

An aerial photograph of a snowy mountain landscape. A ski lift is visible on the left side, and several buildings are scattered across the slope. The sky is clear and blue.

*University of Alaska:
Executive Interviews*

Prepared for:

University of Alaska

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Leaders believe that the University must be more visibly lean, coordinated, and connected to the needs of the state.

Many leaders expressed concern about the coordination and integration of campuses. These concerns have implications for fundraising, strategic direction, and public awareness.

All interviewed executives believe that the State of Alaska should support the University of Alaska.

Interviewed leaders differed when discussing the extent and channels of State support, but all agree that the state should play a financial role supporting the University.

“During these times, I hope that like a family, when there is a threat, everyone comes out bound together instead of fighting each other for crumbs. I would like to see the University come together as a unit. I would like to see us come out of this organized to survive and thrive.”

The University of Alaska contracted with McDowell Group to conduct a series of executive interviews with Alaska leaders about the role and direction of the University.

Perception of the University of Alaska

Role of the University

All interviewed leaders see the University of Alaska playing a crucial role shaping Alaska's future. Executives believe the University system contributes to the state in numerous ways, and many leaders believe the University has the potential to do more.

When asked how the University of Alaska could support a vital and robust Alaska, interviewed leaders identified several functions of the University:

- x Prepare diverse students to perform careers needed 10-

Leaders diverged slightly on whether or not it was important for the University to offer the high quality compared to other states. While executives agree generally that the University should offer a quality education, some executives implied that high quality compared to other states is important, while others acknowledged that they do not expect the University quality to be extraordinary, except in specialty fields.

Those who viewed a University of Alaska education as high quality commented:

- x UA does a good job at providing direct, hands on internships and mentorships, opportunities that cannot be offered in larger states.
- x There is a small enough community that the University can maintain connections to industries.
- x We do not pay a lot for a quality education.
- x The University of Alaska has educated a lot of Alaska leaders.
- x Oil engineering and fisheries programs are top tier.
- x The University offers high value due to its small classes and direct contact with professors.

Those who view UA education as medium to low commented:

- x Quality is solid, but not outstanding.
- x It can be mixed. The University is trying to be all things to all people.
- x Except in specialty fields, the quality is not very high.
- x The quality of education is below average compared to other states.
- x They can do a better job of providing opportunities for students at the top of their class.

Notably, executives acknowledged that the University could do a better job communicating its strengths:

"I think we do some things really well (Museum of the North, UAS, the Arctic programs etc.). We are on the cutting edge of a lot of what we do, but we don't communicate this out to the public or outside of the state. We are doing a lot of things at the cutting edge that other universities should know about and that we should publicize and celebrate."

Recommendation of the University

When asked whether leaders would encourage their children or grandchildren to attend the University of Alaska, most said yes while a third said no. Executives commented that their child's interests would be a key factor.

Most leaders believe that by offering Alaska students the opportunity to stay in state for higher education, the University of Alaska plays a crucial role keeping talent in the state. However, they also described out-of-state higher education as a desirable growth opportunity for their own children.

Leaders who have or will encourage their children and grandchildren to attend the University of Alaska cite the quality and affordability of the education, as well as its ability to develop Alaska leaders as key reasons. Notably,

back to the state or not. Other reasons included more prestigious options elsewhere, concerns about the quality of education, and reluctance for their child to pursue a four-year degree while sharing a campus with part-time, remedial, and community college students.

Pride in the University

In general, executives feel proud of the University of Alaska. Some leaders indicated experiencing overall pride, while others identified feeling especially proud of the University at a distinct point in time, during a specific program or on a particular campus. For many leaders, programs strongly tied to Alaska's economic development are a source of pride (petroleum engineering, aerospace program, geophysical institute). Many

Description of the University of Alaska

When asked to list words

- x Create a University medical district
- x Competitions to address problems and generate ideas
- x Progressive departments dedicated to entrepreneurship and innovation
- x Passionate department heads who are leaders
- x Supporting innovation with research grants
- x Study school systems like Stanford and MIT that capture innovation
- x Commercialize intellectual property processes to be more competitive

Strategic Partnerships

When asked about strategic partnerships the University should pursue, leaders focused on resource industries. Several executives said the University should focus attention on each the strengths of each campus and consolidate when necessary. Niche employment gaps, maintenance of current industry partnerships, and hosting industry panels were a few of the ways executives suggested the University could strengthen their connections to industry.

Recommended partnerships included:

- AEDC
- Alaska Marine Highway
- ANCSA corporations
- Banks and other financial services
- Construction companies
- Donlin Mine – Bethel Campus
- Engineering firms
- Ketchikan shipyard
- Medical institutions
- Mining
- Oil and gas companies
- State agencies
- Timber

Funding the University of Alaska

Charitable Donations

When asked what would motivate Alaskans to make a charitable donation to the University, most leaders acknowledged that the University has significant room for growth in its development efforts. Many leaders recommended investing into the following areas for development, though several also described that they did not feel they were currently being met. Newly appointed University leaders described both broad and specific suggestions including:

- x Actively manage the public perception of the University such that the public perceives the University making judicious, effective financial decisions and having a positive impact.
- x The public needs to feel engaged and heard. The University needs to be willing to listen.
- x Giving is about connection. Connection with the University.

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Appendix B: List of Interviewed Executives

Rob Allen, Sitka Community Hospital

Stephani Allen, United Way-Mat Su

Anna Atchison, Kinross Fort Knox Mine

Joe Beedle, Northrim Bank

Patrice Case, Florcraft

Charles Clement, SEARHC

Larry Gaffaney, Huna Totem

Grace Greene, Totem Ocean Trailer Express

David Karp, Northern Aviation Services

Nina Kempel, Alaska Community Foundation

Rebecca Logan, Alliance

John MacKinnon, Associated General Contractors of Alaska

Lance Miller, NANA Corporation

Bill O'Leary, Alaska Railroad

Mike Orr, Sitnasuak Corporation

McHugh Pierre, Goldbelt

Angela Rodell, Alaska Permanent Fund Corporation

Rachel Roy, Sitka Chamber of Commerce

Julie Saupe, Visit Anchorage

Aaron Schutt, Doyon Limited

Hugh Short, PT Capital

Curtis Thayer, Alaska Chamber of Commerce

Shelley Wright, Southeast Conference