

Polytechnic Investment Case Task Force
Strategic Partnerships
Agenda 3/22/26

In attendance:

George Claffey
Mike Russo
Lisa McMahon
Jen Destefani
Brenda Lopez
Dana Wilkie
Luz Amaya
Toyin Awoderu
Lourdes Casas

Opening

The meeting opened with welcome remarks and introductions, including recognition of members who were not present at the first meeting. Lisa McMahon was introduced, with reference to her work in physical education, human performance, and the health clinic.

Approval of Prior Minutes

The group reviewed the minutes from the March 2, 2026 meeting. A correction was noted to change “CCSU” to “Central.” With that revision, the minutes were accepted.

MS Teams Task Force Site

The task force reviewed the MS Teams site established to support its work. Members were reminded of the research page within the site and encouraged to use it as a repository for related research, documents, and supporting artifacts.

Discussion: Page 1 – Context

The group continued its working review of Page 1: Context, with the goal of moving the section toward a near-final stage.

A central topic of discussion was the role of the State of Connecticut in the university’s polytechnic transformation. Members considered whether anticipated State support for the initiative could position Connecticut itself as a strategic partner. It was noted that the fiscal planning group, led by Dr. Joe Farhat, is developing a funding request for the Governor and the legislature, with an anticipated “multi-million dollar ask.” The group discussed whether the Strategic Partnerships Task Force should also identify opportunities to align some of that future investment with partnership development.

Barbara Fernandez suggested we evaluate the role of the state and framed a broader conversation about intentionality in partner selection. Drawing on prior experience at UConn, Barbara noted that institutions seeking to elevate research capacity often recruit established research teams, sometimes at a cost of approximately \$10 million. She cited an example in which UConn recruited a bioscience team from a

university out of state, including a professor, principal investigator, graduate assistant, and other supporting personnel. She emphasized that such teams frequently arrive with sponsored research funding, making them both an academic and financial asset. The group agreed this model is worth considering as Central evaluates its own needs and opportunities. Members agreed that the university must be deliberate in identifying the types of partnerships it needs, particularly those that can close capability gaps and accelerate research growth.

Toyin observed that once the university identifies its priority partners, it will have a clearer understanding of its institutional strengths and where the most important gaps exist. Brenda asked how academic gaps would be identified and whether that responsibility falls to another task force or should be informed directly by the deans through their knowledge of academic, facility, and instructional needs. The conversation then expanded to include market perspective. Toyin remarked that the university has historically focused primarily on the needs and interests of Connecticut students, but that a polytechnic strategy should consider broader national and global demand. Jen added that, at this stage, the task force's immediate responsibility is to identify the partnerships and serious relationships that already exist across the institution.

George noted that the task force will produce both external-facing and internal documents. Some of the information developed by the group may be included in materials that go to the state, while other information, particularly detailed relationship maps of existing customers, may remain internal and not be made public. Dana shared that similar partnership information had been collected previously by the Community Engagement group. This led to discussion of the institutional risk created by the absence of a centralized tracking system for partnerships and related activities. Members agreed that the lack of a formal tracking mechanism represents an important operational and strategic risk.

The group discussed whether broad descriptors such as "bioscience and healthcare" are sufficiently specific for the investment case, noting a similar issue with the category of "information technology." During the discussion, edits were made to the Page 1 context section to reflect additional partnership areas and improve clarity. The group agreed to work on this asynchronously over the next week and add further detail/clarity.

Barbara asked whether the university has a database of researchers and referenced systems used by land-grant institutions that catalog principal investigators, projects, publications, and related documentation. This prompted discussion about the potential value of developing a more structured research information system as part of the university's long-term evolution. Ultimately the taskforce will add a comprehensive tracking system to the "Risks" document.

Partnership Models and Opportunities

George shared observations from a recent visit to Trumpf, noting that the company has an advanced facility that would not be cost-effective for the university to replicate. Instead, Trumpf has expressed interest in having Central send students there for applied experiences. He noted that a similar model could apply to ASML and other industry partners, where the value lies not in recreating facilities on campus but in creating structured access for students. Toyin added an international example from Ghana, where a Toyota plant is embedded on a university campus. This prompted discussion of the broader possibilities for deeply integrated university-industry partnerships. Lourdes emphasized that the university should think beyond traditional study abroad models. She noted the importance of building partnerships that allow students not only to study internationally, but also to gain direct industry

experience abroad. Toyin reinforced this point by highlighting the potential role of alumni, especially former international students who now hold positions with global reach in their companies.

Luz also pointed to experiential learning partnerships as especially valuable as relationships in which companies provide materials, expertise, and practical guidance. Toyin further suggested that, while Central is a state university, it may be worth exploring longer-term ideas such as an international branch or affiliated presence abroad, where students could experience education and industry engagement across multiple locations. She also noted the broader enrollment and growth potential associated with relationships in foreign countries.

Student-Centered Framing

The discussion pivoted to how this partner work will impact students and what do these partnerships mean for students? Mike stressed that the investment case must clearly articulate student benefit and must do so in a way that is inclusive of the full university community. Members agreed that the task force should avoid framing the polytechnic vision too narrowly around STEM disciplines. Mike specifically noted the importance of addressing concerns among students in other areas, including the liberal arts and social sciences, who may wonder how this transformation could affect their majors. The group agreed that the partnership framework should reflect a broader, institution-wide student value proposition.

Assignments and Next Steps

The group agreed that the next phase of work will focus on review and writing of Page 2: Multi-Part Strategic Partnership Framework.

Members were also asked to identify:

- Potential key performance indicators for strategic partnerships.
- Any major blockers, barriers, or implementation challenges that should be reflected in the task force's work.

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Next meeting

- **March 30, 2026**
 - Review draft for multi-part strategic partnership framework / move to late-stage draft
 - Develop draft of partnership design principles
 - Develop draft of priority partnership domains
 - **STANDING:** Draft any key performance indicators (per discussion)
 - **STANDING:** Develop draft of risks & mitigation

FROM MEETING 1

The charge of the Task Force is:

- Document existing partnerships with industry, community organizations, private foundations, individuals, institutions of higher education (domestic and international), K-12 education systems, and government agencies.
- In addition, include information on external grants and fundraising activities.
- Generate a plan for expansion of external partnerships to enrich the student educational experience, for applied research and fundraising, and establishment of advisory boards for each academic program.

Meeting Logistics:

The meetings will take place **bi-weekly on Mondays at 3 p.m.** Please note that we are under a tight timeline to get this work done. All meetings will be either in person or via Teams. The scheduled invitation for each meeting will be sent out in the next 2 days. By accepting this invitation, you are committing to attending scheduled meetings, with the understanding that the Task Force's work may extend over the summer months.

Quorum

The task force shall not proceed with meetings if there is less than 51% of the membership in attendance.