

Annual Report

July 2024 - June 2025

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Letter from Leadership

I'm excited to share with you the 2024-2025 Annual Report for the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU). This year, higher education has faced a whirlwind of change—some of it difficult, much of it unexpected. However, through these challenges, one thing has become crystal clear: urban-serving research universities are not only rising to the moment, they're also redefining what is possible.

“Together, USU’s voice is stronger, our reach is broader, and our impact is greater.”

Our members continue to drive real impact where it matters most: on campuses, in communities, and across entire cities. Whether it's expanding access to higher education, championing equitable student success, conducting groundbreaking research, or creating strong pathways to social and economic mobility, USUs are leading the way with heart, purpose, and unwavering resolve.

Urban-serving research universities are more than just institutions located in cities; they are essential parts of the fabric of those cities. They help shape the future of local economies, public health, education, housing, and more. As our cities grow in diversity, complexity, and influence, so too does the power and potential of the universities that serve them.

At USU, we're proud to support this mission by bringing institutions together, amplifying their voices, and helping them tap into the tools, resources, and partnerships they need to thrive. Over the past year, we've:

- Worked with major philanthropic foundations to provide funding and technical support for initiatives that promote student belonging, degree completion, workforce development, and support for adult learners.
- Hosted a range of learning and networking opportunities tailored to the unique needs of urban-serving universities, including virtual and in-person events, a summer meeting, and curated programming at national convenings.
- Established the USU Advisory Council, bringing together national leaders and organizations committed to advancing the health and vitality of urban communities through collaboration with higher education.
- Worked closely with APLU to champion the needs of urban-serving research universities in federal policy and advocacy efforts.
- Celebrated and elevated the achievements of our member institutions in student success, social mobility, degree completion, innovation and economic prosperity, and community impact.
- Developed a strategic plan and priorities to guide organizational excellence for years to come.

As we look ahead, our path forward will require connection, collaboration, and a shared commitment to progress. The future of higher education, and the future of our cities, depends on it. Together, USU's voice is stronger, our reach is broader, and our impact is greater.



Jennifer Keup, PhD
Executive Director, USU
Vice President, APLU

About USU

The Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU) is a network of public urban research universities that represents every region of the United States. University presidents created the Coalition to leverage the intellectual capital and economic power of urban universities, thereby improving urban life and America's competitiveness in the global economy.

USU's agenda focuses on the role of urban research universities as "anchor institutions" to drive workforce and career development, equitable student success, impactful campus-community partnerships, and economic and community health. USU advances this work through membership activities and grant-funded initiatives. The Coalition partners with the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) to jointly lead an urban agenda for the nation's public universities.



USU is a 501 (c) 6 membership organization, which has established a permanent partnership with the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) to share a joint USU/APLU Office of Urban Initiatives.

Purpose

The Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU) is committed to advancing the mission of urban higher education institutions. As critical drivers of economic mobility, community engagement, and research, urban-serving universities play a vital role in addressing society's most pressing challenges. USU launched a strategic plan in July 2025 that outlines our priorities and long-term goals to strengthen impact, expand influence, and ensure financial sustainability.

Priorities

1

Shape national conversations on urban higher education *through thought leadership, scholarship, and advocacy that elevate the role of urban-serving universities.*

2

Strengthen university-community partnerships *to elevate the role of member institutions as place-based anchors committed to local vitality and community well-being.*

3

Deepen member collaboration and elevate USU's influence *by fostering a highly engaged, connected and collaborative network that drives collective action and shared learning.*

4

Ensure financial strength to sustain and expand impact *through diverse revenue streams to support organizational stability and growth, expand USU's reach, and ensure member value.*

Board of Directors



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Chair
University of New Mexico



Michael Amiridis
Past Chair
University of South Carolina



Wayne J. Riley
Vice Chair
SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University



Kim Wilcox
Secretary
University of California - Riverside



Erika Beck
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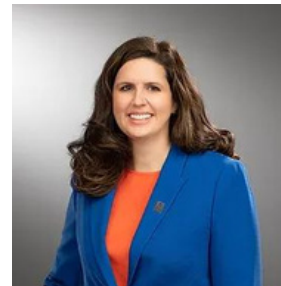
Mauli Agrawal
University of Missouri Kansas City



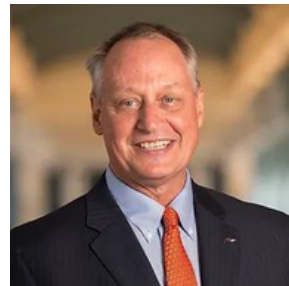
M. Brian Blake
Georgia State University



Alexander Cartwright
University of Central Florida



Jennifer Cowley
University of Texas at Arlington



Taylor Eighmy
University of Texas at San Antonio



Sheila Lange
University of Washington Tacoma



Mark Mone
University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee



Rick Muma
Wichita State University



Keith Whitfield
University of Nevada Las Vegas

Advisory Council

The USU Advisory Council brings together leading organizations committed to advancing the health, sustainability, and economic vitality of urban areas—many of which are home to public urban-serving research universities. USU believes cross-sector collaboration is essential to addressing our communities' challenges and opportunities. The Advisory Council is a space for knowledge-sharing, strategic alignment, and collaborative action between USU and forward-thinking, organizations creating action in Washington, DC. The Advisory Council will strengthen partnerships that support both urban communities and the universities that serve them.



The Alliance to End Hunger

Eric Mitchell, President

Council of Large Public Housing Authorities (CLPHA)

Abra Lyons-Warren, Director of Housing Is

International City-County Management Association (ICMA)

Tad McGalliard, Managing Director of Research, Development & Technical Assistance

MetroLab Network

Kate Burns, Executive Director

National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO)

Ryan Russo, Executive Director

National League of Cities (NLC)

Elfreda Massie, Director of Education & Expanded Learning



Members

USU supports a highly engaged and connected membership community of 39 urban research universities.

USU members are public urban research universities that are located in metropolitan areas with populations of 100,000 or greater. They enroll 10 or more doctoral students per year and conduct a minimum of \$10 million in research and demonstrate a commitment to their urban areas.

Research Dollars
\$8+ billion



Students Served
1.2 million

FTFT Retention Rate
76%



Faculty and Staff
235,482

Member Awards & Honors

This year, our members achieved outstanding milestones, earning prestigious awards and making remarkable contributions that reflect their dedication and excellence.

APLU IEP Award Winners

IEP Connections Award - Wayne State University
IEP Innovation Award - University of New Mexico
IEP Place Award - University of Texas at San Antonio
Finalists - University of Alabama at Birmingham and
University of Memphis

Department of Education Postsecondary Student Success Grant

California State University, Fresno Foundation
Research Foundation for The SUNY – Albany
Portland State University
University of Texas at San Antonio

Department of Education Postsecondary Student Success Recognition

University of Texas at Arlington

APLU Degree Completion Award Finalist

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Department of Education Postsecondary Student Success Trailblazer Award

Georgia State University

Seal of Excelencia Certification

*Ten USU member institutions maintained the
Seal of Excelencia Certification*

California State University, Fresno
California State University, Los Angeles
California State University, Northridge
Florida International University
University of Texas at Arlington
University of Texas at San Antonio
University at Albany
University of California Riverside
University of Central Florida
University of Illinois Chicago

Top Performers on Social Mobility US News & World Report

Two USU member institutions, Florida International University and the University of California, Riverside, tied for the #1 ranking in social mobility according to US News & World Report. Six USU members were named in the top 20 institutions of this category.

USU Awards

CAEL Morris T. Keeton Award

USU Associate Director Jimmy McClellan, for his work with UALI

Wichita State University's Adult Learning Community Partner Award

USU's Urban Adult Learner Institute (UALI)

Initiatives & Projects

In 2024-2025, USU led five impactful, grant-funded projects totaling more than \$3.5 million in collaboration with leading philanthropic partners, which brought resources and technical assistance to USU member institutions to drive innovation and equity in higher education.

Collaborative Opportunity Grant (COG)

COG is a grant project, funded by the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, designed to support emerging and innovative university-community partnerships to improve 21st Century skills delivery, acquisition, and transferability to the workforce. USU has awarded grants to 15 different member institutions to develop and scale collaborations with external organizations such as other four-year universities, community colleges, school districts, businesses, or local governments.

Federal Investments in University Success

Funded by Arnold Ventures, FIUS provides resources, networking, and training to USU and APLU member institutions applying to the Department of Education's Postsecondary Student Success Grant. It aims to elevate evidence-based student success strategies, promote collaboration and knowledge sharing among peers, and offer technical assistance to support universities interested in applying for federal funding.

Graduate TAs as Change Agents for Equitable Student Experience

With a grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, and in partnership with Equity Accelerator, the Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) as Change Agents for Equitable Student Experience project engaged the University of New Mexico and the University of Colorado Denver to implement SEP training for GTAs.

Partnerships for Adult Learner Success (PALS)

PALS is a three-year grant funded by the Lumina Foundation to innovate and build more inclusive, agile, and comprehensive student success pathways and supports for adult learners of color. The grant-funded PALS project concluded in December 2024, but its valuable lessons and impact continue through the lasting UALI project.

Student Experience Project (SEP)

The Student Experience Project (SEP) is a collaborative of university leaders, faculty, researchers and national education organizations committed to innovative, research-based practices to increase degree attainment by building equitable learning environments and fostering a sense of belonging on campus. This initiative is funded by the Raikes Foundation.

Activities

USU provides thought leadership and supports collaborative initiatives that address community needs and promote student success.

Communications

Blog

USU re-launched its blog on LinkedIn to expand its reach and share the work of USU and its members.

Newsletter

The new monthly USU Newsletter reaches 500+ members with updates, events, and member highlights.

Social Media

USU leverages social media to share opportunities and highlight the work of USU and its members. Our social platforms engage a community of 774 users.

Professional Development

Student Experience Project (SEP) Institute

The SEP Institute is a year-long learning cohort that supports institutions in developing faculty communities of practice to improve classroom experiences, foster student belonging, and strengthen student success. Campus teams participate in an in-person two-day intensive, monthly virtual cross-cohort meetings, and ongoing peer coaching.

Urban Adult Learner Institute (UALI)

The Urban Adult Learner Institute (UALI) is a virtual, modular institute and certification opportunity that builds awareness, disseminates best practices, and gathers national momentum in support of undergraduate adult learners.

Webinar Series

In 2024, USU began hosting quarterly webinars with relevant organizations to provide relevant and timely information to members. Webinars hosted this year included:

- “Advancing Evidence-Based Interventions for College Completion: Insights from Postsecondary Student Success Grant Awardees”
- “Student Engagement at USU Institutions: What Can We Learn from NSSE?” with the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
- “Equity/Excellence at Urban-Serving Universities: President's Perspectives” with the Association for Undergraduate Education at Research Universities (UERU)
- “Hunger-Free Higher Ed: A Statewide Approach to Food Security” with Hunger Solutions Institute at Auburn University
- “Exploring the Future of College Admissions” with the Urban Institute

Networking Opportunities

Highlights from Meetings and Events Across the Nation

President and Chancellor Meetings

USU hosts bi-monthly, confidential meetings for member Presidents and Chancellors to discuss key issues and strengthen the network of leaders at USU institutions.

USU Summer Meeting

In June 2025, the Coalition convened Presidents/Chancellors and senior leaders from member campuses in Washington, DC. Sessions covered topics like campus-community partnerships, change leadership, and other networking opportunities. Session titles included:

- 20 Years of USU: How It Started, How It's Going
- Celebrating 20 Years: USU Anniversary Reception
- Expanding the Ecosystem: Partnering Beyond Higher Ed to Support Urban Universities
- From Grant to Impact: Lessons in Postsecondary Student Success
- Government Affairs Q&A
- Reflections and Planning: Results of USU's Strategic Planning Process
- State of the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities Address
- Student-Centered Transformation: Your Role in Using Data and Strategic Finance
- USU Presidents and Chancellors Dinner

APLU Annual Meeting

USU hosted four content sessions at the 2024 APLU Annual Meeting in Orlando, FL. The Coalition also hosted a member meeting and networking reception exclusive to USU members.

- HSRU and USU Joint Reception
- Our Public Purpose: Evidence-Based Student Success That Works at Scale
- The Student Experience Project - Improving Student Belonging in the Classroom and Beyond
- Unlocking Potential: Insights from the Partnerships for Adult Learner Success Grant
- USU Member Meeting



Thought Leadership

Highlights from Meetings and Events Across the Nation

USU implements strategies to increase member participation, facilitate peer learning, and create opportunities for shared advocacy and research that elevate the collective influence of urban-serving institutions.

Conference Presentations

AAC&U Annual Meeting *Multiple sessions*

AAC&U Conference on Transforming STEM Higher Education *Equitable Teaching Practices to Support Student Belonging: Professional Development for Graduate Teaching Assistants*

MetroLab Annual Summit *The State of Universities*

NASPA Mapping Advising to HIPs: Advancing Holistic Advising Redesign

Advisory Roles and Service to the Field

ACE Innovation Lab *Designing Integrated Data Resources to Support Survey Administrators and Institutional Decision-making*

ACE Salon Dinner: *Building Capacity to Facilitate Student-Parent Success*

City-Region Economic Development Institute (City-REDI) at the University of Birmingham (U.K.) *Civic Universities in Action: Global Insights Into City University Partnerships, Place-based Strategies and Community Impact project*

Elevating Teaching Excellence in Higher Education At Scale Convening

IHEP Student Experience and Belonging Working Group

MetroLab Partner

NASH 2025 Superconvening: *Systemness in Action*

NASPA Adult Learners and Students with Children Knowledge Community

Pullias Center's Promoting At-promise Student Success (PASS) Advisory Board
Student Success Journal Advisory Board

TICAS College Completion Convening: Comprehensive Approaches to Student Success

Our Team



Jennifer Keup

Executive Director



Sam Levine

Director



Jimmy McClellan

Associate Director



Julia Boyer

Senior Associate



Jennifer Danek

Senior Strategic
Advisor



Jasmine Vidrio

SEP Program
Manager



Rico Reed

COG Project
Director



Work with Us

There are several opportunities for institutions and organizations of different kinds to work with the Coalition. Please contact us to discuss membership inquiries or other collaboration opportunities.

Find Us



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Website

usucoalition.org



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Urban Serving Universities