



Vice President for University Advancement and
Executive Director of the CSUSM Foundation



THE SEARCH

[California State University San Marcos](#) (CSUSM) seeks an experienced and aspirational advancement leader to serve as the next vice president for University Advancement and executive director of the CSUSM Foundation (VP) during an exhilarating time of investment and institutional growth.

Established in 1989, CSUSM is a regional comprehensive public university and the third youngest campus in the California State University (CSU) system. With a local service area spanning north San Diego and its surrounding counties, CSUSM is among the fastest-growing campuses in the CSU, reaching a record of over 17,000 students in Fall 2025. Since President Ellen Neufeldt's arrival in 2019, CSUSM has introduced its first strategic plan in 15 years, expanded high-demand academic programs, transformed the physical campus, and achieved record-setting gains in enrollment, research, and philanthropy. Today, the university consistently places in the top one percent for *CollegeNET's* Social Mobility Index and among the nation's best by the *Wall Street Journal* and *Money Magazine*, reflecting CSUSM's commitment to student success, educational value, and upward mobility. Earlier this year, CSUSM was also recognized by the American Council on Education and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching as a designated Research College and University (RCU) institution.



As a key member of President Neufeldt's senior management team, the VP will serve as the chief development officer, with responsibility across development (i.e., individual, annual giving programs, planned giving, and corporate and foundation relations), alumni engagement, campaign communications, university events, and government relations. The VP will also play a key role in community outreach and engagement. Leading a 41-member team, including seven direct reports, the VP will build on a clear vision and strategy to advance the university's fundraising aspirations. The university has recently launched the public phase of its most ambitious comprehensive campaign to date. Priority activities for the VP include identifying new sources of philanthropic support, increasing institutional visibility, engaging meaningfully

with CSUSM's regional partners, and securing resources to sustain its strong enrollment growth and academic innovation. The VP will play a vital role in strengthening relationships with CSUSM's full range of constituent communities and key industry partners, elevating CSUSM's reputation as a platform for social mobility.

The next VP will lead advancement into a new era through the further refinement of best practices, expansion of the donor pipeline, strengthening of institutional affinity, development and optimization of a high-performing team, and the introduction of fresh and creative ideas that respond to the evolving nature of philanthropy in today's higher education climate. To that end, the VP will be relied upon as an advisor and counsel to senior leaders on navigating sensitive matters related to external relations, crisis communications, and issues management. Using a collaborative and data-informed approach, the VP will craft outreach, engagement, and fundraising strategies that increase the impact and effectiveness of the advancement enterprise.

Additionally, the VP guides and supports the CSUSM Foundation Board, advising on a range of decisions, including those impacting the university's endowment. The VP must be an exceptional storyteller with superb communication and listening skills, possess the ability to craft compelling cases for support, and build genuine relationships with CSUSM's broad range of internal and external constituencies.

The successful candidate will be a proven and collaborative advancement leader with a growth mindset, entrepreneurial spirit, and a distinctive record of achievement, including expertise in designing, implementing, and managing fundraising and alumni relations programs. This position requires astute and visionary leadership, exceptional judgment, and the ability to work collaboratively with a wide range of internal and external constituents. The ideal candidate will have served in progressive leadership roles within an advancement organization, preferably in higher education or a similarly complex setting, and have clear evidence of personal accomplishments in donor cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship at principal gift levels. They must also possess strong managerial, strategic planning, and motivational skills, along with a keen understanding of best practices in fundraising, and comprehensive knowledge of an advancement ecosystem. The successful candidate will embody CSUSM's core values of respect, empathy, and integrity, in addition to demonstrating a deep appreciation and passion for the university's mission, goals, and unique qualities. A bachelor's degree is required; an advanced degree is preferred.

California State University San Marcos has retained Rachel Ellenport of the national executive search firm Isaacson, Miller to assist in conducting this important search. Inquiries, applications, and nominations for this position should be directed to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

California State University San Marcos

CSUSM delivers a student-centered experience through a supportive and engaging campus culture, access to new and state-of-the-art facilities, integrated research and practicum-based learning, and community-oriented partnerships to prepare undergraduates and graduate students for careers that create positive socioeconomic impact for generations to come. Its 17,000+ students are enrolled across 44 baccalaureate and 54 minor programs, 24 master's programs, 13 credential programs, and a joint doctoral program with UC San Diego. Programs are offered by the [College of Business Administration](#); the [College of Education, Health, & Human Services](#); the [College of Humanities, Arts, Behavioral & Social Sciences](#); and the [College of Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics](#), as well as through its Extended Learning unit. The university also includes a satellite campus, [CSUSM at Temecula](#), which expands educational opportunity and access to residents in Southwest Riverside County. Also of note, the [CSU Shiley Institute for Palliative Care](#) is headquartered at the university.



As one of the largest employers in northern San Diego County, CSUSM is home to approximately 2,000 talented employees. In Fall 2024, CSUSM's highly engaged faculty included 310 tenured and tenured-track instructional faculty members, 612 lecturers, and 56 faculty librarians, coaches, and counselors.

Since its founding, CSUSM has been dedicated to student success and social mobility. As a federally designated Hispanic-Serving Institution, CSUSM proudly serves among the most ethnically, economically, and academically diverse student populations in the country. Over 55% of students identify as members of underrepresented communities and 54% of graduates are the first in their families to earn a bachelor's degree. Because of its close proximity to large military bases, about 11% of students are veterans or are

military-affiliated, which makes it the highest percentage per capita in the CSU. Through first-year programs, learning communities, internships, undergraduate research, and much more, the university works to foster deep learning and academic success by engaging students in meaningful and innovative educational experiences. Of CSUSM's more than 70,000 living alumni, approximately 8 out of 10 live in the local region. In collaboration with colleagues across admissions, athletics, career development, student life, and other offices, the advancement division promotes numerous engagement opportunities for alumni to connect with and further support their alma mater.

CSUSM's campus is committed to sustainability; every campus building has been constructed since the institution's groundbreaking in 1990 to LEED Silver or Gold standards. The campus boasts more than one million square feet of academic and support space, including more than 150 teaching and research labs, a 200,000-square-foot library, a performance hall and black box theater, an art gallery, and nearly 20 art studios and digital media labs. With its enrollment increases, the university has been investing in its housing infrastructure with an additional residential hall and dining commons arriving in 2026. CSUSM acknowledges that the campus sits on the traditional territory and homelands of the Luiseño/Payómkawichum people and remains shared space among the Kuupangaxwichem/Cupeño and Kumeyaay and Ipai peoples.

The [Cal State San Marcos Cougars](#) compete in NCAA Division II athletics as a member of the California Collegiate Athletic Association.

Strategic Plan: The Power of CSUSM

In 2021, CSUSM released [The Power of CSUSM](#), which followed a comprehensive strategic planning process in collaboration with MGT Consulting and the collective university community and its constituents. Guided by CSUSM's vision to become a national leader of social mobility and serve as a vehicle for transformative education in the region, the strategic plan identifies the following goals:

- **Academic Excellence**
- **Student Success**
- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusive Excellence**
- **Culture of Care**
- **Community Partnerships**
- **Distinctive Institutional Identity and Reputation**

Leadership

Ellen Neufeldt, Ed.D., President

Dr. Ellen Neufeldt is the fourth president of California State University San Marcos. Since her appointment in July 2019, she has led transformational progress to position the university as a national model for student success, social mobility, and regional impact.

Neufeldt galvanized CSUSM with the release of [*The Power of CSUSM*](#), created a dedicated committee to serve student success and retention, and oversaw the highest year-over-year enrollment growth in the CSU system despite national enrollment trends following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Under Neufeldt's leadership, faculty-sponsored research reached a record \$20 million for the second consecutive year, while philanthropic support has doubled year-over-year to set a university philanthropic record with the most funds raised in a single fiscal year. Neufeldt secured CSUSM's first 8-figure level gifts totaling \$20 million—one to launch an accelerated behavioral and mental health program and another to provide unrestricted campaign matching opportunities across campus. CSUSM's current comprehensive blended campaign has raised more than \$158 million in just three years. The most recent campaign gift was \$10 million to name the new Integrated Science and Engineering building.



Neufeldt has shaped CSUSM to be a hub for innovation, workforce development, and regional collaboration. Early in her tenure, she launched the Innovation Hub to address societal challenges and has since expanded academic programs aligned with high-demand careers, including computer engineering, cybersecurity, and public health. Her efforts are supported by strategic partnerships and significant funding, such as a \$5 million HSI grant, all aimed at building a diverse and future-ready workforce.

Underscoring her commitment to CSUSM's role in cultivating partnerships that create opportunities for students and enrich the communities it serves, Neufeldt serves on the boards of the San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation and the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities.

Neufeldt has shared her passion for social mobility and student success on multiple local, national, and international media channels and publications. Neufeldt hosts the National Social Mobility Symposium, bringing together policymakers, experts, and higher education leaders from across the country to share ideas and innovations around redefining and advancing social mobility.

Neufeldt received her Doctor of Education from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, her Master of Arts in Educational Psychology and Counselor Education, and a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Tennessee Technological University. To read President Neufeldt's full biography, visit: <https://www.csusm.edu/president/about/bio.html>.

The CSUSM Foundation

All gifts to California State University San Marcos are accepted and administered by The California State University San Marcos Foundation (CSUSM Foundation), an official 501(c)(3) auxiliary organization of California State University San Marcos. The Foundation Board consists of 27 community leaders who guide, advise, and support CSUSM regarding the feasibility and desirability of its strategic plans for growth into the 21st century.

Financial and Fundraising Overview

All CSU campuses have two main funding sources: the State General Fund, and student tuition and fees. State funding now covers slightly more than half of the CSU's operating costs, with tuition and fees making up the remainder. Auxiliaries and philanthropic support generate additional revenue needed for essential services that supplement state-supported activities. CSUSM's operating budget is \$263 million in Fiscal Year 2026, divided as 53% from state support and 47% from tuition and fees. In the same year, the university raised \$10.5 million in annual philanthropic contributions, following a previous year of \$26 million, the highest in the university's history. Its endowment is currently valued at over \$45 million.

Blueprint for the Future: The Campaign for California State University San Marcos

On September 19, 2025, CSUSM publicly launched Blueprint for the Future: The Campaign for California State University San Marcos, its second and most ambitious \$200 million comprehensive campaign. *Blueprint for the Future* is a blended effort encompassing private support and sponsored research grants. As the most aspirational campaign in CSUSM's history, current efforts are geared towards inspiring bold ideas through innovative research, accelerating student success by expanding access to opportunities, and cultivating deep community engagement to build professional pathways. As of September 2025, the campaign has raised \$149 million towards its goal.

VICE PRESIDENT FOR UNIVERSITY ADVANCEMENT & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE CSUSM FOUNDATION

The vice president for University Advancement at CSUSM is responsible for the planning, implementation, and performance of all fundraising, engagement, and government relations activities on behalf of the university. The vice president provides strategic vision and leadership for the University Advancement team, managing an operating budget of over \$6.3 million and directing 41 staff across departments dedicated to development, government relations, advancement services, alumni engagement, and university events, including commencement. The vice president is responsible for building and fostering meaningful community and university relationships, soliciting donations from individuals, foundations, and corporations, and managing capital, special, and comprehensive campaigns, as well as advancement-related events that support established academic and campus priorities. The vice president will serve as a key member of the president's senior management team, represent CSUSM as a key spokesperson for the university, and collaborate with colleagues in the California State University system to support local and systemwide advancement endeavors.



This individual also serves as the executive director of the CSUSM Foundation, which has oversight responsibility for the university's endowment. In addition to formal duties, the VP must be a visible and engaged member of the Cougar family and take an active interest in the vitality of the university, the San Marcos community, and the state as a whole.

Duties and Responsibilities

Strategic Vision and Planning

- Assess the fundraising potential for CSUSM. Serve as the architect and builder of a multi-year comprehensive advancement plan that aligns with the university's strategic objectives while remaining donor-centric. Ensure sustainable long-term growth in philanthropic contributions, external partnerships with regional community and industry leaders, and alumni commitment to the university.
- Understand and capitalize on the gains made during CSUSM's past and current comprehensive campaigns. To maximize the current campaign's ongoing and future success, evaluate the philanthropic capacity of all constituencies, identify areas for growth, strategically augment staff and resources, and craft fundraising strategies to elevate aspirations and involvement of volunteers and donors at all levels.
- Oversee and implement a responsive and collaborative external relations plan that creates goodwill, cohesive messaging, and consensus across all local, state, and national policymakers, supporting and reflecting the university's goals and objectives. Partner with University Communications to provide a compelling narrative for internal and external audiences in support of advancement and government relations.

Executive Support and Engagement

- Guide and support President Neufeldt in her role as chief spokesperson and fundraiser, serving as advisor and co-strategist in cultivating prospective donors, soliciting transformative gifts, and operationalizing bold new ideas that will lead CSUSM to even greater levels of distinction.
- Systematically engage, guide, and support the provost, deans, senior institutional leaders, and key volunteers in development-related activities, serving as a coach and co-strategist on cultivating and soliciting principal and transformational gifts and building strong development and alumni engagement channels.
- Serve as a senior counselor to the president, provost, and other university leaders on sensitive communication matters to craft messaging, both internal and external, and advise on governmental issues and actions that impact the university.
- Cultivate strong working relationships with administrative, academic, and athletics leaders and staff across CSUSM. Ensure that the UA division is seen as a collaborative, proactive, trustworthy, and responsive partner able to address both opportunities and concerns professionally.

Board and Volunteer Management

- Serve as the executive director/CEO and a voting director of the CSUSM Foundation. Supervise, direct, and carry out the foundation's initiatives; support the board's operations and financial management, including endowment growth strategies. Ensure that sound fiduciary practices are followed and that CSUSM Foundation is compliant with CSU System and regulatory requirements.
- Analyze the foundation board, alumni advisory council, and other board giving patterns and encourage their continued personal participation in philanthropy.
- Work closely with President Neufeldt and board chairs to develop strategies that will enhance and strengthen the foundation board.
- Assist in the identification, recruitment, and cultivation of new foundation board, alumni advisory, and volunteer members on a national basis, identifying key leaders with an affinity for the mission of CSUSM; build a volunteer structure that fosters a meaningful culture of philanthropy.
- Provide the highest level of personal support to volunteer leaders and board directors for their activities on behalf of CSUSM; ensure that their experiences are meaningful, productive, and enjoyable, and that their intellectual and emotional connections to CSUSM are strengthened.

Program Development and Fundraising

- Establish priorities, clearly defined goals, and best practices for a comprehensive program that promotes a culture of excellence and collaboration. Lead infrastructure and capacity-building across all advancement functions.
- Systematically identify, cultivate, solicit, and steward new individual (alumni, parents, and friends) and institutional (corporations, community organizations, and foundations) donors capable of making significant principal and transformational contributions.
- Evaluate, strengthen, and leverage untapped opportunities to augment the major gift pipeline, corporate and foundation relations, and planned giving. Implement new strategies to identify and acquire prospective donors, increase donor retention, and upgrade and renew existing donors.
- Maintain existing donor and alumni relationships while deepening those alliances through regular, relevant communications, engagement, and stewardship. Ensure that stewardship is comprehensive, timely, and innovative.
- Oversee and enhance Alumni Association programming to engage CSUSM's 70K+ alumni, 69% whom graduated within the last 15 years, across regional, national, and global communities. Ensure alignment with the university's strategic priorities while expanding outreach to new and lapsed audiences. Support the Alumni Association and campus partners in strengthening alumni engagement strategies, membership growth, and related activities.
- Utilize data analytics and insights to inform decision-making, track progress, and refine fundraising strategies. Ensure the accuracy and completeness of alumni and donor records within the institution's database.

- Ensure compliance with all relevant regulations, ethical standards, and reporting requirements related to fundraising. Uphold the highest ethical standards in donor interactions and gift management.

Campaign Leadership

- Lead campaign activities for CSUSM's current comprehensive campaign, providing support for the creation and development of specific philanthropic partner proposals that align with campaign priorities. Oversee a comprehensive campaign engagement, stewardship, and recognition plan in coordination with all members and functions of the UA division and affiliated fundraising entities/efforts across the extensive campus community.
- Support best-practice campaign planning methodology and technology to maximize the integration of the university's comprehensive campaign priorities, financial goals, external and internal engagement, and ambitions.
- Partner and maintain collaborative relationships with various campus constituents, including, but not limited to, the CSUSM Corporation, the Office of Sponsored Projects, and administrative leaders, to increase knowledge and productivity for executing a comprehensive blended campaign.
- Provide regular and meaningful assessments of the campaign's progress against goals, using data and analysis to track comprehensive campaign trends, identify potential concerns, facilitate timely shifts in focus, direction, or thinking, and identify opportunities to exceed goals.
- Oversee strategic communication and marketing collateral with teams of internal campaign partners to keep the campaign's momentum on track.
- Lead the team to close the campaign within the next two years, overseeing planning and execution of campaign celebration and related recognition events.
- Sustain momentum and deepen engagement following campaign success.

Leadership and Staff Management

- Lead the team, including, but not limited to, development, advancement services, alumni engagement, campaign communications, CSUSM events and commencement, and government relations staff; encourage and support collaboration and transparency between and among functional leaders and teams.
- Motivate and inspire the UA leadership team—a seasoned, committed, and long-tenured cadre of direct reports—to work collectively to address division-wide opportunities and challenges and set policy.
- With the leaders of the team, develop, mentor, train, and motivate a high-quality staff prepared to meet the ongoing challenges of broadening and diversifying CSUSM's philanthropic revenue. Assess current staff capacity, retain high-performing staff, and recruit new staff as necessary.



Qualities and Experience

- At least nine years of progressively responsible leadership roles within an advancement, preferably in higher education or a similarly complex setting.
- The ability to co-create and articulate a vision for the future and craft a development program capable of building that future, engaging a broad array of constituents in the process.
- Demonstrated success in cultivating, soliciting, and stewarding principal and transformational gifts from individuals, foundations, and corporations.
- Proven management skills in establishing a team and goal-oriented environment that empowers staff through active communication, transparency, and delegation, promoting diversity of thought and celebrating achievements.
- Political savvy to navigate a complex public academic institution, building consensus and strong collaborative relationships across the university, inclusive of a broad body of alumni and constituents.
- Proven experience or demonstrated potential for foundation management. Depth of volunteer management experience.
- A proven track record in leading and managing a comprehensive campaign from inception to conclusion.
- Knowledge of strategies and industry best practices for strategic communications, marketing, positioning, and messaging, including broad experience in public affairs, crisis and issues

management, communications planning, media relations, reputation management, enrollment, and internal communications.

- Exemplary interpersonal and listening skills, with the intellectual depth, maturity, and confidence to garner the trust of the president, senior academic and administrative leaders, key volunteers, staff, faculty, alumni, and other constituents.
- A decisive consensus-builder who enjoys cross-departmental collaboration and can create excitement around CSUSM's mission, encouraging others to support the university.
- A sharp eye for operational efficiency and the best use of resources, including a demonstrated understanding of budgets and past success in garnering institutional resources for a program or division.
- Superior written and oral communication skills, with the ability to translate information clearly and compellingly for all audiences.
- A bachelor's degree is required; an advanced degree is preferred.

LOCATION AND COMPENSATION

Located on a 306-acre hillside overlooking the city of San Marcos, CSUSM offers proximity to Southern California's premier recreational amenities, cultural hubs, vibrant neighborhoods, and innovative industries such as biotech, life sciences, and telecommunications. The City of San Marcos is a suburban community of nearly 94,000 residents with top-rated K-12 schools and a beautiful, warm year-round climate. San Marcos is located a short drive from beaches, mountains, and deserts, a downtown nightlife, world-class shopping, and more. To learn more, visit: <http://www.san-marcos.net/home>.

The anticipated compensation range for this role is **\$275,000-\$290,000**. In addition to the salary range listed herein, CSUSM offers a wealth of benefits to make working at the university even more rewarding. These benefits include comprehensive health insurance, sick and vacation time, retirement savings plans, and access to a number of perks. Salary offers are determined based on final candidate qualifications and experience. To learn more about benefits, visit: <https://www.calstate.edu/csu-system/careers/benefits>.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website below.

<http://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/california-state-university-san-marcos/VPUA>

Rachel Ellenport, Partner
Christina Garrison, Senior Associate
Rebecca Lyons, Senior Search Coordinator

The CSU is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by CSUSM. The material presented in this leadership profile should be relied on for informational purposes only. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information, the original source documents and information provided by CSUSM would supersede any conflicting information in this document.

ADDENDUM

CSUSM Corporation and the Office of Sponsored Projects

As an auxiliary organization of California State University San Marcos, [CSUSM Corporation](#) plays an important role in the campus community, existing to provide support, advance the purposes and goals, and meet the evolving needs of the university. CSUSM Corporation is a self-supporting auxiliary and does not receive funding from state sources. The CSUSM Corporation houses the Office of Sponsored Projects, which manages awarded proposals and oversight of extramural sponsored projects and research from federal and state agencies, foundations, and other public and private support. The office provides guidance on the stewardship of funds received.

The California State University System

With 23 campuses, 462,000 students, and over 63,000 faculty and staff, the [California State University](#) (CSU) is the nation's largest and most diverse four-year public university system. The CSU is a leader in high-quality, accessible, student-focused higher education and trains the majority of California's leaders and policymakers: approximately one in ten employees across both public and private sectors in California is a CSU graduate. The CSU system has conferred degrees to over four million alumni, and one in every 20 Americans earned their college degree at the CSU. For Fiscal Year 2026, the CSU's annual operating budget is \$9.1 billion in core funding, with 60% from the state General Fund and 40% from student tuition revenue. In Fiscal Year 2024, over \$448 million in charitable gift commitments were made to the CSU in the same timeframe. The CSU's endowment is valued at \$2.8 billion.

