

# THE COALITION OF URBAN AND METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITIES STRATEGIC PLAN

JULY 2021 – JUNE 2026

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The Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU) was founded in 1989 by a group of presidents and chancellors who recognized and affirmed their shared mission to use the power of their campuses in education, research, and service to enhance the communities in which they are located. Since then, CUMU has been dedicated to its member institutions and to the creation and dissemination of knowledge on the issues that face our membership and our communities. The value of place-based institutions and our collective work has been reinforced during recent years and will be even more important as we move forward.

As the organization of choice for urban and metropolitan universities, this three-year plan builds upon CUMU's existing strengths, while incorporating adaptations necessary to support the changing needs of our students, institutions, and cities. During a time of increased resource constraints for higher education, it will be essential that CUMU not only remain affordable but accessible. To accomplish this, all members will need to step up as contributors, conveners, participants, and champions.

**The following commitments guide this strategic plan and are incorporated across and within each priority:**

- 1. Centering anti-racism, equity, and inclusion:** Anti-racism, equity and inclusion are the most important issue areas that members want CUMU to focus on going forward. CUMU members are developing strategies that move beyond rhetoric to actualize anti-racist initiatives on individual, departmental and institutional levels. In order to achieve racial equity and foster systemic change it must be omnipresent and centered in everything we do going forward, both within CUMU and across programming.
- 2. Driving innovation:** CUMU is forward thinking about the issues facing our urban and metropolitan universities. We will continue to push the envelope and encourage new ideas. As an association of anchor and place-based institutions, we know that a holistic and “all-in” approach is strongest, where leaders across the entire institution partner with their city and community for positive impact. This campus-wide commitment and strategy means that the issues and challenges CUMU seeks to address and support vary greatly and shift quickly. We must be agile and flexible to remain relevant and to drive innovative practice.
- 3. Deepening engagement and partnerships:** Institutions join CUMU because of a commitment to deepening engagement and partnerships within their communities, to move beyond transactional to transformation. To support our members in this work, CUMU must continue providing authentic places and spaces for members to generously share and learn from one another. Furthermore, because CUMU's institutional membership allows anyone affiliated with the institution, including community partners, to take advantage of benefits we must expand the engagement within our member institutions to foster collaboration and the place-based work.

## PRIORITIES

CUMU has identified three priorities that integrate our principles and commitments. Each outcome will have dedicated measures and an annual action plan. The annual action plan will integrate tasks that actualize the commitments listed above. Accomplishing these outcomes will rely on the ability to engage members in new ways, create mutually beneficial partnerships with other associations, and attract investment and resources from corporate sponsors and philanthropy.

- 1. Research and Impact:** Create action-oriented research opportunities to drive effective practice and elevate members' impact.
- 2. Learning, Teaching, and Sharing:** Develop sought-after programming with a stronger local and regional focus that helps our institutions holistically align with their cities.
- 3. Visibility and Connections:** Raise the visibility of CUMU and members, deepen connections, broaden engagement, and expand membership.

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### PRIORITY 1: RESEARCH AND IMPACT

Building on the success of *Metropolitan Universities* journal, CUMU has made strides in recent years in developing a stronger research agenda. CUMU has launched a research fellows program and key foundations have approached CUMU to support research projects and analysis to further critical university-city collaboration and engagement. Working with experts at member institutions, research projects included Opportunity Youth (Cleveland State University and the Annie E. Casey Foundation); Place-Based Hyperlocal Engagement (University of Pittsburgh and the Kresge Foundation); and Homelessness and Housing Insecurity (Portland State University). Over the next three years, we will continue to move our research agenda forward to generate new knowledge and effective practice, which focuses on measurable outcomes and impact. Additionally our research will support the efficacy and return on investment of being an urban and metropolitan engaged institution.

#### Outcomes:

1. Launch CUMU Research Council to include appointed members who will establish and guide the overall research agenda for CUMU
2. Formalize CUMU's research fellowship program and create new opportunities for faculty on sabbatical, graduate students, and urban research centers
3. Build the capacity of scholar administrators/practitioners by championing their work through the Barbara A. Holland Award Scholar-Administrator, professional development, and programming
4. Explore new collaborative relationships with urban-based associations (particularly those that do not explicitly focus on higher education) that can lead to shared research projects
5. Secure new funding from philanthropic organizations committed to addressing urban and metropolitan challenges through research and practice
6. Explore creating new research networks, with identified external funding, based on relevant issue areas (similar to existing networks such as ALN, hyperlocal engagement, and homelessness and housing insecurity)
7. Increase awareness and utilization of *Metropolitan Universities* journal

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## PRIORITY 2: LEARNING, TEACHING, AND SHARING

Historically, CUMU's programming has primarily included an in-person annual conference, special-interest meetings, and theme-driven webinars. During the COVID-19 pandemic, CUMU shifted to all-virtual programming, including the 2020 virtual annual conference, 2020-2021 Learning & Sharing Virtual Series, and virtual convenings for CUMU networks. Looking forward, CUMU members want to connect in-person and virtually based on role, interest, and geographic region. Programming will prioritize the local and regional context, and create deeper experiences for shared learning and understanding. On local, state, national, and global levels, CUMU will raise awareness of *the urban advantage* in order to garner the support of key partners and organizations.

### Outcomes:

1. Establish new "In the Now" virtual series, to bring together CUMU members in a timely and responsive format to understand a critical issue or opportunity affecting a geographic area, higher education sector, or professional community
2. Expand action summit (in-person or virtual) format to facilitate the learning, dissemination, and implementation of innovative practices. These summits would be member-driven and hosted.
3. Integrate policy makers and policy making content into virtual and in-person programming to foster new initiatives and understanding that address the needs of CUMU members and our communities
4. Continue the Learning & Sharing Virtual Series based on experience and member feedback and create a sustainable virtual programming plan
5. Expand president-to-president programming to include experiences and events exclusively for CUMU member presidents and chancellors (in-person and virtual)
6. Refine the annual in-person conference with a deeper focus on networking and the local context to learn about the unique partnerships and issues in that region
7. Develop the next phase for the Anchor Learning Network, in collaboration with The Democracy Collaborative, to continue supporting the institutions doing this work

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## PRIORITY 3: VISIBILITY AND CONNECTIONS

Personal connections and relationship building have always been and will always be foundational to the CUMU experience and to the success of the Coalition. As CUMU has grown, we have developed strategies to foster these relationships including an expansion of headquarters staff to facilitate impactful engagement. As we look forward, CUMU seeks to deepen engagement within existing member institutions in order to maximize benefits for each institution.

### Outcomes:

1. Launch CUMU huddles, peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities for members to connect and develop professionally, based on criteria such as interest, role, region or institution type
2. Establish a mentoring program for new members that fosters participation in CUMU initiatives and creates connections across the network
3. Expand connections and relationships with policy makers at the national level
4. Create an advisory council, composed of rotating leaders (non-Presidents) from across the membership who provide guidance and insights on CUMU's programming and activities.
5. Implement a new customer relationship management (CRM) system to better manage member data, enhance targeted marketing and alignment across our membership
6. Leverage new media and digital communications strategies to enhance the visibility of CUMU to funders, prospective members, and individuals within existing CUMU members
7. Grow total membership by 10% (to 113 members), with a particular focus on minority-serving institutions, community colleges, and universities based in Canada and Mexico