



Community Briefing: Transforming Sacramento State into an Anchor University

Sacramento State's Anchor University Task Force | October 2019

A Call to Action

In his 2018 Fall Address, Sacramento State President Robert S. Nelsen outlined a vision to deepen and strengthen the University's engagement with the community by transforming the campus into an Anchor University. As an Anchor University, Sacramento State has a vested interest in the well-being of the Sacramento Region and strives to support and improve the quality of life in the community in which we serve. As a place-based institution, the University aims to bring the full weight of its intellectual and economic readiness to support the growth and flourishing of the city and region -- most especially, to address those neighborhoods and communities that have historically been underrepresented and underserved.

To launch the University's strategic pursuit of its anchor mission, President Nelsen established an Anchor University Task Force in August 2018. He charged the 50-member Task Force with a thorough review of the University's existing community engagement efforts, to assess community needs, and make recommendations on an organizational infrastructure that would develop and support the University's anchor mission.



Anchor University Task Force Effort

Community engagement has long been a hallmark of Sacramento State. Since the University's founding, thousands of faculty, staff, and students have worked with community partners through service learning, research, creative, and community collaborations, and volunteered their time and resources to nonprofit organizations, local and state governmental agencies, and community-based initiatives. While community engagement has been a part of the University for decades, it has historically focused on providing students with practical and meaningful educational experiences. The Anchor University effort aims to take the mission further into the community by creating lasting change where it is needed the most.

To undertake this work, the Anchor University Task Force examined a number of community needs assessments, conducted faculty and community surveys, and held three community convenings, two of them off campus. These convenings informed our community and campus about the anchor initiative, solicited input and insights about how we should move forward as an Anchor University, and suggested priorities of action for deepening the University's engagement with Sacramento and its residents. A Steering Committee drawn from the Task Force membership provided strategic input and critical guidance.

The Task Force also administered surveys to the Sacramento State faculty and to community partners, soliciting feedback about the anchor initiative and their experience with the University. Finally, a cross-sector literature review was conducted to identify those issues that are of collective concern within Sacramento. Findings from all of these data sources - along with the recently completed reclassification of the Carnegie Foundation's Classification for Community Engagement – contributed to the full report.

Summary of Community Needs

The anchor mission's focus on place is especially appropriate to Sacramento State as the majority of our students are from, and live within, the greater Sacramento region and reflect its racial and economic demographics. In order to develop a broad understanding of the issues facing our communities, the Task Force reviewed over a dozen existing community need assessments and other reports developed by a variety of government agencies, universities, community groups, and non-profits. Those reports, which can be found in the full report, showed that while the economy and population of our region are growing, the inequity among our residents is becoming more evident each day. The final report outlined some of the most pressing needs and issues currently facing Sacramento, as identified in existing community-level reports. Specifically, the Task Force's community needs review focused on the following areas of importance:

- Pre-K through Higher Education and Workforce Development
- Arts and Culture
- Environment and Sustainability
- Health and Welfare
- Homeless and Housings
- Economic and Community Development
- Social Justice and Safety

Community Convenings and Input

University leadership and the Task Force membership firmly believed that the community must be involved in the development of the final report and recommendations in it. A priority was placed on providing ample opportunity for community partners to share their thoughts about the Anchor University effort. To that end, three community convenings were held and two community engagement surveys were administered.

Community Convenings. Three convenings were held with community partners representing a broad cross-section of sectors within Sacramento. The purpose of the convenings was to introduce the Anchor University concept and Sacramento State's efforts to date, collect input from community partners to inform the anchor mission, and identify community members interested in ongoing participation. The community convenings included:

- **February 21, 2019 | Oak Park Community Center.** Attended by 48 community members.
- **May 10, 2019 | Sacramento State Alumni Center.** Attended by 50 community members and held in conjunction with Sacramento State's Community Engagement Center.
- **June 18, 2019 | Grant Union High School.** Attended by 26 community members.

Community Surveys. Two surveys were developed to solicit further input from community partners and faculty. Both surveys were administered online in late spring 2019. The surveys focused on the respondents' experiences with engagement at Sacramento State, including areas that the University currently does well and existing challenges related to university/ community collaborations.

As a result of these efforts, the Task Force gathered input from approximately 120 community members from convenings and more than 440 community partners and faculty who responded to the surveys. The collective input represents a diverse range of perspectives that provide a foundation for articulating what an anchor initiative could look like in Sacramento.

The final report acknowledges that there is no uniform consensus about key issues surrounding Sacramento State's commitment towards deepening engagement in the community, and we do not want to lose the diversity of voices gathered in this effort. However, there were several clear themes that emerged from the input and discussions, which can provide guidance on how an anchor initiative could be uniquely realized in Sacramento.

Themes from Anchor University Convenings

The Anchor University convenings included dozens of lively conversations covering a multitude of topics. The following summary of themes are organized by the three conversation prompts given to participants.

What Excites You about an Anchor Mission?

Individuals were asked to share their "excitements" about Sacramento State embracing an anchor mission and the types of potential and opportunities it may produce.

University-Community Integration. Individuals from both the community and the University expressed excitement about deepening the connection between "town and gown" in Sacramento. There is a common sentiment among participants that developing a stronger relationship between Sacramento State and the community is a "logical step" and for the University to be "in the community, not separate." The notion of fostering more strategic collaboration and replacing existing "silos" was heard repeatedly, as well as the acknowledgement that an anchor mission should be mutually beneficial to the community and the University. Numerous conversations and feedback discussed how an anchor mission would increase the connectivity of the University to other entities, becoming "a hub for coordinating partnerships" and "bringing different people together who are passionate about the work."

Through this work of relationship-building, people expressed excitement regarding the opportunities to build an “ecosystem of inclusion” across Sacramento and “connecting expertise of community with expertise of subject experts.”

Paradigm Shift. Discussions about an anchor mission at Sacramento State included the recognition that a resulting initiative would represent a “paradigm shift” in the University’s approach to making “deeper investments in the community.” This excitement included “change makers challenging the narrative and involving community” in how Sacramento State engages in “reimagining the role of the University in the community.” Likewise, many participants are enthusiastic about the possibility of “large-scale, structural innovations” that this type of engagement could produce. In addition, they recognize that “identifying areas of mutual interest that also improve conditions in the community” can ultimately produce “collective impact” throughout the Sacramento region. Conversations included discussions about how an anchor mission holds the transformative possibility of “opening the idea of a university to more than just classes” and “reimagines the role of the university in the community” by moving Sacramento State toward “being relevant” and “building a world-class university.”

Student Opportunities. Many of the excitements shared by participants involve how a focus on investing in community relationships will enrich the educational experience of Sacramento State students. For example, incorporating an anchor mission was discussed as “connecting the classroom with the context” and providing students opportunities to apply knowledge while “solving real problems.” Specifically, one community member highlighted that an anchor mission would be a catalyst “from theory to action; I believe that academia has a tendency to get stuck in theory without engaging in activities that produce REAL learning.” A number of participants discussed the importance of the ongoing service learning and internships and were excited about the possibility that an anchor mission could ultimately translate to “college students being a bigger and more impactful part of the community.”



Community Impact. Similar excitement was expressed over the possible impacts that an anchor mission could have for the communities of Sacramento. There is enthusiasm about the linking of “resources at Sacramento State to community needs,” and specifically about the possibility of strategically investing in community through local hiring and the use of local suppliers. Many individuals mentioned their excitement about sharing the University’s knowledge and expertise beyond the campus boundaries, to become a true “thought partner to assist organizations in building their capacities to be more effective.” Discussions included connecting the mission of the University to the well-being of the community, and identifying the potential for “research that supports the community,” “knowledge serving the city,” and using “knowledge for the public good.”

What Concerns You About Adopting an Anchor Mission?

In addition to their excitements, participants were asked to share any concerns they might have regarding Sacramento State pursuing an anchor-focused mission.

Inclusivity and Power in Engagement. Participants identified the importance of inclusivity when engaging with the community, and expressed concerns about “giving equal representation” and “leaving portions of the community out.” There is concern that the University would continue “listening only to the same people who have the power” and there would be a focus on the University’s needs “rather than community needs.” Another theme is the concern about the ability of Sacramento State to pivot from “the ivory tower” and its “tendency toward paternalism” and a resulting concern about the “lack of respect for the knowledge and expertise of community” and “outsiders telling the community what they think they need.” Both faculty and community members are sensitive to the fact that, overall, the University holds the privilege and power in most university-community linkages and Sacramento State should be mindful of this when seeking out collaborative long-term relationships.

Capacity and Resources for Success. Another common concern discussed is whether the University has the internal capacity to implement such an ambitious initiative, including the resources and the long-term political will needed to support the initiative. Discussions highlighted the fact that faculty, staff, and students have competing priorities and already are “spread too thin.” Others questioned whether introducing an anchor mission would be “distracting from existing, promising relationships, duplicating efforts” and whether it might divert attention and resources toward “reinventing the wheel.”

Making the Commitment Accountable. A related concern expressed among the participants was that the anchor mission would be “more flash than splash” and the need for the University to be accountable to commitments made to the community. There is a concern that Sacramento State might be perceived as “over promising, under delivering” and there is a need to ensure the “ability to bring value” to community partners when initiating any type of initiative. Concerns were expressed that the anchor mission was “too diffuse, diluting” and that the University should “be pragmatic” and mindful to “manage expectations” when talking about community engagement. Participants reiterated the importance of ensuring that the anchor mission is meaningful and of benefit to the community: any resulting initiative “must be tangible, real and useful to the community.”

Ensuring Long-Term Sustainability. A final theme related to concerns is “the time needed to put systems and relationships in place” and how an anchor mission will be sustained into the future. Participants noted that successful engagement with the community requires the long-term work of building relationships over many years. Many of the concerns acknowledged that the anchor mission needs to “maintain momentum” and that “the University faces the challenge to harness all departments and students to address critical issues - and to sustain efforts” over time. In addition, participants identified the need for the University to institutionalize the mission and to provide a long-term financial support.

Advice for Moving Forward

Advice was solicited from faculty and community partners about how Sacramento State should pursue deepening engagement within the communities of Sacramento and realizing an anchor mission.

Offer a clear and focused mission. One common thread of advice is that becoming an Anchor University should start with a clear focus and mission with “concrete goals and concrete action items.” Participants reflected on the need for Sacramento State to articulate its intentions and vision behind this recent drive for greater community engagement in order for stakeholders to see value in investing in relationships and collaborations.

Engage with the community *in* the community. Feedback from participants was emphatic that to engage effectively with the community, the University needs to be a visible and active partner outside of campus. For example, “come out to the community rather than only inviting community members to CSUS.” The theme of Sacramento State establishing a presence beyond our campus and being a proactive and informed partner resonated throughout the feedback collected.

Communicate effectively. A related theme was that the University will need to effectively communicate the anchor mission to the broader community in accessible, meaningful language. For example, participants advised that engaging feedback and dialogue with the community should not be “too academic” or use “fancy words” but should be authentic and resonate beyond community leaders and with the members of their communities, as well.

Ensure inclusive representation. The need for a body/infrastructure to facilitate ongoing communication and dialogue between the university and the community was another common thematic piece of advice. The suggestion of establishing a community group, council, or committee that advises the anchor mission was seen as a priority across conversations.



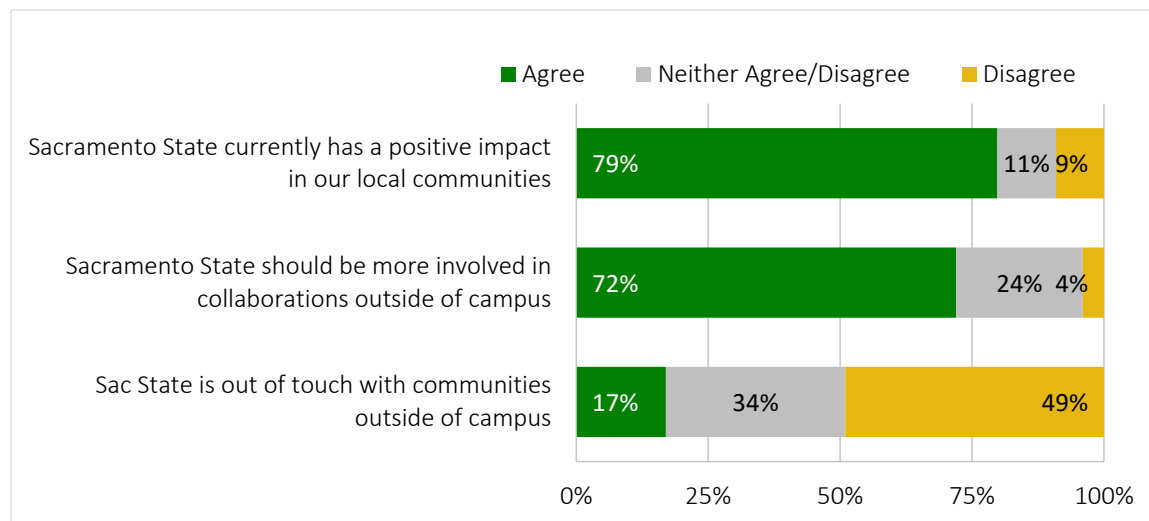
Establish university infrastructure. In addition to establishing a mechanism for ongoing community input about an anchor mission, there was consistent advice about developing an internal infrastructure to support and coordinate anchor activities at Sacramento State. The advice included establishing an office focused on supporting the initiative, to making sure that there are resources and linkages across departments, units, and centers. The idea that this infrastructure should include a “one-stop shop” for accessing the university and fostering relationships was mentioned frequently.

Be data driven. A final theme that emerged was that an anchor mission should be informed by data in both its formation and also in its implementation. The notion was expressed that unless the initiative was “measurable,” it would be difficult to determine its impact or hold the University accountable to its mission. A number of participants noted that there is currently no mechanism to capture the breadth of engagement happening at Sacramento State, and there is a need to track and communicate this work. Advice included “metrics for success and define benchmarks/goals” as well as the importance of using qualitative data to understanding how the initiative is impacting the community.

Community Perceptions of University Engagement

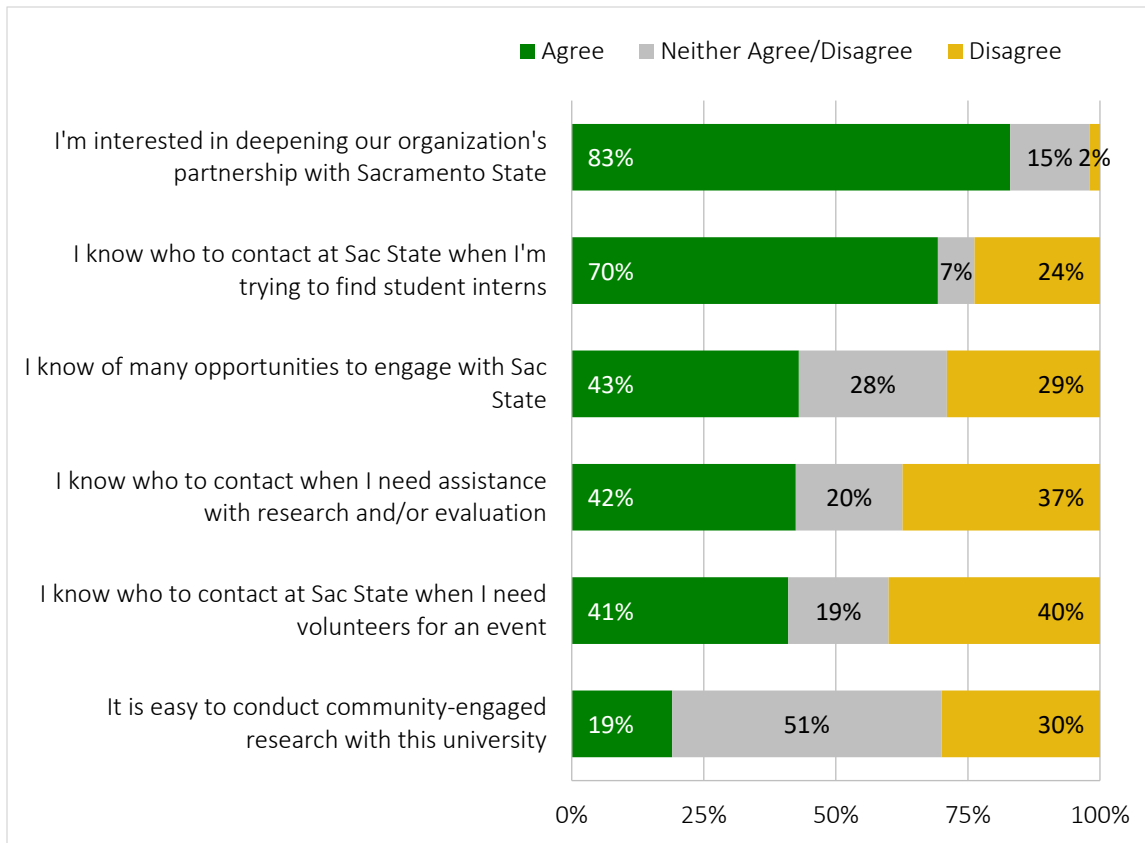
The community partners were asked their point of view about Sacramento State’s current engagement (in the survey). The majority of community partners responding felt that the University currently has a positive impact in our local communities (79%) while also indicating that we should be “more involved in collaborations outside of campus” (72%). Responses were overall ambivalent to the statement that “Sacramento State is out of touch with communities outside of campus” with about half either agreeing with this statement (17%) and not having an opinion (34%).

Figure 1 | Community Partners Perceptions of Sacramento State’s Engagement



In terms of their own experience engaging with the University, 83 percent were interested in deepening their organization’s engagement. Most also knew who to contact at the University (70%) in terms of finding interns, but this is undoubtedly skewed by the fact that the list of partners had an existing relationship with the Community Engagement Center. Even so, less than half of the respondents knew of many opportunities to engage with Sacramento State (43%), knew who to contact for research/evaluation assistance (42%) or who to contact for volunteers for an event (41%). Only 19 percent stated that it is easy to conduct community-engaged research with the University, with most respondents not having an opinion (51%).

Figure 2 | Community Partners Experience Engaging with Sacramento State



Sacramento State's Strengths and Challenges

Community partners were also asked in the survey to identify what they thought Sacramento State does well, “what they should do better,” and barriers to engagements with the University.

Strengths. The strongest theme about what the University does well was in terms of students’ involvement in community engagement: “The students are everywhere and are supporting the community in so many ways.” Contact with the interns and students was reported as overwhelmingly positive, for example, “we have truly enjoyed getting interns from Sacramento State, they have all been amazing and we have even hired a few.” Other partners noted their interactions with faculty bringing in community members into the classroom and who are “very accessible” and wanting “to help where they are able to.” Similarly, several respondents shared their experiences with faculty who “are extremely committed to social justice issues.” Another common thread in the responses was the acknowledgement that Sacramento has a significant impact on the local workforce. “Sac State, provides an excellent education to a large population of the Sacramento community, who then go on to contribute to many communities,” one respondent wrote.

Challenges. In terms of what Sacramento State could do better, one theme was making more linkages that respond to workforce needs, for example, “bring workforce leaders in to tell deans what they want in their future workforce.” A related recommendation was for the University to engage “in the creative economy in several different ways through cross-industry and discipline incubators.”

Many respondents noted that despite their positive experiences with individual faculty, staff and students, they were unaware of specific engagement activities “at the institutional level.” One of the most prevalent themes in the community responses was the observation that there was no central contact or coordinating body which is either available to respond to engagement inquiries, or promoting the engagement work that is being accomplished. As one respondent stated, “I would not know who to contact at Sac State to see if collaborations were possible,” and a number of people noted that they are not aware of the possible opportunities or “their options” that currently exist at the University. Another sentiment expressed multiple times was that the University either did not reach out, or when approached, was not willing to partner with their organizations. For example, “I have often been the one seeking out relationships with Sacramento State rather than being engaged pro-actively,” and “I’ve tried many times to partner with Sac State. They have never seemed interested.”

Task Force Recommendations

After spending the academic year engaging the community, the campus and reviewing both academic literature and community needs assessments, Task Force deliberated on what recommendations to make to President Nelsen and the University’s leadership. Ultimately, the final report makes over 50 recommendations for them to consider. Highlights of the recommendations include:

- **Appoint a senior administrator** who serves on the President’s Cabinet, to lead a central organizational office to develop, implement, and oversee the University’s anchor mission.
- **Create a permanent Anchor University Advisory Council** to offer overall direction, support, and feedback to sustain the work of the anchor mission. The Council should **include external community partners** and have representations from all the University’s academic colleges and operational divisions.
- **Allocate baseline funding** to meet the needs of the governance and organizational infrastructures, communication, and outreach.
- Through shared governance, **consider strategies to incentivize and recognize** the value of community-based learning, teaching, research, and service in hiring, retention, and promotion processes and expectations.

Other recommendations that deal with community partners and regional needs include, but were not limited to:

- **The University’s work should be regionally focused, prioritizing underserved and underrepresented communities.** These communities can include, but are not limited to those with high unemployment, high poverty, low rates of high-school completion, low rates of college attendance, health and income inequalities, and numerous Title I schools.
- **Deepen relationships to K-12 schools and school districts** that seek to solidify their partnership with the University in order to serve existing elementary and high school students, while providing Sacramento State students and faculty additional scholarly opportunities.
- **Address regional workforce needs** by coordinating and aligning anchor initiatives with the Career Center’s initiatives and efforts.
- **Align campus-based grants programs to community engagement activities and/or community-based research.** Consider setting aside funds within existing campus grant programs for explicit community engagement/community-based research efforts.
- **Develop “A Day of Service” for the entire campus to focus on the Anchor University initiative.**
- **Develop strategic partnerships with other prominent anchor institutions in Sacramento,** including local school districts and hospitals.
- **Work with community partners and offer trainings to facilitated access** to Sacramento State faculty, students, staff, administrators, and other resources.

- **Create a website dedicated to existing community-engagement efforts** across all core academic functions as well as, service and operations, and provide key contacts so individuals responsible for these efforts can be reached by on- and off-campus constituents.
- **Establish a local vendor procurement goal and mechanisms to achieve it**, including an advisory committee composed of community members and small business owners.

Next Steps

A community meeting will be held on October 10th to share the Task Force’s finding with the public. In the coming weeks and month, Sacramento State will begin to implement a number of the recommendations in the report, including creating the permanent Anchor University Advisory Council that will include community members. Additionally, the processes for community members to engage the University will be improved and shared with the public. Please stay in touch with your existing campus partners and contacts until a new protocol is unveiled.

For more information, please contact anchor@csus.edu

The full Anchor University Task Force report can be found at <https://www.csus.edu/experience/anchor-university/>





An anchor university is the opposite of the ivory tower. It aims to connect its students, faculty and staff with the community and, in turn, help build and heal that community, achieving lasting solutions and improvements through inclusive civic engagement.

President Robert Nelsen
Sacramento Bee, August 27, 2018