

The CSU Student Success Network
Annual Report 2024-25

Networking and Collaboration: Pushing Forward Equity Work by Building Community

A Letter from the Advisory Board Chair

Welcome to the [CSU Student Success Network's](#) ninth annual report, which highlights our work during 2024-25. As a longtime member and the incoming chair of the Network Advisory Board, I am honored to present this report on behalf of CSU colleagues, students, staff, faculty, and administrators participating in the Network and working to advance inclusion and equitable student success in the CSU. I invite you to join us by participating in one of our events.

During 2024-25, the Network brought together 432 students, staff, faculty, and administrators from across the CSU to engage in meaningful dialogue, planning, and action within a challenging landscape for diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) programming. We hosted two Convenings in our Navigating Uncertainty Together series. Through our year-long Middle Leadership Academy, we brought together 12 campus teams and facilitated the development and implementation of student equity and success projects on campuses. We also sought to drive change on our campuses through developing and inaugurating the Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Middle Leadership Academy, in partnership with the CSU Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Student Achievement Program (CSU ASAP).

All people deserve the chance to improve themselves and their communities through postsecondary education. In challenging times when our educational enterprise is facing external threats or budgetary hardships, we might feel tempted to hunker down and narrow our focus. But it is in times like these that it is especially important to raise our heads and recognize the strength we have in community and networking. The CSU is a unique enterprise because our institutions are learning communities, places where we grow and thrive together, where we recognize that student development is not linear and that each of us plays an interconnected role in their progress.



In 2025-26, the Network presents all of us with opportunities as staff, faculty, administrators, and campuses to continue to make headway in the inclusive work of advancing equitable student success. We can all learn so much from each other, and the Network will continue to connect us. I hope you'll join us over this next academic year!

Sincerely,

Adam Petersen, Ed.D.

Advisory Board Chair, CSU Network

Assistant Dean, Office of Undergraduate Studies, Cal State San Marcos

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Impacts from the Network

In 2024-25, the Network's impacts on middle leaders and their CSU campuses were assessed by our external evaluator, Informing Change. The evaluation was based on group sessions (in-person and virtual) with a total of 31 staff, faculty, and administrators (from 17 CSU campuses) who participated in at least three different Network events.¹ The findings reveal the Network's contributions to sustained changes over time at the individual and campus levels.

In terms of individual-level outcomes, student support professionals reported **“increased confidence, motivation, [and] persistence in the face of challenges, and a sense of community.”** They also reported increases in knowledge and skills related to leadership, including collaboration, project management, and using data for decision-making. These **changes in attitudes also manifested in behavior change**, including increased engagement and participation in leadership roles and responsibilities on campus, and changed practices.”

In terms of campus outcomes, participants in the evaluation sessions identified shifts in existing campus programs, processes, and approaches as a result of efforts by Network participants. They also identified new programs and physical spaces on campus resulting from their participation in the Network.

Here's what participants are saying about the Network:

The Network's activities “*really encouraged us to utilize our voices for change and make a difference... If we're not allowed a platform to do that in a safe space, then generally it doesn't happen. I will say three thumbs up to the Student Success Network and everything it entails.*”

“*One interesting thing was the recognition that you're not doing this work alone. There's a community with shared interests on campus and across the system, which is really powerful.*”

The Network “*unlocked a greater understanding of inequity in the state and CSU. [It] helped [me] understand how much responsibility each of us has [and] how much power we all have to impact equity work.*”

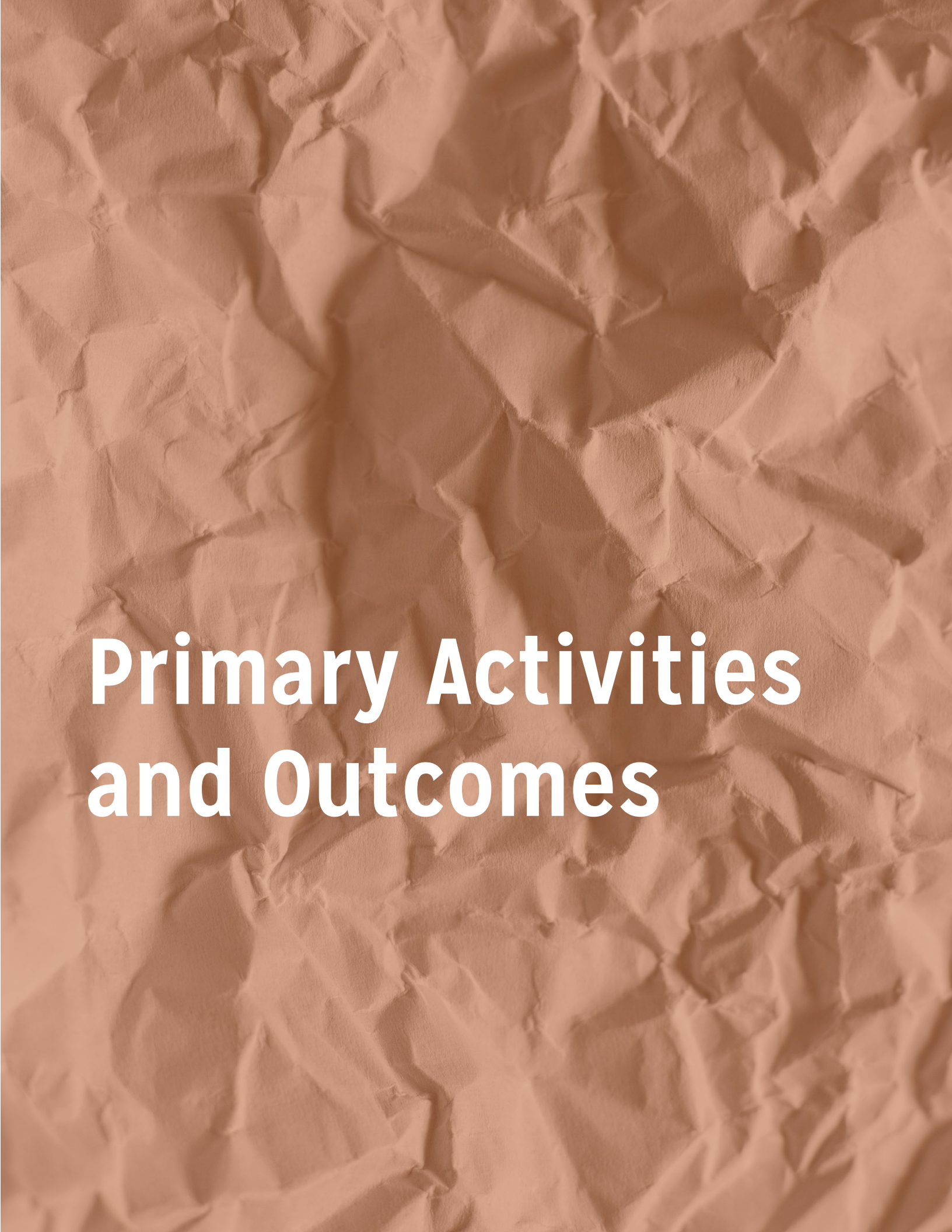
“*We're dealing with higher education institutions, so sustained change is going to have to come [through the curriculum]. It's not happening if it's not happening in the classrooms. As a career services person, an opt-in [to change] is hit-and-miss. You've got to have the faculty and administration buy-in.*”

“*One [theme] is the data, making the data more transparent and having people be more comfortable with examination of their data and collecting data, which I think a lot of us weren't necessarily doing well 10 years ago.*”

¹ For more information on the methodology used, called Ripple Effect Mapping, see the Evaluation section.



Image: Academy Participants

The background of the image is a textured, crumpled brown paper, resembling recycled paper or a paper bag. The texture is uneven with many folds and creases, creating a tactile appearance. The color is a warm, earthy brown.

Primary Activities and Outcomes

Middle Leadership Academy (Academy)

During 2024-2025, the [Middle Leadership Academy](#) (Academy) provided space and guidance for teams from 12 CSU campuses to design and begin implementation of a project aimed at improving equitable access and/or success on their campus. Sixty-seven team members participated, including students, faculty, staff, and administrators from across campus divisions and programs, plus another two dozen CSU professionals serving as facilitators, organizers, and other leadership roles. The Academy was led by Dr. Ellie Ertle, interim vice provost for undergraduate education and academic success at Chico State University.

Teams focused on a range of equity concerns, including: supporting male students of color, designing a clearer pathway and changing campus culture for undeclared students, increasing internship opportunities for students of color, re-enrolling and supporting students who have stopped out, and coordinating the development and implementation of inclusive pedagogies. Teams shared their final projects with each other, Network staff, constituents and decision-makers from their campuses in a half-day virtual mini-conference. This provided an opportunity for teams to bring campus constituents and leadership on board, and share the value and outcomes of the Academy.

After Academy events, about two-thirds of survey respondents ($\geq 66\%$) rated the experience at least “quite useful” in helping them **build relationships and leadership skills, critically examine inequities in student outcomes, and apply their knowledge of assessment measures and research-based evidence** to advance equitable student success.



Image: Staff at the Academy: Daniel Santana (left), Kalifa Madden, Lada Thao, Laura Diep

On average, the surveys' repeat respondents' assessment of their ability to engage various forms of equity-minded practices increased. Mean increases were statistically significant for participants' ability to utilize lenses of innovation and social justice to identify and assess areas for change.

Many respondents described lessons or key takeaways from their participation in this year's Academy, such as:

- gaining new knowledge or tools to progress their work (e.g., data access, institutional equity context and barriers, project development, student-centeredness);
- having the opportunity to work as a team (for example, to communicate, understand their “why,” problem solve) and develop their projects; and
- learning how to better communicate (for example, plan and deliver an effective pitch, build community across the CSU).

“From this Academy I learned that it is important to name and call out the inequities that are consistently occurring in our campus as well as how being data driven can truly make a difference when you present/pitch to folks and campus partners.”

- Academy Participant

During 2025-26, the Academy leadership team is working to redesign the Academy and is using feedback from the survey in this planning year to improve curriculum, pacing, and focus on “servingness” in the CSU. Using the same guiding values and learning outcomes, the team is examining and developing the application process, materials, and timeline; building out facilitator recruitment, training, and evaluation; and working with other strands to build clearer connections between Network activities and Academy work.



Image: Lina Rincón, professor of Sociology at Sac State and Network leadership team member, at the 2025 Academy

Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Middle Leadership Academy (AMLA)

In summer 2025, the Network—in partnership with the [CSU Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander \(AANHPI\) Student Achievement Program](#)—developed and inaugurated the first AANHPI Middle Leadership Academy (AMLA). The AMLA is led by Dr. Arnab Mukherjea, professor of public health at Cal State East Bay.

The [AMLA](#) is based on the principles of the Network Academy, featuring cross-functional, multi-disciplinary, and non-hierarchical campus teams, each composed of students, staff, faculty, and administrators. Each of the two inaugural AMLA events, held in June and July, lasted three days.

- **A welcoming reception** was held the evening before the event, to encourage relationship-building across campuses and divisions.
- **Day one** focused on building community and reaffirming commitments. Campus teams were introduced to the California Education Code (§ 89297.1) that governs legislative funding allocated to the CSU system to enable campuses to address barriers to AANHPI student success using seven prescribed strategies. Representatives from the Chancellor's Office led the campus teams through interactive exercises using the Student Success Dashboards, enabling them to access disaggregated data, including for low-income, first-generation, and other underserved AANHPI students.
- **Day two** focused on preparing for action on campus. Building on their work developing logic models on day one, campus teams refined their logic models, developed implementation strategies, identified measures of success responsive to their campus, and developed evaluation goals, with a focus on leveraging datasets and instruments already in existence. Campuses focusing on similar concerns or strategies were encouraged to collaborate to demonstrate potential impact across the system.
- **Day three** featured plans and aspirations for taking action. Campuses showcased their programmatic framework and assessment plans over the five-year funding period. Teams also discussed professional development and self-care, to enable participants to remain strong and resilient in the complex milieu surrounding higher education.

Image: CSU ASAP and Network staff at the inaugural AMLA



During the AMLA summer events, 81 staff, faculty, and administrators participated in roughly equal proportions, representing all 22 campuses of the CSU system.² An additional 17 facilitators from five CSU campuses and the Chancellor's Office attended, along with guests from the California Community Colleges and the California Commission on Asian & Pacific Islander American Affairs.

Surveys of participants after the events revealed that nearly all attendees found the AMLA to be useful, with a majority expressing “somewhat” to “a lot more” confidence in their:

- expanded professional networks;
- knowledge gained;
- use of CSU data sources (including disaggregated data) to characterize campus concerns and understand student success; and
- application of a new “Culturally Engaging Campus Environments” model to advance strategies for sustainability.

Based on observations at the events, participants were immersed in robust discussions while developing and refining logic models, both during the work sessions and during breaks and meals. Campus team members were observed raising contrasting viewpoints from various domains of program planning and evaluation, indicating that the event was conducive to constructive debate and discourse.

In addition, the knowledge flow was not uni-directional at the events. In leading their interactive exercises, for example, the Student Success Analytics unit of the Chancellor's Office benefited from the expertise in the room and agreed to improve the way disaggregated AANHPI data is presented on the systemwide dashboard; this mutually-reinforcing partnership was highlighted in the unit's [LinkedIn messaging](#). More broadly, the achievements of participants were published in a [Voices](#) blog by Dr. Mukherjee and featured in posts by the California Commission on Asian & Pacific Islander American Affairs, Transfer Nation California, the CSU Certificate Program in Student Success Analytics, and the CSU Student Success Network.

In 2025-26, with funding allocated to each of the 22 campuses to refine and execute their logic models, the AMLA will provide guidance and technical assistance as strategies become implemented. Campuses with similar objectives will be encouraged to consult with each other, including about seeking additional resources such as for academic advising. AMLA leadership has also begun the planning process for next summer's convenings. As campus teams refine and expand their membership to reflect the responsibilities associated with implementing logic models, assessing progress, and evaluating outcomes, AMLA will continue to support and publicize their successes while advancing change at systemwide levels.

² The transition from 23 to 22 campuses was underway in the CSU during 2024-25, with Cal Poly and Cal Maritime integrating.



Image: Group photo at AMLA

“I appreciate that building community and a shared sense of purpose and possibility are big priorities. I think we have a rare opportunity not just to work on individual projects for our individual campuses but also to develop a collective, statewide strategy that will help show the collective power of what we are building and growing system-wide.”

“Spending time with the other campuses was helpful for two reasons: 1) seeing the different and similar challenges we face, and 2) knowing there are some campuses who are a few steps in front of us. [They] can help us and we can help those who may not be as far along as we are.”

- AMLA participants



Convenings

During spring semester 2025, several federal executive orders prohibiting DEI programming and otherwise affecting higher education and its federal funding were signed in Washington, D.C., creating deep uncertainty about the status of programming and resources in the CSU. In response, the Network revived the [Navigating Uncertainty Together](#) series to provide a space for CSU colleagues to come together to discuss concerns and strategies related to navigating the new landscape. The Convenings were directed by Dr. Larissa Mercado-Lopez, professor and department chair at Fresno State University.

The first Convening took place in April 2025. Titled “Maintaining Our Commitment to DEIA Values,” the session focused on the current status of anti-DEIA efforts, with discussion of strategies for persisting with equity-centered work. The session drew 169 registrants with nearly 50% participating. The post-event survey revealed that the session was successful in helping participants mitigate feelings of isolation and build connections across the system. The survey also revealed participants’ interest in concrete recommendations on how to work within the current legal context.

In light of these survey results, the Network reached out to equity expert Dr. Eric Felix, faculty at San Diego State University, who had been addressing the anti-DEIA measures and the power of campuses to continue their equity-driven work. Our second session in May 2025, titled “Leaning into our DEIA Values,” drew 122 registrants, with over 40% participating. Participants learned from Dr. Felix about the CSU’s responsibility to continue with its mission-driven work and discussed opportunities to lean into existing policies and imperatives. The post-event survey revealed that the session was particularly successful at sparking ideas for actions participants could take on their campuses to continue their work.

“It was wonderful to be in community with others [who are] going through the same things and talk about what we are all going through at different universities.”

“The most valuable thing I got from this session was the chance to connect with my colleagues in the breakout rooms.”

- Convening participants



Based on reviews of post-event feedback from across Network activities, the Network's fall 2025 Convening will address the concept of "servingness." Several CSU campuses hold federal Minority-Serving Institution (MSI) designations that [may no longer be funded by the U.S. Department of Education](#). In addition, several CSU campuses have recently applied for the new state-level Black Serving Institution (BSI) designation. In this context, the Convening will address what servingness means and looks like across the CSU system and the implications of servingness for equity-driven work. Feedback from AMLA also indicated a desire to continue discussing the role of data collection as servingness is operationalized.

Navigating Uncertainty Together



Beyond Designation:
Thinking Intentionally about
Servingness in the CSU

CSU LGBTQIA2S+ Communities of Practice (ComP)

In March 2024, the Network hosted its first [LGBTQIA2S+ Student Success Symposium](#) in Sacramento, CA. Building on conversations at the symposium and a shared commitment to continue learning how to better support equitable LGBTQIA2S+ student success in the CSU, the Network launched three [Communities of Practice](#) (ComPs) in September 2024. These ComPs provided a space for 28 participants to continue learning with a focus on improving basic needs, advocating for gender centers, and creating gender-affirming campuses for LGBTQIA2S+ students across the CSU. The Symposium and the ComPs have been directed by Dr. Mercado-Lopez.

The ComPs, co-led by CSU staff and faculty and involving 20 participants from across the system, met throughout fall semester 2024 to address self-identified goals. Dr. Mercado-Lopez, with support from Dr. Vinnie Pompei from San Diego State University, provided resources and feedback to the co-leads and teams. In January 2025, the teams presented their work-in-progress:

Advocating for gender centers and neurodivergent identities: the team met with advocates, experts, and students within the system to understand the experiences of neurodivergent students and gender center coordinators and created recommendations for supporting neurodivergent students in gender centers.

Improving basic needs and SOGI data collection: consultation with basic needs coordinators across the system led to a plan and draft survey for assessing the use of SOGI data to improve basic needs in the CSU.

Creating gender-affirming campuses: upon evaluation of the accessibility of name and pronoun change procedures as stated on

CSU campus websites, the team developed recommendations for improving name and pronoun change procedures, and drafted a memo to communicate these recommendations to the Chancellor's Office.

The efforts of the ComPs are still being evaluated, but initial feedback indicates that the ComPs were successful at reducing feelings of isolation and opening up silos in the CSU by bringing advocates together across the system and providing a space for focused equity work related to LGBTQIA2S+ student success. The ComPs were also crucial for navigating an increasingly turbulent political landscape for LGBTQIA2S+ communities. This was the first time that the Network had implemented communities of practice, and the experience confirmed the value of affinity-based work.

Participant feedback:

"The work that we do with the Community of Practice allowed us to be flexible in terms of a path forward to help create these kind of decentralized spaces for our students across campus with multiple opportunities, that are actually still improving student outcomes in the way that we had originally sought to do with the established centers and the established data."

According to a ComP Facilitator:

"I think that these are takeaways that may resonate across other's experiences as well, and you'll most likely find, as you have in your communities of practice, more than likely that you're not alone."



Evaluation

In spring 2025, the Network’s learning partner, Informing Change, examined the Network’s impacts by using a data collection method called Ripple Effect Mapping. Informing Change conducted three half-day, interactive sessions—one virtual, one at CSU East Bay, and one at CSU Fullerton—with a total of 31 participants who had participated in at least three different Network events. Participants created visual maps illustrating events and activities that led to changes on their campuses, identified connections between direct changes and any unexpected or indirect effects of Network event participation, and shared the stories that arose from their collaborative efforts. Findings are reported in “Impacts from the Network” earlier in this report. The Network’s evaluation efforts were led by Jeanine Cunningham, who also serves as the Network’s research manager.

The Network’s internal evaluations of its events included distribution and analysis of the following surveys during 2024-25:

- Middle Leadership Academy:
 - Pre-academy facilitator survey: 12 surveys distributed, 10 respondents
 - Post-academy facilitator survey: 12 surveys distributed, 5 respondents
 - Pre-academy participant survey: 67 surveys distributed, 41 respondents
 - Post-academy participant survey: 62 surveys distributed, 23 respondents
- AMLA:
 - Group 1 post-event participant survey: 44 surveys distributed, 34 respondents
 - Group 2 post-event participant survey: 37 surveys distributed, 28 respondents
- Navigating Uncertainty Together Series:
 - “Maintaining our commitment to DEIA values,” post-event survey: 75 surveys distributed, 14 respondents
 - “Leaning into our DEIA imperative,” post-event survey: 50 surveys distributed, 8 respondents

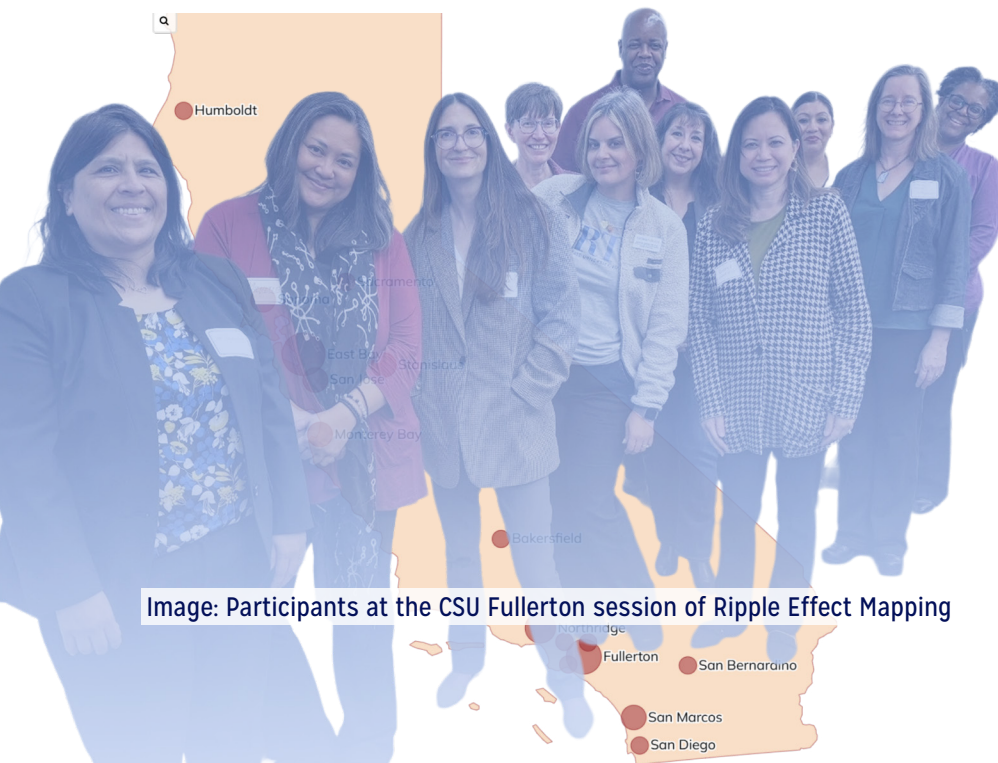


Image: Participants at the CSU Fullerton session of Ripple Effect Mapping

Our evaluation team also worked on the following activities:

- We distributed daily surveys to Academy participants during the February and April sessions so that organizers could make real-time adjustments to content and format.
- We completed our thematic analysis of the 20 final reports from the recipients of the Equity in Action Grants. We will release our findings in fall 2025.
- We facilitated the LGBTQIA2S+ Communities of Practice co-leads focus group.
- We managed and guided the [Middle Leadership Academy Impact Brief](#) publication series.

Research

The Network Advisory board formed a research subcommittee in 2025 to define the Network's strategic vision and purpose for research, in alignment with Network goals and in coordination with its ongoing events. The subcommittee is also seeking to empower middle leaders by providing opportunities for the publication of their original research, reports, and other documents.



Communications

As diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts across the United States were met with federal pressure during 2025, the Network's Communications strategy continued to put student success first. By raising up middle leaders and bringing them together across the CSU, the Network's outreach and communications approach serves as connective tissue and support. As part of this strategy, we increased our investments in platforms and storytelling in 2024-25, which in turn expanded our capacity and reach. Kalifa Madden serves as the Network's Communications manager.

Key achievements and areas of focus in 2024-25 included:

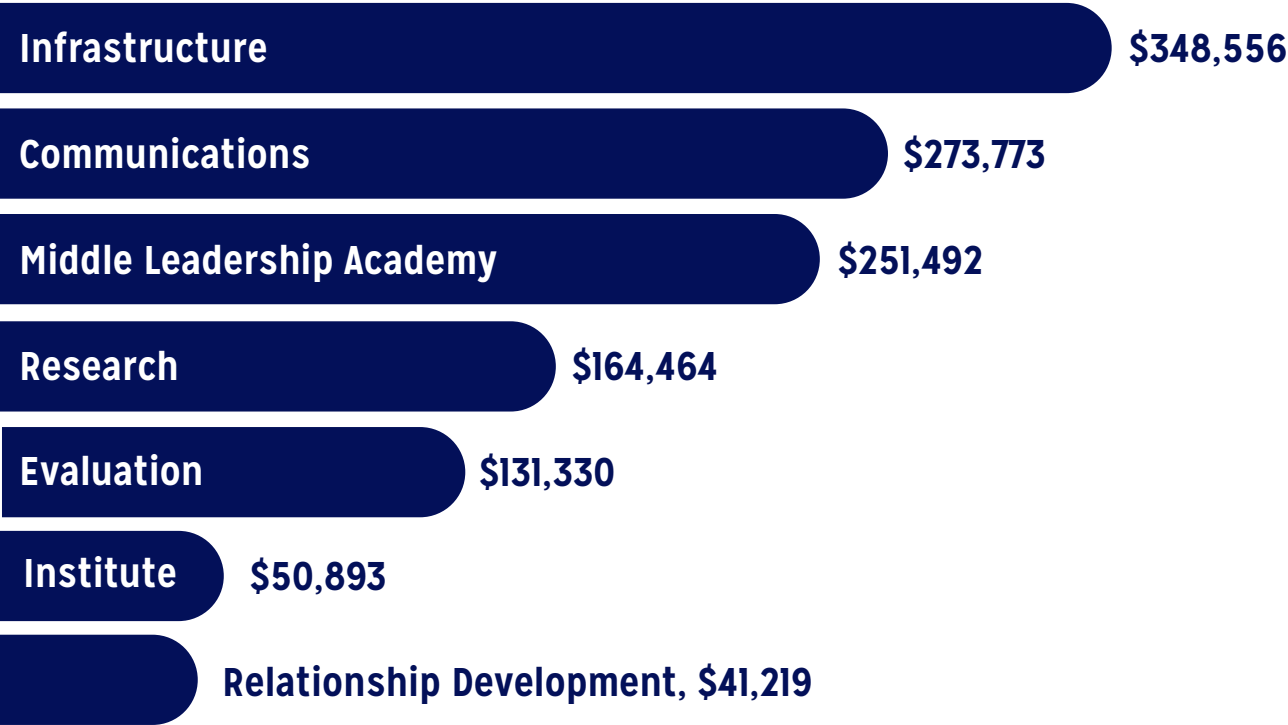
- **Field-watch and insight sharing:** As the landscape of higher education continued to shift, especially in regard to equity initiatives, the Communications team actively monitored national and state news sources and provided insights in a variety of digital formats.
- **Digital presence:** Our social media audience continued to grow steadily across platforms, including YouTube, Bluesky, and Facebook.
- **Network storytelling:** We built on the momentum of last year's approach through publication of Voices blogs, research-based memos, and other means.
- **Event coverage and support:** We provided full design, outreach, and storytelling support for this year's Network events, including the Middle Leadership Academy, Communities of Practice, and Navigating Uncertainty Together webinars. This included preparing visual toolkits and narrative summaries.
- **Reach:** Direct outreach expanded to over 2,470 middle leaders across the 22 CSU campuses. **Our performance data shows a 48% open rate for our monthly newsletter**, which attests to the value and utility middle leaders perceive in the newsletter. The average email open rate for the education industry varies by source but generally falls between 25% and 35%.
- **Strategic framing:** We are maintaining a strong editorial commitment to language that resists oppressive systems.



Financial Report

The Network received \$1.1 million from the State of California for fiscal year 2024-25 and total expenses were \$1,261,726 for the year. Carryover funds were used to cover the overage. The Network plans to continue using carryover funds where appropriate to support its key goals, including expansion of current activities and increasing staff capacity. Infrastructure costs support all core Network functions and include salaries and benefits, general meeting expenses, supplies, and services.

Figure 1. Network Spending Itemized by Strand, 2024-25



The total spending for the 2024-25 fiscal year was \$1,261,726.



Advisory Board, 2024-25

The Advisory Board in 2024-25 represented 16 campuses and the Chancellor's Office. During 2024-25, the following members left the Board: Jane Lehr, professor and director of student research at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo; Jennifer Mabry, director of enrollment services/university registrar at Bakersfield; and Shonda Goward, interim vice chancellor of student success at the Chancellor's Office (previously AVP of Undergraduate Student Success at San José State). In June 2025, Adam Petersen was unanimously voted in as advisory board chair for a three-year term beginning in 2025-26. Aimee Arreygue, student success center director at Dominguez Hills and Emily Acosta Lewis, professor of communication and media studies at Sonoma State will join the Board in 2025-26.

First Name	Last Name	Title	Campus/Entity
Jennifer	Mabry	Director of Enrollment Services/University Registrar	Bakersfield
Brianne	Davila	Associate Dean and Professor of Sociology	Cal Poly Pomona
Doreen	Wright	Assistant VP for Student Affairs	Channel Islands
Duan	Jackson	Systemwide Director, Student Advising Initiatives	Chancellor's Office
Jessica	Stern	Associate Dean	Fullerton
Svetlana V.	Tyutina	Associate Professor, Graduate Program Director	Northridge
Nadine	Kelley	Senior Director for University Housing Services	Sacramento
Lisa	Guzman	Project Director	San Bernardino
Michelle	Lopez	Assistant Dean for Student Success	San Diego
Susanna	Jones	First-Year Experience Faculty Director	San Francisco
Shonda	Goward	AVP, Undergraduate Advising and Success	San José
Jane	Lehr	Professor, Director of Student Research	San Luis Obispo
Ellie	Clifford Ertle	AVP, Undergraduate Education	Chico
Larissa	Mercado-López	Department Chair and Professor	Fresno
Jennifer	Eichstedt	Professor	Cal Poly Humboldt
kyzyl	fenno-smith	Associate Librarian	East Bay
Arnab	Mukherjea	Associate Professor, Department of Public Health	East Bay
Adam	Petersen	Director of Strategic Initiatives for Academic Success	San Marcos



Acknowledgments

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