



The Aspen Institute Welcomes 40 Aspiring Community College Presidents into its Signature Fellowship Program

Preparing the Next Generation of Community College Presidents to Improve Student Outcomes

CONTACT: Kristin O’Keefe, kristin.okeefe@aspeninstitute.org, (240-351-8531)

Washington, D.C., May 27, 2026 – Today, the Aspen Institute (Aspen) announced the selection of 40 outstanding leaders from across the country for the 2026-27 Aspen Rising Presidents Fellowship. Chosen from a competitive pool of more than 125 applicants, these 40 executive and senior community college leaders were chosen for their potential to enact major reforms that deliver much stronger results for students.


Over 15 years, Aspen’s research on high-performing community colleges has consistently shown that high and improving levels of student success are much more likely when an exceptional president is leading the community college. For that reason, Aspen has been working for a decade to help prepare a new generation of transformational community college leaders through this program.

Over the coming year, these fellows will:

- Deeply examine data on available jobs in their community and student outcomes at their colleges
- Learn about transformational models from 15 years of Aspen Prize research into colleges with high and improving levels of student success through the Aspen Prize process
- Receive coaching and feedback from accomplished college leaders, including sitting and retired presidents who have led transformational reforms
- Devise a concept for major reform strategy at their institution, receiving critical feedback from peers and experts along the way

“Our research shows that excellent colleges share a common trait: they are led by presidents who focus on a few transformative initiatives that extend beyond enrollment and even completion numbers, centering instead on whether graduates are prepared for transfer and bachelor’s attainment and success in the workforce or further education,” said Josh Wyner, executive director of the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program. “I cannot wait to begin working with this impressive set of leaders.”

Rising Presidents Fellows are chosen based on their commitment to improving student success and advancing economic mobility, their readiness to lead major student-success reforms, and the likelihood that they will assume a college presidency within five years of completing the program. The selected fellows come from 20 states and a wide range of institutions—from small rural colleges to large urban campuses—bringing diverse perspectives and experiences to the fellowship. They join a vibrant network of over 500 peers—including over 215 sitting presidents—who are leading colleges that help more students finish college, transfer to four-year institutions, and secure good jobs.



The Aspen Rising Presidents Fellowship is made possible through the generous support of the Burton Family Foundation, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies, College Futures Foundation, Mellon Foundation, and the Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research at NC State University.

For bios and photos of all 40 leaders, visit as.in/risingpresidents.

####

The **Aspen Institute College Excellence Program** aims to strengthen higher education leadership and practice to improve student outcomes—with the ultimate goal of advancing economic mobility and developing talent for the good of each individual and society as a whole. For more information, visit [our website](#) and follow us on [LinkedIn](#), [Bluesky](#), and [X](#).

The **Aspen Institute** is a global nonprofit organization whose purpose is to ignite human potential to build understanding and create new possibilities for a better world. Founded in 1949, the Institute drives change through dialogue, leadership, and action to help solve society’s greatest challenges. It is headquartered in Washington, DC and has a campus in Aspen, Colorado, as well as an international network of partners. For more information, visit aspeninstitute.org.