

Q&A: Anna Quider advises the STEM community on federal policy

A love of science and ease in communicating led her to start a consulting firm that aims to broaden opportunities in science and technology.

By **Toni Feder**



▲ Anna Quider (Photo courtesy of Anna Quider.)

While working on her PhD in astronomy at the University of Cambridge, Anna Quider realized that although she loved knowing and promoting science, discovering something like a new stellar population wasn't motivating for her; she would be happy to be "the champion for the person who is making those discoveries." She earned her PhD in 2011, ditched her plans to pursue an academic career, and pivoted to science policy.

In 2023, she launched her consultancy, the Quider Group, through which she advises research and higher-education organizations on science policy, congressional and agency engagement, grantsmanship, and advocacy.

Quider says that she remains "deeply connected" to the physics community. She is a fellow of the American Physical Society (APS) and of the American Association for the Advancement of

Science (AAAS); both organizations have recognized her contributions to science policy and her mentoring of early-career physicists.

The following interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Why did you go into science?

In eighth grade, my Earth sciences teacher wrote on the board that the universe was expanding. I could think of nothing else: How is it expanding? Is it stretching? Or is it rigid? I was always curious about a lot of things, so my ending up in science was not surprising. Early on, I was convinced I would be an astronomy professor.

How did you U-turn from your early plan to stay in academia?

What started opening my eyes was winning the Marshall Scholarship from the British government to do graduate studies at Cambridge. The scholarship has a policy component, and I had the opportunity to meet with elected leaders in the UK and to visit Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Ireland. Crucially, I started going to talks at Cambridge's new Centre for Science and Policy, and members of Parliament said they needed scientists to bring their expertise to policymaking.

At the same time, although my research was going well, I was realizing that sitting at a computer all day, every day, and wrestling with data was not how I wanted to spend my time. I'm better at talking to people than I am at talking to machines.

I started thinking, What are the things that I am uniquely good at? What do I value? It kept coming back to, I really like communicating, I like complexity, I like systems thinking.

I like knowing science, and I like promoting science, but I discovered in grad school that I am not motivated by discovery. That got me thinking about how I could become part of the enabling environment.

What were your next steps?

I became an APS Congressional Fellow and worked for a member of Congress for a year advising on science, technology, innovation, telecommunications, and education. Then I worked for nearly two years in the State Department on an AAAS Science & Technology Policy Fellowship. Those experiences showed me that science policy is a way to serve the scientific enterprise at a systems level and introduced me to the government relations profession.

I joined Northern Illinois University as federal relations director and later as an assistant vice president.

What did your work at Northern Illinois University entail?

I founded the DC office for the university, and I managed its federal portfolio. I maintained and managed our relationships with the state's congressional delegation. I advised the institution on federal policy issues. My role was also about creating opportunities for expertise within the institution to make its way into the policymaking process—for example, by setting up opportunities for faculty experts to weigh in with committees and other congressional staff who make decisions.

Part of the work relates to science and technology policy funding and how that connects with opportunities on campus. But it also involves other federal policies that affect institutions, such as those on immigration, athletics, tax, and labor.

While at the university, I was also very involved in crafting the science portion of the CHIPS and Science Act. [The 2022 law authorizes roughly \$280 billion for domestic semiconductor research and manufacturing and for other investments in science and technology.]

How did you contribute to the CHIPS and Science Act?

One of my major contributions was leading the effort to include a new higher-education designation: emerging research institutions, or ERIs, which are higher-education institutions that spend less than \$50 million annually on federally sponsored STEM research. Among higher-education institutions in the US, about 175 are not ERIs. But those 175 receive 93% of federal research dollars despite educating less than half the students—and only about one-third of low-income and minority students attend a research-active campus.

Why did you switch to consulting?

I had been doing effectively the same job for eight and a half years. Having that hyperfocus on science and technology policy [while working on the CHIPS and Science Act] made me realize that I wanted to get closer to my roots in science and technology. It was important to me that I focus on increasing access to opportunity; by offering multiple services under one contract, I make strategic federal engagement more accessible to more organizations. I also wanted a job that would let me have work-life balance—I have a young daughter.

How did you make the switch?

You see a problem, you see an opportunity. That's what entrepreneurship is. If the solution doesn't exist, you build one. That's why I started my firm in January 2023. It's been great.

The funny thing was that earlier, when I was at the State Department, I had managed a global entrepreneurship program. At the time, as I sat through entrepreneurship trainings, I told myself, “Being an entrepreneur is brutal. I’m never doing that.” I ate my words.

Tell me about your firm.

I work with higher-education institutions and other research-focused organizations. My clients are mostly ERIs. I help them strategize and get what they need from the federal government, with a focus on science and technology.

I also do paid speaking to keep clients informed about what’s happening in the federal government in areas that matter to them. For example, I am hired by boards to give quarterly updates on federal policy priority areas. Science policy fellowships hire me to run trainings on policymaking. And I do grantsmanship trainings and advise on national scholarships and student opportunity programs.

For some clients, my work has a strategic component. For others, it’s more focused on government relations. They may want support navigating a congressio-

nal process or advancing a priority of theirs through the legislative or appropriations process. Some clients want a little bit of everything.

How has demand changed since the new administration came in?

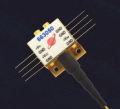
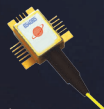
My clients need more real-time interpretation of federal policy and funding developments and more support anticipating what could be coming next. Some clients have decided to put building toward long-term federal policy or funding goals on the back burner. Their immediate priority is navigating uncertainty from the federal government, including research funding levels, grants administration policy changes, and reduction in basic-needs assistance for students.

How do you use your physics in your work?

I do a fair bit of data analysis. I’m not daunted by complex problems; I understand that they can be broken down. And I use my physics background to tap into a network of other highly motivated, technical people. Finally, people sometimes have more respect for “Dr. Quider” than they do for “Anna.”

PT

WIDE BANDWIDTH OPTICAL RECEIVERS FOR MAXIMUM NETWORK FLEXIBILITY



Applications

- Aero-Space
- Datacom
- Defense
- LIDAR
- Optical Clocks
- QKD
- RF-over-Fiber
- Telecom

Features

- Extensive Reliability and Space Radiation Qualifications
- Fibered and Free Space coupled options
- Wavelength range from 800 nm to 2400 nm
- Proven Defense and Space Flight Heritage



Telephone: +1(609)-434-1311
Email: sales@discoverysemi.com
Reach us at: www.discoverysemi.com

