

INVESTING IN THE JOBS AND ECONOMIES OF TOMORROW

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

JUNE 2023

BACKGROUND

Economic impact has always been a key part of Kansas State University's traditional land-grant mission. As K-State adapts its focus toward becoming a leading next-generation land-grant university, it must also continually align this historical definition of economic impact with the rapidly evolving needs and demands of the communities and economies it supports, as well as the economic opportunities the university can help create.

In some instances, this means continuing to focus on economic impact beyond traditional teaching and research, honing in on best practices that can be applied to the broader institution and activating all parts of the university to spur economic activity and innovation. In others, it means developing more seamless, consistent, and clear pathways for industry partners to engage with the full university enterprise. K-State must also continually focus on elevating all areas of the institution in keeping pace with the needs of the private sector or employers who are urgently seeking skills like critical thinking and applied experiences that help inform seamless pathways from higher education to the workforce. This dynamic is particularly crucial when it comes to connecting the value of higher education to prospective learners, while knowing that there may be programs that might not necessarily have a broad impact in job creation but bring significant value and impact to society – a value that must be captured, communicated, and elevated at every turn.

All of these factors connect to how stakeholders, partners, and residents throughout the state view K-State as an economic driver for the entire state. K-State must fully leverage its statewide presence through its three physical campuses, Global Campus, and Kansas State Research and Extension's offices in all 105 counties – recognizing that different communities and economies require very different approaches and partnerships. Above all, K-State must be nimble and adaptable in the face of change – leaning into uncertainty or new conditions to rapidly deliver the solutions the state, nation, and world most crucially need to achieve economic wellbeing.

PROCESS

A task force comprising some of the university's leading voices and diverse perspectives was assembled to better understand how K-State is currently contributing to economic and workforce development needs and to identify opportunities to amplify this impact by leveraging the university's unique statewide infrastructure and developing the type of integrated and responsive solutions economies and communities throughout Kansas need in order to thrive.

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

- Matt O'Keefe, Professor and Dean, Carl R. Ice College of Engineering, Task Force Co-Chair
- Rebecca Robinson, President & CEO, K-State Innovation Partners, Task Force Co-Chair
- Katelyn Bailey, Masters Student, Grain Science, College of Agriculture
- Royce Ann Collins, Associate Professor and Interim Chair of Educational Leadership, College of Education and K-State Olathe, Adult Learning and Leadership
- Josh Diazdeleon, Senior, Educational Leadership, College of Education
- Judy Gordon, Associate Professor, Architecture, College of Architecture, Planning & Design
- Eric Higgins, Professor, Finance, College of Business Administration
- Eric Holderness, Senior Associate Vice President of Development, KSU Foundation
- Siny Joseph, Professor, Economics and Integrated Studies, K-State Salina
- Kerri Keller, Executive Director, Career Center, Student Life
- Ping Li, Professor, Chemistry, College of Arts & Sciences
- Charlie Morrison, CEO, Wingstop, and Member, KSU Board of Trustees, K-State Alumni
- Joe Parcell, Professor and Director, Center for Risk Management Education and Research, College of Agriculture
- Lauren Racki, Professional Development Manager, K-State Olathe
- Bonnie Rush, Dean, College of Veterinary Medicine
- George Widenor, Director of Marketing, K-State Global Campus
- Martin Seay, Professor and Head, Personal Financial Planning, College of Health & Human Sciences, ex-officio

This task force met four times from February to April 2023, participating in extensive and in-depth discussions, reviewing data, analyzing best practices, defining the ideal future state for K-State, and developing ideas for bridging the gap between the university's current and future state.

The following findings and recommendations represent a summary of this task force's work, submitted for the university's consideration as key inputs to K-State's future through its next strategic plan.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

EMBRACE ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT AS AN INSTITUTIONAL IMPERATIVE

The Kansas Board of Regents has charged institutions in the state to serve as innovative, intentional partners in building state and local economic prosperity. As K-State fully embraces this mandate and takes continual steps to invest in the jobs and economies of tomorrow, this focus must be continually highlighted and elevated as opposed to it living as a concept scattered across the university. Elevating economic engagement as an institutional imperative enables K-State to build on recent successes in driving economic impact, connecting university actions to broad economic opportunity, and generating well-educated workforce entrants while establishing clear prominence and expectations for how programs, units, and stakeholders across the institution must clearly connect their work to economic growth.

Foundational to this priority is the K-State Economic Prosperity Plan, which has generated significant momentum toward how K-State delivers increased prosperity to the people, businesses, and residents of the state. K-State has an opportunity to build upon this momentum – in attaching greater specificity and enhanced thought surrounding plan implementation strategies, clearly aligning the plan both with other university strategies and state-level economic strategies and using this plan as a building block for positioning K-State as a force in building or growing new economies. Most importantly, it is crucial that the concept of economic engagement is one that people across K-State are invested in and see themselves as integral in advancing – reinforced by structures, systems, and incentives that spur continual buy-in and support. While this naturally includes a distinct focus on traditional inputs to economic growth like technology transfer and commercializing intellectual property developed within the institution, it must also include nontraditional inputs to economic growth or programs that are not typically associated with generating economic value. Only then will K-State be able to truly articulate the full value it brings to the state of Kansas and build an internal environment where all feel a sense of shared mission and purpose in driving the university and state’s economy forward.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

SHORT-TERM (0-3 YEARS)

- Define measurable goals and outcomes for university economic engagement aligned with the K-State Economic Prosperity Plan
- Require all colleges and units develop annual goals focused on driving economic impact
- More clearly connect the K-State Economic Prosperity Plan to the university’s focus on economic development and develop inclusive implementation strategies
- Identify core areas of university strength for economic engagement that faculty and staff can engage with and support
- Establish university-level sector advisory councils to connect changing economic factors and industry needs with the broader university
- Build awareness among stakeholders, communities, economies, and prospective partners that K-State is “open for business”

LONGER-TERM (4-7+ YEARS)

- Develop incentives for colleges, units, faculty, and staff to prioritize economic engagement
- Recognize and reward economic engagement as part of the faculty and staff performance evaluation process
- Modify the service portion of faculty workloads to include service and engagement, with credit given for economic engagement activities
- Establish economic impact center or institute with designated college personnel focused on coordinating across the university to mobilize solutions that align with the state’s industry and economic needs
- Develop shared or interdisciplinary goals among colleges and units focused on holistic economic impact
- Increase the visibility of economic engagement in the work of the university, including having cabinet-level leadership charged with advancing economic prosperity

ESTABLISH SYSTEMS, STRUCTURES, AND CULTURE FOR CONNECTING PARTNERS WITH TALENT AND INNOVATION

Oftentimes, industry partners seeking to engage with K-State rely upon distinct relationships with faculty, staff, or programs to support and formalize any related collaborations. Other broader industry engagements take place across the institution but in a siloed nature, with various units and affiliates carrying or sharing various responsibilities for industry and corporate engagement. As a result, K-State is not fully maximizing the impact it can deliver through robust industry partnerships, where one partner may currently rely upon the university to produce a small number of graduates from a given program but could benefit greatly from sponsored research that develops solutions in their field and leads to commercialization opportunities for faculty, or an expanded talent pipeline that supplies students from outside a more niche program or discipline. In some instances, strengthening the underlying processes that enable these partnerships can have a profound impact on K-State’s position of being “open for business” – removing any and all barriers that may inhibit or challenge a partner from engaging with the broader institution. By navigating external partners toward a more visible, elevated “front door” for industry engagement and making it easy and seamless to partner with the university, K-State has a unique opportunity to bring together these disparate relationships and interactions more intentionally in a structured way as a hub for coordinating across industry needs and better connecting partners with the full breadth and depth of the university’s talent and innovation enterprise.

In many ways, K-State can seize these opportunities by establishing more intentional, real-time alignment of university programs with industry and economic needs. K-State must be visionary and aggressive in how it develops solutions that build this alignment – from reimagining historical structures like the K-State Career Center and holistically leveraging data to identify prospective partners to building environments where physical and academic infrastructure is conducive to real-time experimentation and effectively blends university and industry perspectives. Such systems and structures can and should serve as a key step in the direction of building a culture where external partners know exactly where to go to access university talent and innovation, and the university in turn is able to move swiftly to respond to these needs and deliver solutions that meet economic and workforce needs.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

SHORT-TERM (0-3 YEARS)

- Develop training program to educate industry partners on ways to partner with K-State and how colleges or departments can partner with industry, establishing shared expectations for such partnerships
- Support and elevate a central university structure for industry and corporate engagement, with designated point people embedded/identified in each college and unit charged with both individual and interdisciplinary connections and collaborating with corporate engagement support units
- Streamline new academic program development pathways to address urgent or significant industry talent needs
- Provide resources and support for faculty and staff engaged in industry-based engagement activities
- Evolve and sustain data-driven program for identifying and pursuing high-potential industry and corporate engagement partnerships
- Build an inventory of existing talent and innovation relationships with industry partners
- Elevate digital presence to help partners effectively navigate and fully understand the breadth of K-State’s talent and innovation assets

- Develop communications campaign and success stories to highlight effective industry partnerships

LONGER-TERM (4-7+ YEARS)

- Create teams of interdisciplinary faculty to meet industry needs
- Re-envision and realign K-State Career Center to more intentionally align industry needs with capstones, internships, and talent pipelines and consistently support learners as they prepare to meet real-time industry needs
- Build new or repurpose existing facilities as integrated, modern environments focused on interdisciplinary research and collaborations with industry partners
- Establish model for industry-focused mini-sabbaticals for faculty and professional staff, jointly funded by K-State and industry partners
- Develop model and process for integrating K-State 105 into all program offerings with a focus on building local talent and innovation pipelines
- Establish public-private partnerships with industry partners spanning multiple university programs, units, and focus areas focused on generating large-scale economic value and impact

INTEGRATE APPLIED LEARNING INTO ALL MAJORS, PROGRAMS, AND EXPERIENCES

One of the most fundamental and crucial components to a university effectively growing the jobs and economies of tomorrow involves the alignment of its programs and services with the skills and experiences learners need to accelerate their careers. K-State can become a national leader among land-grant institutions in achieving this alignment, further cementing its reputation as a university that equips graduates with skills necessary to thrive – both immediately and well into the future.

To facilitate this integration, K-State must explore every aspect of the student experience for opportunities to layer in skills development and real-world perspectives that best prepare them for life beyond K-State – starting at Day 1 of their college experience. This means equitably connecting all students, regardless of their college or program, with the resources, advising, access, and connections necessary to support applied learning as first-year students and with this focus carrying through the entirety of their time at K-State. It also means removing any barriers that may challenge employers from seamlessly connecting and engaging with the university and students, tapping into students learning from a more adaptive curriculum aligned with real-world conditions who are also benefiting from more integrated applied learning opportunities.

Over time, what starts as a mix of incentives and requirements will effectively transition into embedded culture across the institution, where clear expectations and a demonstrated track record of success underpin broad integration of applied learning into all facets of the K-State student experience.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

SHORT-TERM (0-3 YEARS)

- Provide training and tools for faculty on how to integrate applied learning into courses and curriculum
- Inventory existing pathways for work-integrated learning and best practices across the university (credit and non-credit)
- Consistently align career maps clearly connecting academic degrees and industry functions

- Define and elevate best practices for applied learning across the institution
- Develop relationships with external partners that facilitates widespread student participation in embedded, high-impact experience within industry
- Establish an initiative in coordination with the K-State Career Center to more intentionally integrate applied learning opportunities across the university and create seamless pathways for employer engagement
- Establish testing or evaluation system for all learners to calibrate skills with industry needs

LONGER-TERM (4-7+ YEARS)

- Establish multiple learning channels that allow for the creation of impactful academic programs (e.g., micro-credentials, badges, and non-credit programs) and provide different or flexible paths to graduation
- Conduct cluster hires for faculty with specific skills and knowledge aligned with economic engagement strategies and emerging sectors
- Establish interdisciplinary academic clusters in coordination with industry partners based on industry and employment needs
- Create network of industry partners committed to providing resources for access to K-State learners, faculty, staff, and other assets

SUCCESS DEFINED

The task force identified a number of prospective metrics to monitor the success of these priority recommendations and the outcomes they are designed to generate for the institution, including the following:

- Internship participation rates
- Job placement rates
- Resources saved in scholarships through paid work opportunities for students
- Invention and intellectual property development activities
- Starting salaries of K-State graduates
- Job creation in the state facilitated by K-State engagement
- Direct investment into Kansas resulting from overall K-State efforts
- Longitudinal career success and mobility among K-State graduates moving into management or leadership positions