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Guiding USF St. Petersburg's **Community Relations Vision 2025**



Community Perception Survey Results

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY //



In September 2024, the University of South Florida (USF) St. Petersburg conducted a survey targeting community and business leaders to gather feedback on how effectively we serve and engage with our local community. The survey results highlight USF St. Petersburg's strong community presence, valuable contributions, and areas for growth.

DEMOGRAPHICS We invited 200 community, business and local government leaders to fill out this survey and received 75 responses. Respondents represented a mix of non-profit leaders (44%), business leaders (23%), and local government officials (20%). Their organizational focus spanned a variety of areas including health (13%), education/youth (12%), and economic development (8%). Engagement with USF St. Petersburg varied, with 13% interacting weekly or daily, 56% connecting monthly and 27% engaged once per year.

PERCEPTION AND IMPACT USF St. Petersburg overall community contribution was rated “Good” or “Excellent” by 81% of respondents, with educational opportunities identified as the most significant impact. Respondents also praised the university’s role in economic development, cultural enrichment, and research.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT USF St. Petersburg partnership efforts were highly regarded, with 60% rating efforts as “Above Average” or “Excellent.” Over half of respondents participated in campus-related events three or more times, and 43% reported that USF St. Petersburg representatives attended their events. Community Relations Director Caryn Nesmith received praise, with 77% rating her effectiveness as high and 92% acknowledging her positive impact on community relations.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT Student community service received favorable ratings from 38% of respondents. Nearly 70% considered students well prepared to be engaged citizens 37% indicated their organizations offered internship or volunteer opportunities to USF students.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH USF St. Petersburg is widely regarded as a critical community asset with approachable leadership and significant opportunities to strengthen its role as a community anchor. Key recommendations included expanding academic programs and internships to enhance student engagement, fostering collaborative research and service-learning initiatives, and increasing the visibility of community events. Alumni engagement, student involvement in local projects, and tailored communication strategies to distinguish USF St. Petersburg were also highlighted.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT Feedback suggested greater promotion of public-facing events and differentiation from the Tampa campus. Resource gaps, particularly in supporting community initiatives and scaling Caryn Nesmith’s efforts, were noted.

RECOMMENDATIONS Survey respondents recommended that USF St Petersburg formalize quarterly community listening sessions, enhance partnerships, and improve external promotion of public events. Long-term strategies suggested included creating an external facing living-learning community, securing additional funding, and leading large-scale community projects.

INTRODUCTION //



This report summarizes the responses from 75 community leaders, highlighting key insights to community sentiment, identification of USF strengths and areas for improvement. Feedback provides actionable opportunities to enhance partnerships, improve visibility, and strengthen community integration. By examining these results, USF St. Petersburg hopes to refine its strategic planning, strengthen its community relations, and foster more impactful collaborations with local government, businesses, and non-profits. Thank you to all who participated in this survey. Your candid feedback serves as a cornerstone for our continued efforts to build meaningful connections and create a stronger, more engaged community.



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SUMMARY OF KEY DATA //

SECTION 1: DEMOGRAPHICS



Respondents' Roles

44%

Non-Profit Leaders

23%

Business Leaders

20%

Local Government Officials

Organizational Focus of Respondents

13%

Health

12%

Education/Youth

8%

Economic Development

8%

Arts

59%

Other

Interaction Frequency

13%

Engage daily or weekly with USF St. Petersburg

56%

Engage at least once a month

27%

Connect annually

SECTION 2: OVERALL PERCEPTION AND IMPACT



Overall Contribution

81%

Rated USF St Petersburg's contribution to the community as "Good" or "Excellent"

Top Contributions of USF St Petersburg to the Community Include

Educational opportunities ranked highest (46 first-place votes)

Other significant areas: Economic impact, cultural enrichment, and research

Engagement Effectiveness

75%

Rated USF St Petersburg's engagement as "Good" or "Excellent"

Comments

- The St. Pete campus is seen as a "crown jewel" with a strong sense of community.
- The growth and exposure with Chancellor Hardigree is stellar.
- I am grateful to have such a community-focused university in this area.

SECTION 3: STUDENT ENGAGEMENT



Student Involvement

38% Rated student community service as “Above Average” or “Excellent”

Internship/Volunteer Opportunities

37% Of local organizations who responded offer opportunities, including internships in marketing, public service, and mentoring programs, with several respondents listing opportunities (See Appendix)

Student Preparedness to Become Engaged Citizens

68% Rated students as very or extremely prepared

Comments

- PSTA, Community Tampa Bay, City of St. Pete, St. Pete Downtown Partnership, American Stage, St. Pete Arts Alliance, Girls, Inc. mentioned internships or other opportunities for students.
- “It would be great to better understand what the students think the relationship is with the community and if they realize why it is important.”
- “When I have the chance to ask students about their involvement in things on either campus, more often than not they respond that they don’t know of opportunities that are made available to them.”
- Make community engagement a mandatory part of student education. That will help educate the public about what the university is doing and the students about local opportunities and needs.



SECTION 4: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Partnerships

60%

Rated USF efforts to foster partnerships with local businesses, organizations, and government entities as “Above Average” or “Excellent”

Listening and Feedback

63%

Believe USF St Petersburg “effectively listens” to the community

Event Participation

52%

Of respondents or their organizations participated in USF St. Petersburg events three or more times. 44% participated in 1 or 2 events last year.

USF St. Petersburg Representative Involvement

43%

Reported university representatives attending their events three or more times. 41% 1 or 2 times and 9 % reported never having a university representative attend their event.

Caryn Nesmith’s Effectiveness

77%

Rated her community engagement as “Above Average” or “Excellent”

92%

Credited her with a “significant” or “moderate positive impact” on community relations

Recommendations for Caryn Nesmith

Enhance student engagement and faculty collaboration

Continue as a visible and proactive community advocate

Comments

- “Caryn Nesmith has been instrumental in bringing USF St. Pete and the City together for events and projects.”
- “Caryn is effective with the resources/opportunity she is given and would excel with additional support.”
- “The USF St. Petersburg team has been very collaborative and creative when looking at partnership opportunities. We have tested a few different ideas, from participation in USF St. Petersburg’s mentoring program to supporting the campus food pantry to recruiting students as event volunteers. That experience is helping us craft an even better engagement plan for the future.”

SECTION 5: AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT



Top Priorities

Expanding academic programs, enhancing partnerships, and increasing outreach

Desired Initiatives

Community development (79%) and internship programs (74%) were the most requested collaborations

Recommendations

- Hold community conversations on topics of interest to the general community.
- Develop quarterly community listening sessions.
- Increase focus on job training and targeted degree programs.
- Consider a program to “adopt a nonprofit”

SECTION 6: ADDITIONAL FEEDBACK



Community Sentiment

- USF St. Petersburg is viewed as a critical community asset with approachable staff and visible leaders
- Respondents praised its accessibility compared to Tampa and called for greater distinction between campuses

Comments

- “I appreciate the continued focus on how to support local students and keep them in the area. Employers like my organization need a deeper talent pool.”
- “Give the [Regional] Chancellor more authority.”
- “I feel USF does a really good job with engaging the community, creating local partnerships and keeping the community informed of new initiatives, events and successes.”
- “Additional comms should be created that focus on USF acting outside of campus - job training with local companies, collabs with Eckerd other ed facilities and especially any joint projects with private businesses.”
- “I would like to see USF do more impact and engage in Spanish.”
- “Unsure if you are able to increase opportunities for organizations to set up tables on certain days of the week throughout the year so they may be able to share their services with students, faculty, and staff.”
- “Bring something like OPEN back to engage more everyday community members.”

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS //

STRENGTHS AND ACHIEVEMENTS



Strong Leadership

Many respondents noted an increase in leadership visibility in the community. The USF St. Petersburg leadership team was described as having “creative, positive outreach in the community,” emphasizing the importance of their role in fostering partnerships. Asked specifically about the impact of having a community relations Director, respondents praised Caryn Nesmith for her leadership and dedication. Ninety-two percent of respondents identified her as having a significant or moderate positive impact on community engagement. Comments described her as “a trusted advisor,” “an incredible advocate for USF St. Petersburg,” and “proactive in fostering collaborations.” Several respondents emphasized her ability to identify and act on opportunities for mutual benefit between USF St. Petersburg and the community. Some suggested that Caryn Nesmith’s impact could be amplified with additional resources and support.



Community Impact

When asked about the value that USF St. Petersburg brings to the community, **educational opportunities** and **workforce development** emerged as the university’s most significant contribution, with 46 respondents ranking it as the top priority. **Cultural enrichment** and **economic impact** were also frequently highlighted as important areas of support. Collaborative initiatives, such as mentoring programs, campus food pantry support, and data literacy partnerships, were also cited as effective examples of community engagement.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT



Communication

One comment indicated low awareness of events at USF St. Petersburg and expressed interest in increased promotion of public events to enhance community engagement.



Differentiation

Feedback highlighted concerns about the lack of a distinct identity for USF St. Petersburg. Respondents emphasized the accessibility and unique opportunities provided by the St. Pete campus, recommending that these qualities be better communicated.



Resource Gaps

While Caryn Nesmith’s leadership received high praise, respondents expressed a need for additional support and resources to expand her efforts. Some also noted that other USF representatives should play a more active role in local initiatives to complement existing leadership.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH



Expand Academic Programs and Internships

Formalizing and scaling internship and mentorship opportunities with local businesses was a key recommendation. Several respondents suggested developing internship structures that offer stipends and course credit to attract more participants



Meet Community Needs

Partnerships that integrate academic resources with community needs were seen as vital. Suggestions included joint research projects with local government and service-learning courses aligning with community-focused goals. Respondents highlighted the value of initiatives co-created with community partners.



Increase Visibility of Community Events

Increasing the visibility of events, such as open houses, community fairs, and public lectures, was emphasized. Respondents also recommended creating opportunities for local organizations to engage with students, faculty, and staff on campus.



Enhance Alumni and Student Involvement

Alumni events tailored to the St. Pete campus and voter registration initiatives were noted as areas for growth. Respondents also emphasized the importance of involving students in community projects to strengthen local ties.



RECOMMENDATIONS



Perceptions and Impact

- Secure additional funding and resources to support outreach and partnership-building efforts.
- Continue as a visible and proactive community advocate.
- Enhance student engagement and faculty collaboration in community.
- Enhance or promote the university's role as a community anchor through visible participation in large-scale initiatives like urban planning projects and public-private partnerships.
- Promote public-facing events through targeted external communication campaigns.
- Develop a comprehensive communication strategy to differentiate USF St. Petersburg from the Tampa campus.
- Increase alumni involvement through tailored events and pride-building initiatives.
- Expand collaboration with non-profits, focusing on shared goals and co-created initiatives.
- Create an external "living learning community" model to integrate students, faculty, and local stakeholders in addressing community challenges.
- Host quarterly community listening sessions to gather feedback and build trust.
- Partner with local organizations to formalize new internship opportunities.



Student Engagement

- Increase opportunities for local organizations to showcase services to students, faculty, and staff.
- Develop a mandatory community engagement component for students.
- Create a campus-wide site for ongoing internship, mentorship and volunteer opportunities



More Comments...

- "Recognize the importance of differentiating USF St. Pete from the Tampa campus."
- "The USF St. Petersburg team has been collaborative and creative in partnership opportunities, including mentoring programs and campus food pantry support."
- "We partnered with USF St. Petersburg on data literacy and research for government-led initiatives."
- "Networking happy hours [USF St. Petersburg organizes highlighting local organizations' community efforts] are effective for community engagement."
- "Greater promotion of public lectures and activities to increase community visibility."
- "Emphasize external community engagement in communications rather than internal activities."
- "Host more community open house events for city residents unfamiliar with USF St. Petersburg."
- "Partner with the City on collective healing and education initiatives."



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