Executive Director, National Center for Social Mobility

THE SEARCH

California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) seeks applications and nominations for the inaugural Executive Director of the CSU National Center for Social Mobility at CSUSM.

The Executive Director will join a highly regarded public university system whose identity is rooted in inclusive excellence and social mobility. Since its founding, CSUSM has been dedicated to student success and social mobility and has been actively leading national conversations about social mobility in higher education through symposia and other educational programs since 2020.

As a federally designated Hispanic-Serving Institution, CSUSM proudly serves among the most ethnically, economically, and academically diverse student populations in the country. Over 53% of students identify as members of underrepresented communities in higher education, and 53% of graduates are the first in their families to earn a bachelor's degree. In 2025, the university launched Blueprint for the Future, a $200 million campaign aimed at making higher education accessible, affordable, and adaptable for all, while advancing the university's commitment to social mobility.

As the first center of its kind within the CSU system, the National Center for Social Mobility serves as a national hub for research, innovation, collaboration, and policy engagement that strengthens student success, degree completion, and economic mobility. Supported by philanthropic investment and with ambitious plans for future growth, the Center is entering a formative stage of development and seeks an Executive Director who can build on the current momentum to develop the Center as hub for all 22 CSU campuses and position social mobility as a national priority. Guided by the conviction that higher education remains one of society's most powerful engines of opportunity, the Center seeks to become the nation's leading convener and catalyst for advancing social mobility through higher education.

The Executive Director will have a rare opportunity to build a national organization from the ground up, shaping its strategy, partnerships, funding model, team, and influence. The Executive Director will lead the Center's approach to applied research, innovation grants, national convenings, strategic partnerships, and thought leadership to accelerate the adoption of proven approaches that improve student outcomes and strengthen communities. Reporting to CSUSM's President, Dr. Ellen Neufeldt, the inaugural Executive

Director will be a critical hire for the university and must be a visionary builder who is energized by the opportunity to shape something new and turn bold ideas into reality.

A list of desired qualifications and characteristics of the executive director can be found at the conclusion of this document. All confidential applications, inquiries, and nominations should be directed to the parties listed at the conclusion of this document.

ABOUT CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY SAN MARCOS

CSUSM delivers a student-centered experience through a supportive, engaging campus culture; access to new, state-of-the-art facilities; integrated research and practicum-based learning; and community-oriented partnerships that prepare undergraduates and graduate students for careers that create positive socioeconomic impact for generations to come. Its 17,000+ students are enrolled in 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 for residents in Southwest Riverside County, and has begun offering degree completion programs in Chula Vista at the Southwestern College higher education center. Notably, the CSU Shiley Institute for Palliative Care is headquartered at the university.

Consistently recognized among the nation's top universities for advancing educational and economic opportunity, CSUSM has embedded social mobility at the core of its mission, serving a student population that includes a high proportion of first-generation and historically underserved students. The university's approach has attracted national attention as higher education institutions increasingly focus on outcomes such as degree completion, workforce readiness, career attainment, and economic advancement. Through first-year programs, learning communities, internships, undergraduate research, and more, the university fosters deep learning and academic success by engaging students in meaningful and innovative educational experiences.

In 2021, CSUSM released *The Power of CSUSM*, which followed a comprehensive strategic planning process. 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**; and **Distinctive Institutional Identity and Reputation.**

Dr. Ellen Neufeldt serves as 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. President 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.

ABOUT CSU NATIONAL CENTER FOR SOCIAL MOBILITY

The CSU National Center for Social Mobility, housed at CSUSM, was established to position social mobility as a national imperative for higher education and to advance evidence-based practices that help students translate educational opportunity into economic mobility and lifelong success. The Center serves as a collaborative hub for the 22-campus California State University system while engaging policymakers, higher education leaders, employers, researchers, foundations, and community partners across the country.

A signature component of the Center's work is the annual National Social Mobility Symposium, hosted by CSUSM, which convenes leaders from higher education, philanthropy, government, workforce development, and public policy to explore the role of colleges and universities in creating opportunity. What began as a modest gathering has grown into a nationally recognized forum that attracts hundreds of participants and helps to shape conversations around educational attainment, workforce preparation, and economic mobility. The Center also manages the review of proposals for mini grants focused on innovation in social mobility practices across the CSU system.

Under the leadership of CSUSM President Ellen Neufeldt and with the support of CSU Chancellor Mildred García, the Center has been envisioned as a national platform for innovation, collaboration, and impact. Its mission is not to compete with major research organizations that generate large-scale mobility datasets, but rather to serve as an incubator for the practices, partnerships, and institutional strategies that help students succeed. The Center aims to bridge research and implementation by translating insights into scalable solutions that colleges and universities can adopt to improve social and economic outcomes.

ROLE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Executive Director of the National Center for Social Mobility provides strategic leadership, vision, and coordination for a first-of-its-kind center dedicated to advancing social mobility through higher education. The Executive Director serves as a senior advisor to the president on matters related to the role of higher education in advancing social mobility and leads efforts to identify, scale, and disseminate evidence-based practices that remove barriers and expand opportunity for students, particularly those from underserved communities. In addition, the Executive Director provides leadership in advancing grants and external funding, creating opportunities for research and best practices that can be incubated for scale, and in planning and implementing the Center's national convenings.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Provide visionary and collaborative leadership for the Center and its growing national agenda.

- Foster a culture of trust, inclusion, innovation, accountability, and professional excellence.
- Build, mentor, and inspire a high-performing team committed to advancing social mobility and student success.
- Lead through complexity, addressing challenges proactively and developing effective, sustainable solutions.
- Create an environment where employees feel empowered, valued, recognized, and supported in their professional growth.
- Ensure effective onboarding, coaching, performance management, and succession planning practices.
- Champion diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in all aspects of the Center's work.
- Serve as a collaborative partner across CSUSM and the CSU system, building consensus and advancing shared priorities.
- Effectively allocate resources and align talent, time, and investments with the Center's strategic goals.
- Represent and advocate for the Center, the university, and the CSU with a unified and mission-driven voice.

Develop and execute the long-term vision and strategic direction that elevates social mobility across higher education.

- Establish and implement ambitious short- and long-term goals aligned with CSUSM's mission and CSU system priorities.
- Translate emerging trends, research, and data into actionable strategies that advance student success and economic mobility.
- Guide the Center's research, innovation, and knowledge-sharing agenda by overseeing applied research initiatives, innovation grants, publications, and tools that advance student success and social mobility while translating findings into actionable practices for campuses and partners.
- Identify opportunities to expand the Center's influence, impact, and national visibility.
- Communicate strategic priorities clearly and inspire commitment among stakeholders and partners.
- Monitor progress, evaluate outcomes, and continuously refine strategies to maximize impact.
- Position the Center as a national leader in identifying and scaling effective social mobility practices.

Build relationships with state and federal agencies, policy makers, higher ed foundations, etc.

- Work with CSUSM and CSU advancement, government relations, and strategic communications and marketing along with other campus partners to secure funding and partnerships with foundations, government agencies, higher ed partners etc.
- Convene partners to identify shared goals, build consensus, and develop innovative solutions.
- Serve as an ambassador for the Center, cultivating support, influence, and long-term partnerships.

- Promote a collaborative approach that recognizes the value of collective expertise, knowledge sharing, and cross-sector engagement.
- Develop strategic alliances that advance the Center's mission and expand opportunities for students and institutions.
- Engage diverse stakeholders in meaningful collaboration around social mobility initiatives.
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Build and strengthen relationships across the CSU system and beyond that strengthen student success, workforce readiness, and economic mobility.

- Collaborate with campus and system partners to elevate the Center's visibility, communicate its impact, and position the CSU as a national leader in advancing social mobility.

Implement sound operations, resource management, and administration of the Center to fuel its growth.

- Establish and oversee data, assessment, and evaluation frameworks that measure impact, inform continuous improvement, and support evidence-based decision-making, resource allocation, and strategic planning.
- Serve as a national ambassador for the Center by engaging higher education leaders, policymakers, employers, philanthropic organizations, and researchers to advance dialogue, policy, and practice related to social mobility and workforce development.
- Lead the planning and execution of the annual National Social Mobility Symposium and other convenings that elevate CSU leadership, strengthen institutional capacity, and foster national collaboration around social mobility.
- Oversee the Center's financial resources, including budgeting, grant administration, philanthropic investments, and resource allocation, ensuring responsible stewardship and alignment with strategic priorities.
- Ensure accountability and transparency through effective reporting, impact assessment, stakeholder communications, and presentations to university leadership, advisory groups, funders, and external audiences.
- Partner with University Advancement and philanthropic stakeholders to secure and steward external funding, develop new funding opportunities, and build the long-term sustainability of the Center.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The Executive Director of the National Center for Social Mobility will possess many of the following qualifications and characteristics:

- A bachelor's degree in higher education, public policy, social sciences, education, or related field and five years of progressively responsible professional experience in higher education, nonprofit, research, or public policy environments is required;
- An advanced degree in education, public policy, social sciences, or related field is preferred;
- Ability to articulate and execute a compelling vision for the Center while advancing the mission of California State University San Marcos and the California State University system;
- Demonstrated commitment to diversity, inclusion, access, and student success;
- Experience leading complex organizations and building high-performing teams characterized by accountability, collaboration, innovation, and continuous improvement;
- Ability to coach, develop, and inspire staff while navigating organizational challenges with sound judgment and integrity;
- Demonstrated ability to translate bold ideas into actionable strategies, establish long-term priorities, manage change, align resources, and deliver measurable results in complex environments;
- Proven success building partnerships and coalitions across higher education, philanthropy, government, research, workforce development, and community organizations;
- Outstanding written, verbal, and interpersonal communication skills, with the ability to engage diverse audiences, build support for strategic initiatives, and serve as a persuasive and credible spokesperson;
- Ability to identify emerging opportunities and challenges, apply creative and evidence-based solutions, and lead effectively through ambiguity, complexity, and change;
- Deep understanding of strategies that improve educational attainment, workforce readiness, and economic mobility, with a demonstrated commitment to removing barriers to opportunity and advancing equitable outcomes;
- Experience overseeing complex initiatives, managing fiscal and human resources, evaluating performance, and ensuring effective stewardship of organizational assets and investments;
- Ability to navigate highly collaborative and matrixed environments with discretion, diplomacy, strong decision-making skills, and an appreciation for the diverse roles and perspectives that contribute to institutional success;
- Capacity to represent the Center effectively with policymakers, educators, employers, researchers, foundations, and other stakeholders while helping establish the Center as a national leader in advancing social mobility.

LOCATION

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.

COMPENSATION

The anticipated compensation range for this role is $175,000-185,000. 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. **For best consideration, please apply by December 15, 2026.** Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be submitted via Isaacson Miller: https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/california-state-university-san-marcos/executive-director-national-social-mobility.

Cati Mitchell-Crossley, Luciano Zuniga, and Christina Errico
Isaacson, Miller

All university programs and activities are open and available to all regardless of race, sex, color, ethnicity or national origin. Consistent with California law and federal civil rights laws, California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) provides equal opportunity in education and employment without unlawful discrimination or preferential treatment based on race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin. Our commitment to equal opportunity means ensuring that every student and employee has access to the resources and support they need to thrive and succeed in a university environment and in their communities.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by CSU San Marcos. 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 CSU San Marcos would supersede any conflicting information in this document.