

Presidential Search Listening Session Feedback Report

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Prepared for:

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**INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH
IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY**

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Introduction

The Presidential Search Advisory Committee (the Committee) conducted eight public listening sessions as part of the Colorado State University Presidential Search. The goal of the eight sessions was to hear from campus stakeholders about what qualities they want to see a new president bring to Colorado State University. Sessions took place from August 22 – August 31, 2022, and were open to the public. Of the eight sessions, four were conducted in-person and four were conducted virtually over Zoom. At the in-person sessions, Spanish-language translation and ASL interpretation were available. The virtual sessions were captioned, and Spanish-language translation was offered. Attendees at the sessions represented Colorado State University faculty, staff, students, and community members.

During the listening sessions, participants shared their comments and questions related to the Presidential Search. This report captures the results of the feedback shared over the course of the eight listening sessions.

Methods

Of the eight listening sessions, the Committee recorded and transcribed the four in-person sessions as well as the Zoom sessions. The Committee also preserved the Zoom session comments, which were read aloud during the session. Researchers used the session transcripts and notes to qualitatively analyze stakeholder feedback across the eight Presidential Search Listening Sessions using inductive thematic analysis. Researchers captured the frequency of themes across the eight listening sessions. Results of the analysis are found in the sections below.

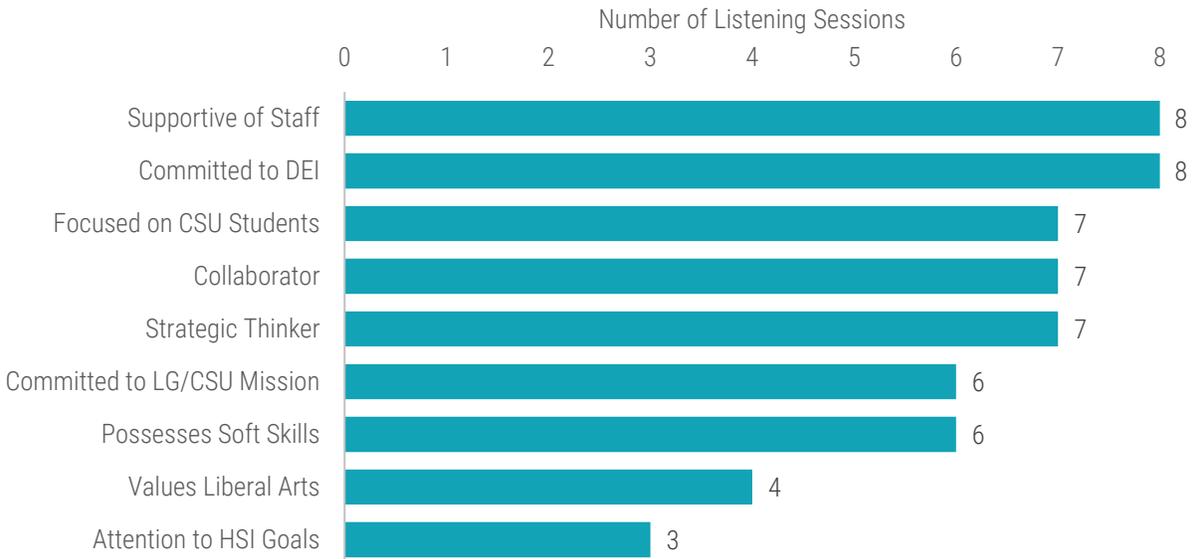
Findings

The findings section is broken down into three sub-sections: desired characteristics, challenges, and opportunities at CSU. Across the eight Listening Sessions, the majority of participant contributions pertained to desired characteristics of a new president. Current challenges was the second-most talked about topic among participants, and opportunities at CSU was discussed the least frequently by participants.

Desired Characteristics

The Committee asked listening session participants to share what types of characteristics they desire in a new president for the University. Participant responses were categorized into nine main themes. The themes and their frequency across the eight focus groups are shown in the table below.

What are the Desired Characteristics of a New President?



Supportive of Staff and Faculty

In each of the eight listening sessions, participants said they desire a candidate that is supportive of Colorado State University staff and faculty. Participants spoke of a need for the president to address issues such as workload, retention, and morale among faculty and staff, as well as include these groups in decision-making. Participants specifically identified a need to support state-classified employees, non-tenure track faculty, and staff from communities of color. Participants also highlighted the need to address staffing issues in non-teaching and research units, such as human resources, facilities, and procurement, and to consider staff across all campuses. Finally, participants expressed a desire for a new president to recognize the talent of the current staff and faculty of Colorado State University.

“We have to do as the airlines say, and put the mask on ourselves before we can put it on someone else. And that means really cultivating a place where employees can thrive. And I’m referring to all employees, not just faculty and tenured and non-tenured positions, but the folks who put food on our students’ tables. Who create an experience where students can feel welcome and safe and housed and sheltered. I mean, all of these folks are incredibly important to the backbone of this institution, and I really hope that the new president recognizes that and puts people first.”
Listening Session 5 Participant

Committed to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

In each of the listening sessions, participants said they would like a president that is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts. Participants noted that they want a president that supports both students and staff from communities historically underserved by the University, and that they desire a president committed to addressing incidents of bias and racism that occur on campus. Participants noted specific groups that they would like to see the new president support in DEI efforts including students and staff with disabilities, students and staff from Indigenous tribal nations, peoples and communities, and students and staff from the LGBTQIA community. Participants also noted the importance of the new president valuing language inclusion and language justice. Participants would also like to see a president that both values and listens to people from minoritized communities, is committed to creating a more diversified staff and faculty, and values a diversity of ideas.

“As an alum, as someone who works here, someone who's committed to Colorado State University, [I am] looking for someone who understands the complexity of diversity, equity, inclusion in the Rocky Mountain southwest. So context matters, and our context matters.”

Listening Session 4 Participant

Places Focus on CSU Students

In seven of eight of the listening sessions, participants shared that they would like a president that places a focus on the students at CSU. Specifically, participants would like the president to commit to supporting CSU graduate students, students from minoritized backgrounds, online students, undergraduate students that are undecided in their major, and the international student population. Participants would like the new president to consider the students when making decisions and be more visible and approachable for CSU students. Participants would also like the new president to be supportive of students navigating difficult university processes and systems.

“We need a President that not only understands the student experience and values the work of those on the ground with students, but does so outwardly and communicates that to the campus community.”

Listening Session 2 Participant



Commitment to and Collaboration with the Community

In seven of the eight sessions, participants stressed the importance of the new president being a collaborator that values collaborating with faculty and staff on campus, the surrounding Fort Collins community, with other leaders in the state, and with the global community including internal staff and students. As part of this collaborative mentality, participants hope that a new president will be transparent in decision-making and communicating, and will foster collaboration between different departments and units on campus.

"I suggest that a President that comes in is one that knows how to handle the competing interest of faculty staff and students and other outside stakeholders, such as alumni, politicians, and the greater community, meanwhile also coming in and making the decisions that feel reflective and inclusive of those that they are impacting."

Listening Session 3 Participant

Strategic Thinker

Participants in seven of the eight listening sessions stressed the importance of a president that is a strategic thinker. This included strong decision-making skills and the ability to strategically approach funding opportunities and priorities.

"[CSU needs] a person who is willing to take a hard look at our division of operations and ways to improve our efficiency and effectiveness, as well as retain staff."

Listening Session 6 Participant

Committed to Land Grant Mission and CSU Traditions

In six of the eight focus groups, participants identified a need for the new president to show strong commitment to CSU's mission as a Land Grant University and CSU traditions more generally speaking. Participants said they would like to see someone invested in rebuilding the University's relationship with rural Colorado, as well as someone who recognizes the importance of CSU's agricultural history and current academic offerings.

"I'd like to see someone who really understands the mission of Land Grant Universities and serving the public. They should understand extension and be able to support our work around the state as a valuable part of the CSU mission."

Listening Session 6 Participant

Soft Skills

Participants in six of the eight sessions said they would like a new president to possess certain soft skills including being a good communicator, approachable, trustworthy and a unifying presence on campus.

"[CSU needs] someone who can unite us. We're very divided in many ways and [we need] someone who can unite us."

Listening Session 8 Participant

Values Liberal Arts

In four of the eight sessions, participants stated a desire for the new president to place value on the College of Liberal Arts (CLA) at CSU and in liberal arts more generally. Participants also said they would like the new president to recognize the ways in which teaching loads in the college impact research abilities of faculty and to address wage disparity between colleges. Participants also discussed concern for the lack of representation from CLA on the search committee.

“We need a President committed to the Liberal arts, a college that serves every single CSU student.”

Listening Session 2 Participant

Focus on Goals of a Hispanic-Serving Institution

Participants in four of the eight listening sessions discussed CSU’s work toward becoming recognized as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) and the importance of the new president understanding how to become a successful HSI. Participants would like a president that understands how to both recruit and retain Hispanic students, as well as supports staff that work with these students.

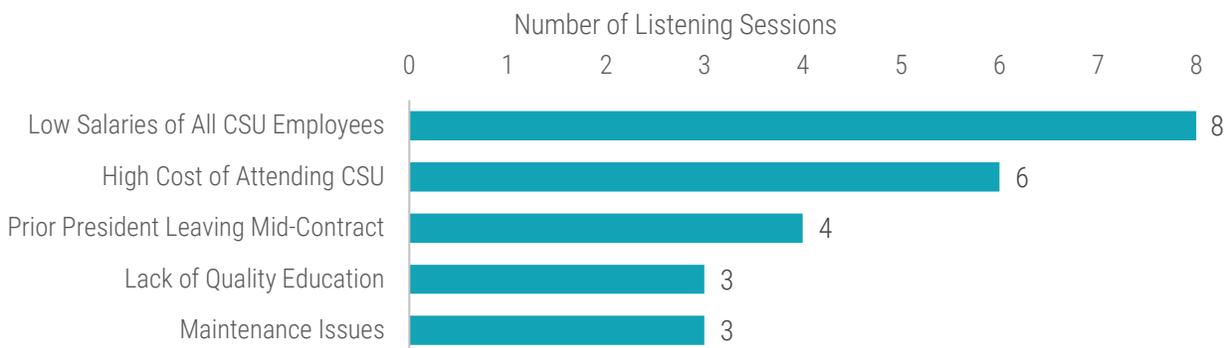
“It’s really important for the President to believe in inclusion and diversity, but also to believe in equity...I also think about how we are working to be a Hispanic-serving institution, and historically we have not seen a lot of work being done to make sure that we get there or that we’re achieving those goals.”

Listening Session 4 Participant

Challenges

Listening session participants discussed current challenges at CSU that a new president would need to address upon taking on the role of president.

What are the Current Challenges at CSU for a New President?



Low Salaries of All CSU Employees

In each of the listening sessions, participants identified low salaries of CSU employees as a current challenge at the University. Participants said that salaries of all employees need to be reexamined and in particular, a new president would need to address pay equity issues for non-tenure track faculty and state-classified employees. Participants said that the insufficient salaries at the University cause morale and retention issues among employees.

High Cost of Attending CSU

In six of the eight sessions, participants said that the high cost of attending CSU is a current challenge at the University. In particular, participants said that high tuition costs, expensive campus-living costs, and the high cost of living in Fort Collins pose a challenge for students at the University.

Prior president leaving mid-contract

Participants in four of the eight sessions discussed the prior president leaving CSU mid-contract as a challenge that the new president would need to overcome. Participants said there was a loss of trust due to the lack of transparency of why the previous president left. Some participants also discussed the amount of resources lost in replacing a president mid-contract. Participants also discussed the initiatives set by the last administration that are in progress and a desire to see movement on the initiatives continue.

Lack of Quality Education

In three of the eight sessions, participants discussed a lack of high quality education as a current challenge at CSU. Specifically, participants mentioned the need for more high quality professors and courses and more hands-on learning opportunities for students. Participants also said that lack of support for CSU's international students and a lack of student accountability are challenges that need to be addressed.

"People are leaving higher ed in a record numbers – yes; However, many colleagues I see are leaving CSU for other higher ed institutions. We need a president who will improve salaries."

Listening Session 1 Participant

"We need president who understands that there are many students who do not have their mothers or their fathers paying for their college. And I think it's really important that we need a president who understands what needs to be done in order to drive costs down."

Listening Session 5 Participant

"I think a new president who's coming in is going to have a challenge to feel empowered and have a voice of their own after having the most recent President leave so quickly."

Listening Session 3 Participant

"[CSU needs a] president who is committed to making sure that there's a return on the investment that students make at the university. I think there's a lot of degrees that we offer that there's not a return on that investment currently from a job market perspective."

Listening Session 3 Participant



Lack of Building Maintenance

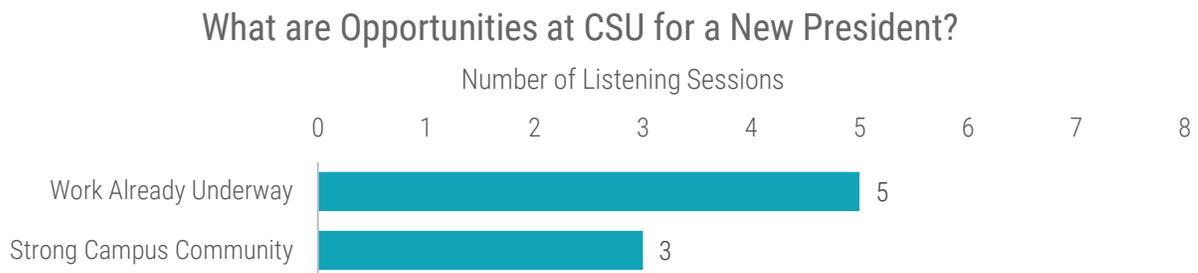
Participants in three of the eight sessions said that a lack of building maintenance is a current problem at CSU. Participants shared that certain buildings on campus feel outdated and in disrepair, for example lacking adequate air-conditioning. Participants noted that these maintenance issues negatively impact students and reflect poorly on Facilities Management staff.

“We need someone who can create a plan for attending to the deferred maintenance of some of our less sexy buildings. My office is dealing with cockroaches, broken windows, ineffective heating and air...smaller departments do not have the funds to attend to these issues, so they go unaddressed.”

Listening Session 6 Participant

Opportunities

Participants in the listening sessions commented on what they perceive as opportunities at CSU for a new president. Comments in this category were grouped into two themes, as described below.



Work Already Underway

In five of the eight sessions, participants discussed the great work that is already occurring at the University as an opportunity for the new president to embrace. Specifically, participants noted the Courageous Strategic Transformation, CSU’s sustainability goals, and work done toward experiential learning as areas where CSU has done well.

“There’s a lot of work put into the newly developed strategic plan, and it’s important to honor and respect that work.”

Listening Session 6 Participant

Strong Campus Community

Participants in three of the eight sessions discussed CSU’s strong campus community as an opportunity for the new president. Specifically, they said that the staff and faculty at CSU are high quality and doing great work on campus. Participants also talked about the quality of students at CSU presenting an opportunity for the new president.

“I think CSU punches above its weight, and I think that the folks that are here are amazing from the staff through the faculty and all of the support. Everything we do. It’s really a scrappy, resourceful, effective, great bunch of folks.”

Listening Session 5 Participant