

Colorado
Higher Education Summit
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**Higher Education
Political Environment**

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The Metric

1. After years of budget cuts, there is a sense that higher education (HE) is now due an increased share of state funds. This is especially true of the business community, much of the political class and the media.
2. The amount required for Colorado to get to the average national level of support, \$823 million, has been established as a metric in the media and elite conversations.

Public Opinion

3. It is less clear if the average voter sees HE in a funding crisis, but many are concerned about the cost and affordability of HE. Funding for HE is highly complicated and little understood.

Controversies

4. Resistance to more funds is heard from some sectors, especially strong conservatives, due to perceived liberal bias in HE (professors, diversity, etc.) and the lack of productivity. On the other hand, some intense liberal forces perceive a failure to adequately address diversity.
 - The controversies around CU have mostly been resolved under the Brown tenure (although the Churchill controversy lingers). But no narrative of success has replaced the old stories.

Value of College

6. Public opinion concerning the value of college, its performance and funding needs is still characterized by gaps in awareness and misinformation.
7. Developing and communication strategies that address educational quality, performance and productivity will be necessary to provide context for funding requests.

Economic Development



8. The linkage between the economy and HE and the economic development potential of universities, two- and four-year colleges for the urban areas and non-metro areas, is much better established today than a decade ago. A partnership with the business community is essential.

9. The business community and the new state administration are highly committed to job creation, business retention and global competitiveness. HE is a key component in the strategy.

Unified Strategy

10. Striking a fair funding formula among the major institutions and tiers of institutions is a challenge, but a unified effort for long-term funding is essential.
11. The alumni network is a powerful asset and is not yet fully developed, integrated or utilized.

Competition for Money

12. One significant anomaly of state financing that causes considerable confusion is that additional funds from the TABOR "time-out" (Referendum C) and the growing economy do not produce discretionary money available for HE. The fact confuses even the reasonably well-informed, and opponents of additional HE funding add to the confusion.

13. There are numerous aggressive, well-positioned interests competing for limited state dollars and protective of any amendments and statutes that ensure their financial advantages within the state budget.

Political Changes

14. The political environment has shifted slightly toward reform of constitutional clutter and increases in investment. But as the Referendum C election results reflected, the state remains closely divided on tax and fiscal issues.
15. Partisanship is a powerful factor and without significant bipartisan support – especially from Republican civic and business leadership – progress on these issues will be difficult, if not impossible.

Next Steps

16. List of next steps.

- a. Lay a foundation (good start)
- b. Build the network
- c. Create a narrative and communication strategy
- d. Meet any ongoing crisis and challenges
- e. Devise and implement short-term strategies
- f. Devise and tee-up a long-term strategy ready to initiate at the earliest opportunity