Executive Summary

Collegiate state relations is the continual, collaborative process of engaging state policymakers to maximize support needed to achieve institutional and state objectives. Building and sustaining a state relations program helps the college focus on achieving its mission and promoting its value to individuals and society. A number of dynamics—economic, fiscal, political and demographic—are among many forces that beckon institutions to renew their strategy for engendering mutually beneficial relations with state government. A state relations program should be orchestrated in a manner that reflects the history, culture, values and governance structures that are unique to each state.

Campus and higher education system leadership remains paramount to a successful state relations program. Higher education system leaders should oversee a coordinated and inclusive state relations program. They should actively engage leaders at member campuses to fully leverage the system’s collective voice in building and executing a unified agenda for advancing state policy objectives. Likewise, college presidents must develop a strong working relationship between the institution and state government, and fulfill a leadership role in serving as an institutional voice and liaison with state government. College presidents must employ an array of campus stakeholders in state relations and advocacy, leading to a culture of engagement between colleges and state government.

A collegiate state relations program fundamentally involves building relationships among and between an institution’s internal and external constituencies and mobilizing these stakeholders to strengthen the institution’s relationship with state government. These constituencies include both those whom are public target audiences and groups that serve as advocates on behalf of the institution.

Adhering to organizing principles can help ensure the sustainability and success of a state relations program. The program should be staffed and funded, with accountability for outcomes clearly delineated. State relations should be viewed as a year-round endeavor in which relationship building is incessant and agenda setting with state officials takes place well in advance of the legislative session. A campus’ state and federal relations activities should be synchronized; the interplay among the two levels of government involving policy and funding developments—and their ramifications on the institution—should be well understood and appropriately communicated to affected stakeholders.

Six functions are integral to an effective collegiate state relations program:

- **Create supportive networks through relationship building.** It is through these relationships that state governmental actions affecting public colleges and universities are informed, shaped and codified through legislation.

- **Lead a unified state relations team.** The campus president should assemble a team charged with executing the state relations
agenda and designate staff to oversee day-to-day state relations activities. Campus leaders should leverage resources, staff and feedback mechanisms throughout campus. Well-defined protocols should be implemented to ensure strategic, accurate communications with state officials.

- **Serve as a state legislative liaison and resource.** The state relations team should monitor all consequential legislative, budgetary and regulatory activity and clearly articulate concerns involving legislative proposals. A college’s legislative orientation should be proactive and focused on addressing state goals and objectives. Institutions should build a reputation for being responsive resources for information and serve as liaisons for connecting university expertise to state needs.

- **Facilitate communications with state government constituencies.** Communication with the college’s many constituencies is a vital function of a robust state relations program. The offices of the president, government relations and communications should have processes and protocols in place to ensure that the audiences receive timely, accurate and high-quality content. Feedback mechanisms should be included with all communications.

- **Build external institutional support.** Generating support for the college’s goals that span the legislative, regulatory, funding or programmatic spectrum of state government is a crucial function of a state relations program. In building support for university positions on these matters, the institution’s mission and commitment to serving the state should be consistently reaffirmed. The benefits, outcomes, and return on investment for a given state government action should always be conveyed.

- **Foster partnerships to advance state and institutional interests.** The college’s state relations program should be vigilant in identifying how the institution can join forces with other entities to serve as a force multiplier in generating positive outcomes for communities and the states.

State relations programs must be a priority of the campus president with adequate staff resources committed to achieve desired outcomes. Four steps are essential to institutionalizing a collegiate state relations program:

- **Conduct an audit of the current state relations program.** Assessing the institution’s current state relations capacity and effectiveness will provide insight for how to strengthen the program. Questions to consider range from organizational leadership of the state relations function to the college’s success with constituency engagement.

- **Set measurable and achievable objectives.** Informed by the audit’s findings, program objectives should be established. They should be clearly defined, measurable and realistic, and take into consideration the six functions of a state relations program discussed above. Time frames for achieving objectives should also be established.

- **Design and execute strategies for accomplishing objectives:** Every objective should come with a set of explicit strategies for how it can be achieved. Campus leaders should consider the resources required to achieve their objectives.
Evaluate and refine the state relations program: Program evaluation is essential to ensure accountability and to inform corrective measures needed to maximize campus effectiveness in serving the state. Among the elements to evaluate are whether program objectives have been met; if staffing and resources are sufficiently and appropriately allocated and utilized; and the robustness of the college’s state relations constituency networks and level of engagement with each of them.

America’s public colleges and universities are inextricably intertwined with state government. The ability of these vital public institutions to fully deliver on their missions is foundational to the economic vitality and social vibrancy of their states. Higher education leaders must renew their commitment to ensuring that a program is in place to foster a “partnership for prosperity” with state government.