomplished and relationship-driven Chief External Relations Officer (CERO) to lead the University's governmental affairs, legislative advocacy, community relations, and external partnership strategy. Reporting to the President and serving as a senior institutional leader, the CERO will advance VSU's priorities with elected officials, policymakers, civic leaders, regional partners, and other key stakeholders.

This is an opportunity for a strategic and diplomatic leader to strengthen VSU's public impact, connect institutional expertise with community needs, and position the University as an essential partner in the economic and social vitality of the region and state. The successful candidate will combine policy insight, political acumen, coalition-building ability, and sound executive judgment.

WHY VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY

At VSU, meaningful work is connected to student success and the vitality of the communities we serve. The CERO will join a leadership team that values collaboration, thoughtful innovation, accountability, and service. VSU offers the successful candidate a visible platform to shape public policy engagement, build enduring partnerships, represent a mission-driven institution, and help create lasting opportunities for students and communities.

DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Leadership, direction, and supervision

- Provide executive leadership for the University's governmental affairs, legislative advocacy, community relations, external engagement, and coalition-building functions.
- Develop and execute an integrated external affairs strategy that aligns public policy, government relations, and community partnerships with VSU's mission and strategic priorities.
- Lead, mentor, and develop staff responsible for government relations, community engagement, public affairs, and related programs, as applicable.
- Mobilize appropriate campus stakeholders, including the President, senior leaders, faculty experts, alumni, and other advocates, to advance key legislative and community priorities.
- Lead high-priority, cross-functional initiatives involving complex public issues, multiple constituencies, and significant institutional visibility or impact.

Administration

- Develop and maintain the University's legislative agenda at the local, state, and federal levels in alignment with institutional priorities, including funding, capital projects, student support, workforce development, research, and other strategic interests.
- Plan and coordinate meetings, briefings, campus visits, advocacy activities, community forums, and other engagements involving elected officials, legislative staff, agencies, civic leaders, and external partners.
- Create effective systems for stakeholder management, issue tracking, legislative monitoring, project coordination, follow-up, and executive reporting.

- Direct community engagement initiatives that connect University resources, expertise, student service, workforce programs, and public-facing services with identified regional needs.
- Establish key performance indicators and report regularly on legislative outcomes, community engagement, partnership activity, emerging risks, and the value of external affairs investments.

Subject-matter expert

- Serve as the University's senior advisor on governmental affairs, legislative strategy, public policy, community relations, coalition building, and external stakeholder engagement.
- Monitor and analyze proposed legislation, regulations, appropriations, and policy trends affecting higher education, student financial aid, research, workforce development, taxation, compliance, and University operations.
- Translate complex policy developments into clear assessments, recommendations, talking points, testimony, briefing materials, and action plans for executive leaders and campus stakeholders.
- Advise the President and senior leadership on emerging external issues, political and community considerations, partnership opportunities, and potential institutional impacts.
- Maintain current knowledge of governmental processes, advocacy practices, public-sector decision making, community engagement trends, and issues affecting public higher education.

Department representative

- Serve as the University's primary liaison and point of contact, as designated, for elected officials, legislative staff, regulatory agencies, municipal leaders, economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, civic groups, and other key external stakeholders.
- Represent VSU on relevant external boards, civic committees, regional partnerships, higher education associations, and advocacy coalitions.
- Cultivate trusted, productive relationships with public officials and community leaders across differing perspectives while maintaining the University's nonpartisan institutional posture.
- Lead and support coalition-building efforts that align VSU with partners around shared legislative, economic development, workforce, education, health, and community priorities.
- Serve as a connector between external stakeholders and the appropriate University leaders, faculty, programs, and resources, ensuring timely coordination and follow-through.

Manage budget

- Develop, administer, and monitor the Office of External Relations operating and strategic budgets in alignment with institutional priorities and applicable requirements.
- Allocate resources effectively across personnel, advocacy and engagement activities, events, travel, professional services, memberships, research, and partnership investments.
- Evaluate expenditures, vendors, memberships, and partnership commitments using defined outcomes, responsible stewardship, and demonstrated value to the University.

Compliance

- Ensure governmental affairs, advocacy, community engagement, and external partnership activities comply with applicable federal and state laws, ethics and lobbying requirements, University System of Georgia and VSU requirements, records obligations, and contractual commitments.
- Protect institutional neutrality by ensuring University advocacy and external engagement are appropriately authorized, fact-based, mission-aligned, and nonpartisan.
- Partner with Marketing and Communications, Legal Affairs, Public Safety, and other offices during major events, critical incidents, or public controversies involving government or community stakeholders.
- Exercise exceptional judgment, diplomacy, discretion, and confidentiality when handling sensitive public policy, political, community, or institutional matters.
- Complete required annual compliance training and satisfy all position-related screening requirements, including a criminal background check and credit check.

Policy and Procedure

- Develop, implement, interpret, and regularly review University policies, standards, and procedures related to governmental affairs, legislative engagement, advocacy, community relations, external representation, and stakeholder visits.
- Establish clear protocols for legislative contacts, elected-official engagement, advocacy requests, issue escalation, external commitments, and coordination with the President's Office and other University units.
- Create consistent processes for documenting stakeholder interactions, monitoring commitments, tracking outcomes, and communicating developments to appropriate leaders.
- Evaluate emerging issues and professional standards and recommend improvements that strengthen coordination, compliance, responsiveness, and institutional effectiveness.

COMPENSABLE FACTORS

- Work requires exceptionally well-developed leadership, communication, interpersonal, negotiation, and influencing skills to address matters critical to University operations, reputation, funding, and strategic priorities.
- Actions and decisions may significantly enhance or jeopardize the University's public standing and relationships and may require the attention of the President, executive leadership, governing authorities, or public officials.
- Work requires considerable judgment, initiative, political awareness, and ingenuity in formulating and administering institution-wide strategies, policies, programs, and external responses.
- The position regularly manages competing priorities, time-sensitive legislative or community issues, public scrutiny, and interactions with concerned or distressed stakeholders.
- The position directs and evaluates professional staff and may supervise managers or directors.
- The role may require work beyond 40 hours per week, including evenings, weekends, travel, and availability during legislative sessions, major events, emergencies, or emerging issues.

REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS

- Master's degree in public administration, public policy, political science, government relations, higher education administration, business, communications, or a related field.
- Ten years of progressively responsible professional experience in government relations, public affairs, legislative advocacy, community relations, external affairs, public administration, or a related field, including at least seven years in a supervisory or leadership role.
- Demonstrated experience developing and executing governmental affairs, advocacy, community engagement, or external relations strategy in a complex, multi-stakeholder organization.
- A record of building productive relationships with public officials and community leaders, advising senior executives, navigating sensitive issues, and leading collaborative initiatives.
- Equivalent combinations of education and experience may be considered in accordance with applicable University requirements.

PREFERRED QUALIFICATIONS

- Experience in higher education, government, a public-sector organization, or another mission-driven and highly visible institution.
- Established knowledge of Georgia's governmental, legislative, economic development, and higher education environment.
- Experience with appropriations, capital priorities, higher education policy, community development, workforce initiatives, or coalition-based advocacy.
- Experience representing an organization before elected officials, public agencies, civic bodies, boards, associations, or community groups.
- Relevant professional certification, designation, or advanced credential in public administration, government relations, community engagement, project management, or a related discipline.

ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ABILITIES

- Strategic, enterprise-level thinking with the ability to translate institutional priorities into credible external affairs strategies and measurable action.
- Exceptional writing, speaking, presentation, listening, negotiation, and executive-advising skills.
- Ability to communicate complex and sensitive information diplomatically and persuasively to varied audiences.
- Sound judgment, political and organizational awareness, discretion, and the ability to remain effective under pressure and public scrutiny.
- Ability to build trust and sustain productive, nonpartisan relationships across differing interests, perspectives, and levels of government.
- Strong project, portfolio, budget, event, and stakeholder-management skills, with the ability to manage interdependencies and competing priorities.
- Ability to research and analyze legislation, regulations, policy proposals, and community issues and communicate implications through concise reports and recommendations.
- Ability to lead cross-functional initiatives, foster collaboration, resolve conflict, and gain support for shared priorities.
- Commitment to developing people, strengthening partnerships, and representing VSU with integrity, professionalism, and service.

THE IDEAL CANDIDATE

The ideal candidate is a trusted advisor, skilled advocate, and natural coalition builder who understands how public policy, community relationships, and institutional strategy intersect. This leader will be equally comfortable briefing the President, engaging an elected official, convening community partners, analyzing legislation, navigating a sensitive public issue, and ensuring commitments are carried through to completion. The successful candidate will be credible, politically astute, nonpartisan, service-minded, and ready to expand VSU's influence and impact through purposeful relationships.

HOW TO APPLY

Applicants should submit all required application materials through the Careers portal. Questions regarding the search may be directed to Jeanine Boddie-LaVan via email at jyboddie@valdosta.edu.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT

Valdosta State University is an equal opportunity educational institution committed to fostering a welcoming and respectful environment. The University does not discriminate on the basis of sex, race, color, sexual orientation, religion, age, marital status, national origin, disability, veteran status, or other status protected by applicable law.