

The logo features the word "AASCU" in a large, white, sans-serif font, with the word "NEXT" in a smaller, red, sans-serif font directly below it. The background of the entire page is a dark blue overlay on a photograph of a large, historic university building with multiple domes and arched windows. In the foreground, there is a blurred image of a graduate in a cap and gown.

AASCU NEXT

Strategic Plan of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities

Welcome to What's Next

The world is changing rapidly, and higher education must change with it. The ways we teach and learn are evolving, driven by technological advancements and shifting societal needs. At the same time, economic shifts and evolving perceptions about the value of a college degree present new challenges for institutions and students alike.

Regional Public Universities (RPUs) are how America will meet this moment. Why? They are nimble, adaptable, and in tune with the needs of their communities.

AASCU is committed to empowering RPUs to lead the way. Our new strategic plan, "AASCU *Next*," outlines a bold vision for the future of our association and our member institutions.

We chose to call our plan AASCU *Next* because it is our responsibility to students, our members, and our partners to have a clear-eyed perspective on how to turn today's challenges into tomorrow's opportunities. AASCU members have told us loud and clear that they depend on our organization to not only provide support but to prepare for what's coming next.

This is a pivotal crossroads for how Americans teach, learn, and explore. Through AASCU *Next*, we will:

- Champion the value and impact of RPUs.
- Build the institutional and leadership capacities of RPUs.
- Foster the opportunities for the future of RPUs.

I invite you to join us in this vital work. Together, we can shape the future of higher education. What will we think of *next*?



Chuck Welch

President, AASCU

Our **Next** Mission

AASCU's mission statement focuses on the now. It describes our core purpose, reason for existence, and what we do to achieve our goals today.

AASCU champions the nation's regional public universities to drive economic mobility through education and discovery.

Our **Next** Vision

AASCU's vision statement focuses on the future. It captures our long-term aspirations and paints a picture of what we hope to achieve.

AASCU will advance the unique ability of regional public universities to provide transformative student opportunities, meet workforce needs, and enhance community vitality through impactful innovation.

Defining the **Next** Regional Public Universities

Today's RPUs focus on serving all student populations, including many of the nation's adult learners, students of color, and those who identify as first-generation, low-income, or from rural communities. They enroll nearly three-quarters of undergraduates at public four-year institutions and are characterized by a commitment to service and community impact.

In short, RPUs are where the vast majority of higher learning happens in America. These institutions provide accessible, equitable, and affordable education. Their students transfer from other institutions as life challenges them, often looking for a new path.

Against all odds, including lower federal and state funding per student, RPUs deliver substantial returns on investment. They are crucial to advancing mobility in their regions, with average in-state tuition below \$10,000 and significant affordability for Pell Grant recipients.

But we also know that RPUs must evolve. Tomorrow's RPUs must honor their roots while transforming into financially sustainable institutions adept at meeting consumers where they are. A strong RPU will diversify revenue, embrace innovative pedagogies, and integrate emerging technologies. RPUs need to foster strong partnerships with K-12, community colleges, and industry, providing accessible pathways to lifelong learning and contributing to economic success.

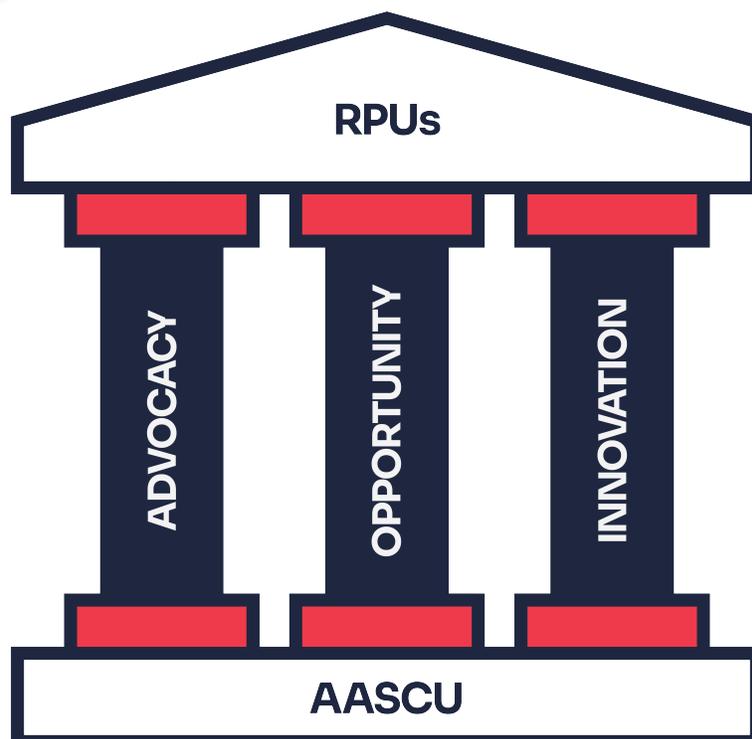
Our **Next** Priorities

Why are we so future-focused? The task ahead is not just about completion but equipping students for an ever-evolving world where adaptability is key. It's about providing them with the tools to thrive in an environment where the rules are constantly shifting. We know that the best for higher education is yet to come.

AASCU's value proposition is rooted in our ability to drive local and regional change at scale.

We are uniquely positioned to support RPUs as leaders in higher education, driving progress and ensuring America's global competitiveness.

Our strategic plan outlines three priorities that empower our members to adapt to the evolving landscape of higher education through the strategic pillars of **advocacy**, **opportunity**, and **innovation**.





Advocacy

Champion Value & Impact

We must actively engage in policy discussions to ensure our voices are heard, and our interests are represented. This includes engaging the business community and enhancing public perception to ensure a shift in the narrative around the value of a degree.

- 1. Communicate, defend, and promote the value proposition of public higher education** to address enrollment challenges facing RPUs.
- 2. Speak with a united voice on the federal level**, fighting for policy and funding to advance priorities, address the demographic cliff affecting enrollment, and protect students and our institutions.
- 3. Equip institutions to advocate at the state and local level**, guiding how to best engage and navigate political headwaters with state legislative and executive leaders around economic impact and other critical conversations.
- 4. Elevate the profile of RPUs' baccalaureate and professional-level workforce education efforts**, highlighting their role in preparing students for high-skill, high-wage industries that drive regional and national economic growth.
- 5. Increase the visibility of research efforts at RPUs**, showcasing their contributions to research and the unique role these institutions play in driving innovation and economic development.



Opportunity

Build Institutional & Leadership Capacities

We must seize opportunities to strengthen institutions, address demographic shifts, and evaluate and adapt business models. This includes expanding membership, building a strong P-20 pipeline, and exploring alternative degree structures.

- 1. Strengthen leadership capacity and diversity** by creating and delivering high-quality, relevant leadership development programming.
- 2. Scale student success partnerships**, with a constant refocusing on how to best deliver a holistic educational product, ensuring members are equipped with tools and strategies.
- 3. Empower institutions in preparing students to become engaged citizens**, ensuring more Americans are better prepared to lead the nation and make tough choices in a complicated world.
- 4. Enhance programming around alternative degree structures** to offer guidance and best practices for implementing accelerated programs, stackable credentials, and competency-based education while preserving the distinctive qualities of RPUs.
- 5. Support strengthening teacher education programs and policies** to diversify the K-12 educator pipeline, encourage pathways for nontraditional candidates, and offer linkages to foster inclusive, robust educator preparation at RPUs.





Innovation

Foster Opportunities for the Future

We must foster innovation in teaching, learning, and institutional operations. This includes embracing new technologies, promoting student success and well-being, and adapting to rapidly changing societal trends.

- 1. Identify and diversify funding streams** that directly support member institutions in scaling student success and other key initiatives, enabling them to address challenges and expand their impact.
- 2. Create opportunities for institutions to enhance long-term financial sustainability** through resources, toolkits, templates, and consulting.
- 3. Stimulate integration of artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies** into higher education, equipping members with the strategies they need to harness these tools for student success, research, and administration.
- 4. Encourage strengthening sustainability efforts** to help members prepare for the impacts of climate change, recognizing that RPUs serve student populations especially vulnerable to these challenges, by facilitating pathways to address resilience and leverage the growing green economy.
- 5. Bolster RPUs as reputable pathways for international students**, enticing more top-achieving, ambitious learners to pursue education with a global perspective rooted in regional contexts.



Our **Next** Steps

This plan outlines big ideas, and they require big capacity that builds upon our proven track record of positive results,

AASCU will be laser-focused as an organization on deepening, growing, and strengthening member engagement. Through expanded consulting services, partnerships, and practical resources, we will serve as a central resource hub for strategies and best practices.

- 1. Refine and evaluate community-building initiatives** such as conferences, symposiums, and virtual gatherings.
- 2. Revitalize regional engagement opportunities** for member institutions to convene around shared challenges, facilitating connections among those grappling with similar issues and fostering collaboration and resource sharing.
- 3. Reinforce our role as bridge builders**, connecting members to philanthropic, corporate, and non-profit partners, resources, toolkits, and promising practices.
- 4. Revamp strategic communication and engagement efforts** to better connect members with initiatives and clearly define benefits.
- 5. Recognize the role of community colleges as partners for success** and as critical starting points for students, which often exist within systems like many RPUs.

The background of the entire page is a dark blue-tinted photograph of a large, historic university building with multiple domes and arched windows. In the foreground, a grassy lawn is visible with several people walking. The AASCU logo is centered in the middle of the page, with the letters 'AASCU' in a large, white, serif font. The letter 'S' is highlighted in red. To the right of 'AASCU' is the text 'American Association of State Colleges and Universities' in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. Below the logo is a red horizontal bar containing the tagline 'Delivering America's Promise'. At the bottom center, the website address 'www.aascu.org' is displayed in white. In the bottom right corner, there is a circular inset showing a close-up of a graduate wearing a black cap and gown, with a white stole and a red tassel. The graduate is smiling slightly.

AASCU American Association
of State Colleges and
Universities

Delivering America's Promise

www.aascu.org