

KENNEDY & COMPANY



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA AIKEN  
STRATEGIC PLAN

2024-2029

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- ❖ Executive Summary
- ❖ Strategic Planning Process
- ❖ Landscape Assessment
- ❖ Strategic Priorities and Goals

USC Aiken has engaged its stakeholders throughout 2022 and 2023 in the development of an updated mission, an ambitious vision, and a set of strategic priorities and goals that will guide the institution toward that vision through 2029.

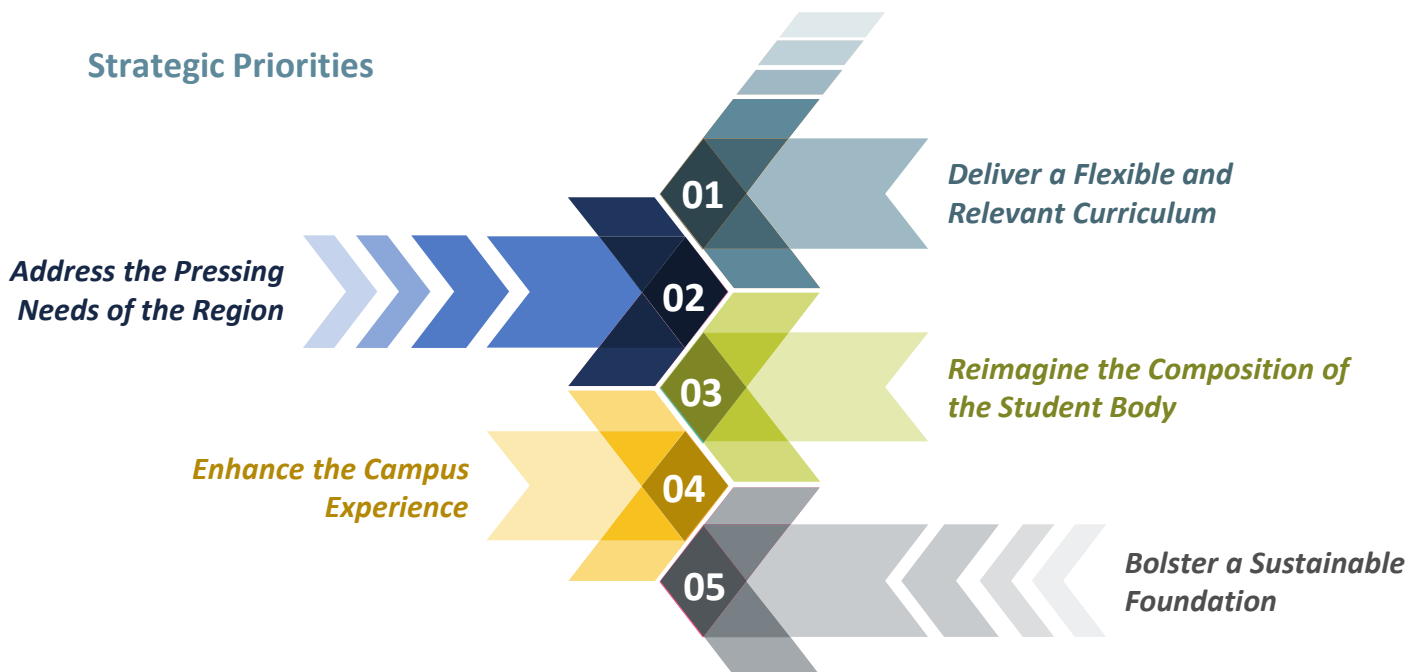
## Mission

*The University of South Carolina Aiken is a regional public comprehensive university that cultivates a diverse population of engaged citizens who provide lifelong contributions in their careers and communities. Our dedicated faculty, staff, and industry partners guide undergraduate and graduate students through a transformative educational journey that uses engaged, accessible teaching and learning practices to blend the liberal arts, sciences, and professional disciplines with research and experiential opportunities that are aligned with economic and societal needs. We are a center for innovation that serves the region through entrepreneurial partnerships, public service, community leadership, relevant research, educational outreach, the visual and performing arts, and intercollegiate athletics.*

## Vision

*To create a campus community that values each individual, acts as a vibrant hub of activity in our region, partners with government and industry to address societal and economic issues, and transforms undergraduate and graduate students into engaged global citizens.*

## Strategic Priorities



USC Aiken kicked off the 2024-2029 strategic planning process in August of 2022 to ensure a roadmap for the future would be in place prior to the conclusion of the 2018-2023 plan. Central to the new strategic plan are a refreshed mission and inspirational vision to ground the work of the institution as it looks ahead to the next five years.

## USC Aiken Leadership & Strategic Planning Committee

The strategic planning process was driven by Aiken leadership and the Strategic Planning Committee, which was formed to guide, execute, and deliver on the five-phase process.

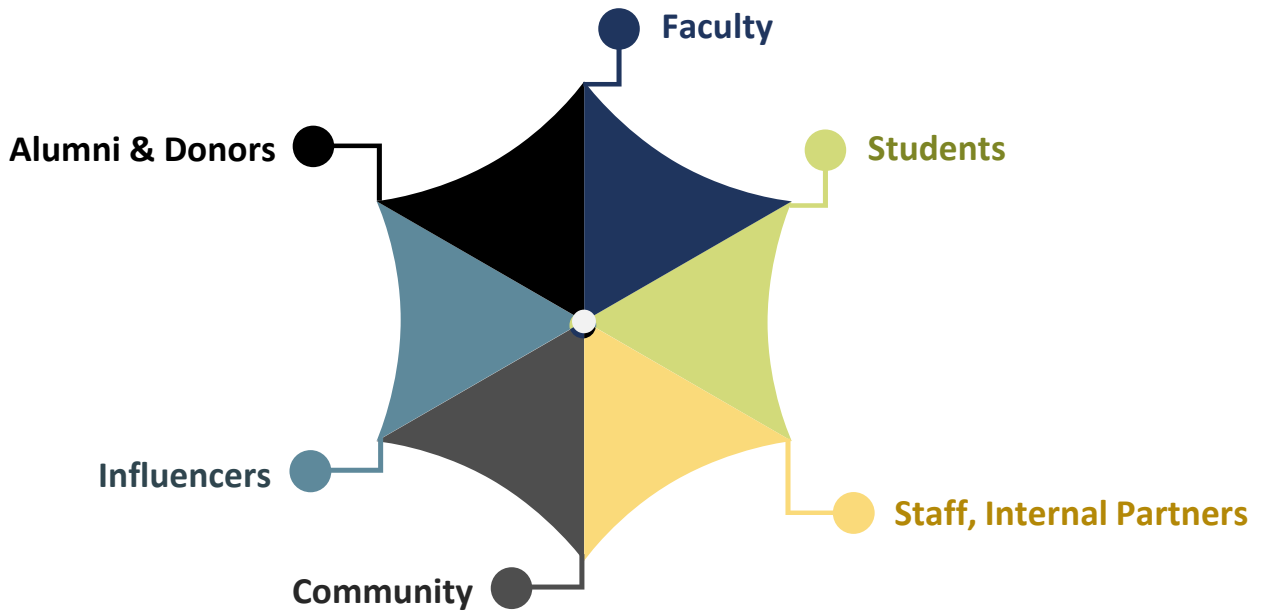
The leadership team provided project guidance and input; access to data and resources; and feedback for final decision making.

- Daniel Heimmermann, Chancellor
- Mary Driscoll, Vice Chancellor of University Advancement and External Relations
- Christen Engel, Vice Chancellor for Marketing and Communications/Chief of Staff
- Ernest Pringle, Vice Chancellor of Information Technology
- Cam Reagin, Vice Chancellor of Administration and Finance/CFO
- Dan Robb, Associate Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management
- Ahmed Samaha, Vice Chancellor for Student Engagement and Belonging
- Daren Timmons, Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
- Todd Wilkinson, Director of Athletics

Invited to serve by the Chancellor, the Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) actively engaged stakeholders throughout the strategic planning process and provided perspectives representative of their constituency in the development of the mission, vision, and plan.

- Liz Dille, Director of International Programs
- Beth Georgian, Department Chair, History, Political Sciences and Philosophy
- Andrew Gregory, SGA President
- Carla Hayes, Director of Human Resources
- Jamel Hodges, Director of Institutional Culture and Belonging
- Thayer McGahee, Dean, School of Nursing
- Jason Munsell, Department Chair, Communication and Emerging Media
- Robert Murphy, Director, Veteran and Military Student Success and the Center for Student Achievement
- Ravi Narayanaswamy, Professor, School of Business
- Ellis Reeves, Director of Online Learning and Support, President of Staff Assembly
- Alex Roach, Associate Professor, President of Faculty Assembly
- Gerard Rowe, Professor and Chair, Department of Chemistry and Physics
- Nicole Spensley, Director of Institutional Effectiveness, Research & Compliance

Early in the process, six primary stakeholder groups were identified as having insights valuable to understanding USC Aiken’s strengths, challenges, and opportunities for the future.



## Stakeholder Engagement Activities

In multiple phases of the strategic planning process, a wide range of internal and external stakeholders were provided opportunities to engage. In-person activities and events included:

- focus groups
- interviews
- unit/department meetings
- town halls
- visioning sessions
- lunch and learns

Online surveys were also broadly administered to ensure a robust range of insights and perspectives were gathered as well as to collect feedback on the draft mission, vision, and strategic priorities.

# STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The methodology guiding the strategic planning process was comprised of five phases of work performed sequentially so that information gathered in one phase would inform the subsequent phase.



## Local, State, and National Context

The undergraduate programs in South Carolina face a challenging landscape, but there are still market opportunities available for USC Aiken to help offset the shrinking population of traditional students. Firstly, our proximity to both traditional and non-traditional learners opens the door to cater to a wider range of students. Dual enrollment could serve as a feeder program, while the growth of graduate and post-baccalaureate certificates signal a notable opportunity in graduate education. The rebound in international interest as well as USC Aiken's proximity to military and veteran prospective students provides an advantage in recruitment. Additionally, changes to federal financial aid programs create new possibilities to serve low-income students.

## Job Market Needs

The job market demands graduates with credentials and specific skill sets, highlighting the need for relevant education and training, specifically in the areas of health care, finance and banking, education, and data analytics. Graduate curricular opportunities align with USC Aiken faculty areas of interest, and several academic fields are already popular in the region at the bachelor's level. Ultimately, growth in certificates and master's degrees will appeal to both recent graduates and working professionals looking to continue their education.

## Competitive Advantage

Competitive research shows that many institutions tout similar strengths to those of Aiken, such as small class sizes, leadership and applied learning experiences, and military community. USC Aiken's competitive advantage will come not from *what* we do, but from *how* we deliver a transformational educational experience. Therefore, USC Aiken must define, and execute on, the *how*. We will focus on the following areas to establish a unique and compelling brand identity for USC Aiken:

- Curriculum and pedagogy
- Career outcomes
- Affordability
- Leadership
- Student life



## Strengths

- Student-centered experience
- Teaching focus
- Affordability/Value
- Accessibility of applied learning experiences (early and numerous)
- Quality of Faculty
- Collegiality/sense of community
- Military connections
- Campus size
- Savannah River Site & DOE



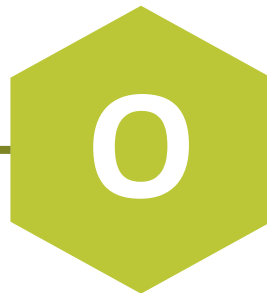
## Weaknesses

- Lack of differentiated brand identity
- Under-resourced faculty & staff
- On campus student experience – student life, housing, dining, athletics
- Student, staff, & faculty retention
- Aging facilities
- Marketing/website
- Internal communications
- Clunky technology/data management



## Opportunities

- Value proposition at the intersection of tech schools & R1 (career-ready hard & soft skills)
- More flexible & targeted gen ed curriculum
- Build depth & breadth in applied learning experiences
- Tap into regional alumni for hiring, mentoring, annual gifts
- Dual enrollment, direct enrollment, military feeders
- Align incoming classes with adjusted curriculum/staffing
- County/city partnerships



## Threats

- Importance of student life & career outcomes vs. current state
- Legislative climate for higher ed/liberal arts
- Quiet quitting; faculty and staff morale
- Knowledge & efficiency gaps with turnover
- USC system constraints on hiring, budget, technology
- Perceived lack of leadership transparency





## Future Success

In looking ahead to the next five years, USC Aiken's future success depends on the following:

- Defining a differentiated brand identity
- Revamping General Education requirements and updating the curriculum and pedagogy in kind
- Aligning the undergraduate target population, curriculum, and resources
- Delivering on expectations and investments in Cybersecurity
- Facilitating access and increasing heterogeneous prospective student population
- Improving the campus experience for internal and external stakeholders
- Expanding applied learning and career management resources
- Growing post-baccalaureate certificate & Master's degree offerings and enrollment

## Capabilities Needed

To deliver on the strategic plan certain capabilities will be required:

- Subject matter expertise in areas including, but not limited to, marketing and communications; cyber and engineering; integration of career readiness and applied learning experiences into the curriculum; annual campaigns
- Stronger partnerships with external stakeholders such as local government and industry partners and employers
- Mechanisms to develop and recognize faculty and staff, as well as transparent and improved internal communications
- Enhanced internal assessment activities such as program assessments; workplace and climate surveys; and compensation and workload reviews
- Financial resources in the form of increased donor and alumni giving; optimizing tuition revenue across undergraduate and graduate programs; and external funding through partnerships and major gifts

## Deliver a Flexible & Relevant Curriculum

### 1. Expand and support experiential learning opportunities for each student

Early access to faculty-mentored research, leadership roles, internships, study abroad, and the like has been a hallmark of the Aiken experience. Going forward, *every* USC Aiken student will graduate with at least one experiential learning element that supports their post-graduation goals. A central resource will be created to grow the pool of experiential learning opportunities and to provide information, access, and support to students as they pursue them.

### 2. Bolster career and graduate school preparation and tracking resources

Students and families care deeply about outcomes – graduate school admissions and career placement, in particular. Our mission is to cultivate engaged citizens who provide lifelong contributions in their careers and communities. We are aligned with students and families in our collective interest in student success post-graduation, and bolstering the services for students related to graduate school and career preparation is one part of it. Another is the capture of data related to outcomes, as they provide both a benchmark for constant improvement and a signal of our success in this area.

### 3. Enhance industry connectivity

USC Aiken is a hub of activity in the region, and both the region and the institution will benefit from stronger and broader relationships with industry partners. Industry partners inform and support research, advise on curricula to maintain relevance, provide mentorships, and tap into USC Aiken as a pool of talent for student and post-graduation positions. We seek to expand upon existing relationships to engage our partners in all of these ways, as well as to establish new partnerships that are representative of the industries that drive our economy and align with students' postgraduate interests.

### 4. Revamp the GenEd curriculum with a focus on flexibility and relevance

Our distinctive blend of the liberal arts, sciences, and professional education with applied experiences is what prepares our students for success. Our GenEd curriculum will prepare our students for both the hard and soft skills needed in their careers and communities. It will be flexible to allow for exploration and changes in majors, including providing multiple pathways for those pursuing our most competitive courses of study. It will also be welcoming to transfer and non-traditional students by valuing prior experience.

### 5. Maintain and support a clear program and course review process

“Relevance” is a moving target, and as such, we will maintain strong program and course review processes as well as support mechanisms for sharing and implementing best practices in education technology and delivery. We will review our new program development process for potential refinements to ensure timely launch of programs with market demand, faculty expertise, and institutional resources.

## Address the Pressing Needs of the Region

### 1. Launch graduate programs that are aligned with the talent and research needs of the region

We have identified a number of areas where market demand for talent aligns with existing faculty strengths and hiring needs in our region, specifically in the areas of health care, finance and banking, education, and data analytics. Opportunity is concentrated in post-baccalaureate certificate and master's degree offerings. We will further investigate these opportunities and develop a new program strategy and rollout plan for graduate education at USC Aiken.

### 2. Nurture existing partnerships

USC Aiken has established strong relationships with the Department of Energy, Department of Defense, and Savannah River Site. These partnerships have been cornerstones of our most recent strategic plans and will continue to drive our impact in the region. Our efforts over the next five years will focus on the memorandums of understanding (MOUs) and other working documents needed for the Advanced Manufacturing Collaborative (AMC) and the National Guard Cyber Center.

### 3. Expand partnerships to represent the major industry sectors in the region

Our existing partnerships are deep, mutually beneficial relationships that enhance our research, enable us to provide students with experiential learning opportunities, ensure that our course content is relevant, improve our campus experience, and bolster our fundraising efforts. As we grow our graduate offerings and increase our experiential learning and potential graduate school and career paths, partnerships with a broader range of industry sectors such as education, healthcare, and STEM will be key to our success.

### 4. Establish an innovation hub for applied research in areas that drive regional, social, and economic needs

USC Aiken strives to be a catalyst for positive change, fueling economic and social progress throughout the region. Through close collaboration with local government and industry partners, we will identify the specific areas of research that are most relevant to the development of the region and will target fundraising and allocate resources to build research capacity and expertise in those areas. We will disseminate the findings gained from the applied research endeavors to ensure the knowledge reaches and benefits the broader community.

## Reimagine the Composition of the Student Body

### 1. Expand graduate student population

Growth in the education market is concentrated in graduate education – in particular, post-baccalaureate certificates and master’s degrees. Students and employers are seeking additional knowledge and experience to either jump-start or move ahead in their careers. We will focus on both expanding our existing graduate programs where there is market opportunity, as well as leveraging new graduate programs to notably increase the portion of our student body that is comprised of graduate students.

### 2. Adapt to changes in the undergraduate student market

The traditional undergraduate student population is shrinking, while non-traditional students and transfer student populations are growing. Our recruiting, intake, and support services will adapt to better identify, attract, and retain these students. This will allow our undergraduate student mix to better reflect where the market lies – with slightly less traditional students and more non-traditional and transfer students.

### 3. Emphasize student success and retention

Student success is key to fulfilling our mission and vision. Our multi-faceted approach will focus on preparedness, transition, curriculum, and active support. Our admissions team will establish a target student profile that aligns with market realities and ensures students are academically prepared. Orientation will be retooled to ease the transition to college, particularly for students who have had alternative social and academic experiences through COVID. The revamp of the GenEd curriculum will better support student exploration, academic planning, and learning outcomes, and will align with the new mix of incoming students. Faculty and staff will be trained and provided with resources in order to offer ongoing support and guidance to students throughout their USCA experience, driven by proactive engagement of at-risk students and the removal of administrative barriers to timely graduation.

### 4. Align resources with the student population

We will evaluate resource needs among faculty and staff and adapt resource allocation to account for the change in student body composition as well as the faculty and staff expertise needed for new programs. Additional post-baccalaureate, master’s, and online students may transfer some resources from student to academic services. Career, graduate school planning, and experiential learning will need focused energy.

### 5. Lower administrative barriers for applicants

Students are increasingly choosing to delay or not attend college. Early exposure to a university environment through dual enrollment programs helps demystify higher education and builds an understanding of the value it brings. Direct admission programs streamline the application process and tap other resources to ensure that a student is positioned for success. We will expand our dual enrollment programs and look to direct admission and other approaches that lower administrative barriers of pursuing higher education.

## Enhance the Campus Experience

### 1. **Build a vibrant campus community, based on respect and the value of each person**

A vibrant campus is a hub of activity for all of its stakeholders – faculty, staff, students, alumni, industry partners, and the community – to come together, learn from each other, and flourish. We will consider adjustments to the housing exemption so that more students are required to live on campus, thus generating more activity and engagement. Through the curriculum, on-campus events, and improved facilities and dining services, we will bring our stakeholders together. As a regional institution whose campus community members hail from across the U.S. and around the world, we will cultivate a sense of belonging and inclusion through personal connections with each other and the University.

### 2. **Improve facilities and services**

We will target our facilities investments toward upgrading on-campus housing, improving technology infrastructure and data management, and providing a wider range and more flexibility in dining options and meal plans. These elements are key parts of the student experience, and enhanced dining options and hours will also draw other institutional stakeholders to campus. We see great opportunities to partner with city, county, and local businesses as well as donors to help us to improve campus living and dining.

### 3. **Drive the successful completion of the AMC facility and the National Guard Cyber Center**

The construction of the AMC facility and the National Guard Cyber Center presents an extraordinary opportunity for the advancement of STEM fields in Aiken and the CSRA, opening endless possibilities for innovation and job growth. We will closely oversee efforts to complete construction on the AMC facility by the end of 2024. Concurrently, we will launch a targeted fundraising campaign to secure the resources needed to relocate the softball field and commence construction of the National Guard Cyber Center, further enhancing our capacity to deliver cutting-edge education and research.

### 4. **Facilitate student, faculty, and staff development and well-being through a culture of continuous assessment and improvement**

Each member of our community will be stronger personally, and will make the community stronger, when they feel valued and respected. We will invest in the development of each community member through career and personal development programs. We will establish mechanisms to assess our campus climate and support of our stakeholders, and to address opportunities for improvement.

## Bolster a Sustainable Foundation

### 1. Define and communicate the USC Aiken brand identity

We have identified clear areas for differentiation in the market, and we will complete this work by developing proof points that define and support *how* we deliver on those differentiators. This will be implemented as the backbone for updated marketing materials, the website, and communications.

### 2. Overhaul website and adapt social media and other marketing channels

Our website and social media are the primary ways that we engage with prospective students, families, alumni, donors, partners, and the rest of our stakeholders. They are how we share our story and build our community, and they will be updated and enhanced to better support our activities.

### 3. Improve internal communication and transparency

Internal communication is key to ensuring that all stakeholders are engaged, knowledgeable, and aligned with institutional priorities and goals. Transparency and timely communication also contribute to a sense of well-being and connection to the institution. We will review current internal communication platforms, processes, and frequency, and set a plan for action to provide effective and timely communications to our stakeholders.

### 4. Identify and address drivers of faculty and staff attrition

Our staff and faculty are our most valuable assets, and they are critical to our ability to deliver on our strategic plan. We will identify the drivers of faculty and staff attrition and will create and implement a plan to improve retention.

### 5. Advance fundraising efforts

Funding is always a major factor in what can be accomplished in a strategic plan, and how quickly. Building revenue sources beyond tuition revenue is critical to both the execution of this plan, and the ongoing sustainability of the institution. We will target specific additional revenue streams, including alumni giving, corporate giving, state and local government funding, summer programs and conferences, and athletics.

### 6. Establish a clear budgeting process across all units

Allocation of funds in alignment with the strategic plan's priorities and goals are key to its success. All units contribute to achieving the plan, and will be involved in budget planning and stewardship. We will define and roll out a clear process for budget requests, review guidelines, and allocation, including timelines and communication.

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