



SACSCOC R1 SUMMIT (Fall 2025) | KEY INSIGHTS

The Fall 2025 SACSCOC R1 Summit brought together representatives from Carnegie R1 institutions to discuss accreditation priorities, institutional challenges, and opportunities for innovation. Conversations were organized around six questions addressing accreditation value, process improvements, workforce engagement, innovation, and post-college outcomes.

Overall, R1 institutions reaffirmed the importance of accreditation as a mechanism for accountability, peer validation, and continuous institutional improvement. At the same time, participants identified several areas where the accreditation process could evolve to better reflect the scale, complexity, and mission of major research universities.

This brief summarizes the most consistent themes emerging from the summit.

The summit reaffirmed strong institutional support for the role of accreditation while highlighting opportunities for evolution.

Across discussions, several consistent themes emerged:

- Accreditation remains valued as a framework for accountability and improvement.
- Institutions seek greater differentiation to reflect mission and institutional complexity.
- Reducing procedural burden could strengthen the impact of accreditation.
- Peer review remains essential but would benefit from additional calibration.
- Institutions want their research, innovation, and economic impact to be more fully recognized.
- There is strong interest in structured opportunities for innovation within accreditation frameworks.
- Participants emphasized that workforce contributions from research universities extend beyond immediate job placement outcomes.

These perspectives provide valuable insights as SACSCOC continues exploring ways to strengthen accreditation while supporting innovation, institutional effectiveness, and student success.

Feedback Summary and Analysis

The Summit conversation was structured around six discussion questions. Attendees were randomly placed in small groups of 8-10 R1 representatives. Each group had a SACSCOC staff facilitator and a recorder. Quotes in this report represent notes made by the recorders.

SIX DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

When asked what should be *most valued about accreditation*, themes included:

- The two-fold purpose of accreditation: accountability and improvement
- Improving student learning
- Process features

- Consistent peer review
- The self-study process.

When asked what should be *least valued about accreditation*, themes included:

- Lack of differentiation in standards and review by institutional type
- Misalignment with state, system, and/or programmatic accreditors
- The bureaucratic aspects of accreditation
- Uncalibrated peer evaluators
- Lack of positive reinforcement in the review process.

R1 institutions have several suggestions of how they can communicate their *contribution to the workforce*:

- Indicators of workforce development
- Ways to stimulate workforce development
- The accrediting body's role in workforce development.

SACSCOC might better represent the *mission and operations of an R1* through:

- Stories of research and economic development impact of R1s
- Implementing differentiated review by institutional segment
- Engaging in advocacy for R1s.

A *Sandbox of Innovation* could help R1 institutions by promoting innovations with

- Programs
- Partnerships
- Artificial intelligence applications
- Changes to the accreditation process.

R1 institutions provided feedback on what measures or indicators of student achievement would highlight the impact of an R1 educational experience on *post-college success*

- General consideration for selecting post-college success metrics
- Sample metrics and approaches that would capture the R1 experience
- Methodological considerations related to post-college success.

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Question 1: WHAT SHOULD WE VALUE MOST ABOUT ACCREDITATION?

Attendees were asked to identify what they value most about SACSCOC accreditation. Their responses centered on the following three inter-related themes: **1)** the purposes of accreditation, **2)** the focus on student learning and success, and **3)** various aspects of the accreditation review process. In addition, comments provided multiple suggestions and recommendations that the Commission can consider to further support its R1 (as well as other) member institutions.

1. THE TWO-FOLD PURPOSES OF ACCREDITATION: ACCOUNTABILITY AND IMPROVEMENT

Attendees indicated they value the two-fold purpose of SACSCOC accreditation. The elements they most discussed valuing are *a)* integrity and accountability and *b)* institutional improvement and innovation.

First, accreditation ensures that the institution is transparent, accountable to stakeholders, and held responsible for what it claims to deliver. For example, one attendee commented that accreditation is “Holding us to the integrity of what we produce. Whether it is credit, degree, etc.” Similarly, one person stated that “What’s best is it help us be accountable and to be our best selves.” Comments also indicated that accreditation’s value in this regard protects the student and other stakeholders: “A truth in advertising – what the institution claims to have, they have to back it up.” For instance, one attendee pointed out that accreditation provides “a minimum set of standards that all institutions must meet. This is important for consumers.” In essence, participants want accreditation reviews to deliver answers to questions such as “Does the institution provide services and expertise it claims to offer students who enroll?”

Related comments also highlight the fact that institutions understand accreditation as an objective way to communicate their value to the external public. Attendees saw value in “peer review, external validation.” Participants viewed accreditation as “external endorsement” and a mechanism, to recognize and communicate “excellence of institutions.” One individual stated that “Transparency is a value and we communicate our outcomes – there is value in that. This is how we communicate to stakeholders that we are vested in this” These statements demonstrate that institutions understand that accreditation is a vehicle to establish and ensure integrity, and they see it also as a conduit for demonstrating their value to their stakeholders.

Second, accreditation should foster institutional innovation and continuous improvement rather than merely serve as a compliance check. Attendees see accreditation as a vehicle for institutional innovation and “data-driven continuous improvement, including closing the loop.” For instance, one participant stated, “Ultimately, accreditation should be used constructively to facilitate positive change within institutions.” However, several participants noted an important caveat, these benefits can only be obtained if accreditation is appropriately implemented to address its two-fold purpose: accountability and improvement. For example, one comment stated that “Accreditation helps focus on continuous improvement and being more effective – if accreditation is done well.”

Participants noted that to strengthen accreditation’s ability to bolster sustained meaningful, impactful institutional innovation and improvement, the Commission should begin by taking a fresh look at the language of the accreditation, perhaps utilizing language that emphasizes constructive enhancement rather than compliance mandates. One comment that elaborated on this sentiment is as follows:

Words and messaging matter – starting at institution accreditation was like ‘you must comply’ with a stick. Starting using different language such as continuous improvement, support, etc. Instead of compliance and non-compliance but maybe words like met goal, partially met, successful, could improve, you’re doing well, fix this yesterday....

The current pass/fail framework, which does not recognize institutional progress toward excellence, discourages investment beyond minimum compliance.

2. STUDENT LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT

Many of the attendees also valued the positive role that SACSCOC accreditation has played in advancing student learning and success. For instance, one participant noted, that accreditation reviews provide “an opportunity to focus on educating students.” Another individual observed, “The process of accreditation leads to student success.”

This appears, in part, to be because accreditation includes outcomes assessment standards. For example, one attendee noted that accreditation requires “having student learning outcomes” and another stated a benefit of accreditation is “measuring student outcomes.”

Although recognizing the role that accreditors played in spearheading assessment processes on college campuses, attendees are acutely aware of growing student dissatisfaction with higher education given the post-attendance outcomes they experience. One comment stated in part that “...students are becoming litigious because they can’t find a job after graduation.”

To address these issues, attendees also highlighted the desire for the assessment of student learning to re-focus from mechanistic, process-based assessment procedures to capturing essential outcomes of college educational experiences. For example, several noted that student success occurs over time and extends beyond completion of their formal studies, but “we don’t know what happens after they get an education.” One comment reads that accreditation should “Ensure we can better observe our students where there are when they leave.” Similarly, another participant called for “standards that reflect student outcomes – how to measure student outcomes, especially post-graduation.”

At the same time, participants strongly cautioned limiting outcomes of college experiences just to completion metrics and/or post-college economic indicators. For example, one person keenly observed that student success is “not just about...graduating and salaries, but it is about what [students] learned. If they didn’t learn anything, then credentials don’t matter.” In fact, attendees voiced a desire for more holistic, comprehensive measures of student success (beyond financial indicators) that capture a wide range of positive outcomes.

3. PROCESS FEATURES

Respondents indicated that the value of accreditation can be enhanced by introducing affirming, enhancing, and expanding the following elements of the review process: *a)* differentiation or consideration of diverse institutional missions, *b)* evaluations based on calibrated peer review, *c)* engagement of institutions in meaningful self-studies, and *d)* relevant guidance and support provided by SACSCOC staff.

Understanding the institution’s mission is critical to any appraisal of institution’s effectiveness. Attendees value that the SACSCOC accreditation review process is explicitly centered on a member institution’s mission, “Institution’s mission is used to evaluate how we do certain things.” This ensures that the process acknowledges each institution’s distinctiveness and that its distinctiveness is relevant to assessing its quality. As one comment noted, “This approach respects the unique character of each institution.” While emphasizing the uniqueness of institutional missions and, consequently, the importance of differentiation, attendees noted that institutions are very different even when they share the same category (e.g., SACSCOC Level, Carnegie Classification). For instance, one participant observed, “Institutions within the same level are diverse, and so it’s critical for the institutional mission to be understood and can require extensive explanation.”

Another aspect of the process that attendees value is the peer evaluation nature of SACSCOC accreditation. The peer review’s value stems in part from having external assessments of institutional operations that yield valuable insights and suggestions. One commenter shared, “One of the things about valuing accreditation is the opportunity to have outside eyes to give feedback and suggestions concerning standards.” In addition, service on peer evaluation committees is an effective professional development mechanism. For example, one participant stated, “Peer review...serving on a committee is the most informative experience institutions can have...We come around as peers to validate or confirm if it meets the marker.” Peers are therefore driving the process by verifying the reviewed institution’s policies and

practices. However, attendees also expressed concern about the peer review process as will be explored later in this report.

Summit participants see the self-review as valuable. They appreciate that accreditation reviews provide an “opportunity to do a thorough self-study…” and view “comprehensive self-study as [a] powerful lever” for institutional improvement. The self-study process facilitates institutional cohesion and enables deeper operational integration among institutional shareholders, especially in the complex, decentralized environment of large R1 institutions. Several comments highlighted this fact including the following: “Not sure stakeholders at the institution would come together if not for accreditation” and “[Opportunity to] think like one institution, rather than as a decentralized institution with many units.” One comment that summarizes this nicely is “Getting together to align mission and strategies and remembering why we’re here.”

A positive corollary of self-study is that the accreditation process focuses the institution on using evidence to make decisions. One attendee stated that the self-study process “value[s] data-driven decisions and creating standards of collecting, analyzing and using data to develop plans and closing the loop. The data driven process is very valuable.” Importantly, the practice of maintaining and regularly updating the self-study document was highlighted as way to reduce stress that is typically associated with accreditation reviews.

Question 2: WHAT SHOULD WE LEAST VALUE ABOUT ACCREDITATION?

Attendees were also asked what they valued the least. The responses highlight some significant insights. Specifically, the following five themes have emerged from the analysis: **1) No differentiation in standards and reviews by institutional type / performance, 2) Misalignment with state/system and/or programmatic accreditors, 3) Accreditation review as a bureaucratic exercise, 4) Uncalibrated peer evaluators, and 5) Lack of positive reinforcements in reviews.**

1. NO DIFFERENTIATION IN STANDARDS AND REVIEWS BY INSTITUTIONAL TYPE / PERFORMANCE

There is a perception that current standards do not account for the unique contexts of different institutional types, particularly R1 institutions. Attendees stated that the standards were the same for every institution and, thus, needlessly insensitive to institutional type. For instance, one attendee perceived that SACSCOC is “treating all institutions the same, despite differences in mission and type.” These differences are especially meaningful in the context of peer reviews.

More specifically, participants perceive that current SACSCOC accreditation standards fail to reflect the fact that large complex institutions have different realities, challenges, opportunities and operations than small institutions. A common sentiment among the R1 Summit attendees appears to be that current standards are “written for small private institutions, not large, complex institutions” and “aren’t designed for R1’s.” One participant shared a complaint, “Any time there is a standard revision of standard or policies, we -- the R1 institutions -- are outvoted in the minority.”

R1 status and size are not the only instance of needed differentiation mentioned by participants. Institutional control should also be taken into consideration. For example, one participant commented that “Standards for public vs private should be different” and another asked “Could public institutions be subject to a smaller number of standards than private institutions?”

These, and several other comments, suggest that accreditation standards could include a common core among all institutions and differentiation reflective of institution control, mission, focus, and other factors. Such an approach would be an opportunity to even further focus on and drive institutional excellence.

Finally, the participants indicate that the current process does not distinguish between ‘stronger’ and ‘weaker’ institutions. For instance, one attendee noted “The Commission is asking too much of long-established institutions.” Similarly, participants suggested that certain standards should only be activated in specific situations of significant change. For example, one comment stated, “There are many standards that can be addressed one time and don’t need to be addressed unless it changes – e.g., governing board, how we are established. The state constitution hasn’t changed so neither does our governing board.” For many institutions, it seems, there are attributes that rarely, if ever, change. Having to respond to such during each accreditation review is seen as taxing.

2. MISALIGNMENT WITH STATE/SYSTEM AND/OR PROGRAMMATIC ACCREDITORS

Another challenge that attendees identified is that SACSCOC standards and compliance articulation requirements seem disconnected from the institution’s contextual reality. Institutions have state requirements, programmatic accreditor requirements, and a host of other regulations that sometimes match or contradict SACSCOC expectations.

First, attendees are unclear how requirements of the higher education quality assurance triad (including federal government, state governments, and accreditors) relate to each other. For instance, one participant shared, “Can’t always tell where the federal and Commission’s standards align.” Another attendee pointed out that while redundancy is problematic, there may not be agreement with how the expectations should align, stating that “New programs are reviewed by the state (if public institution) in addition to SACSCOC. Some wish only SACSCOC reviewed new programs, rather than state; some said the opposite.”

In addition to duplication, participants pointed out instances of misalignment between SACSCOC and state requirements. For example, one individual observed, “Some institutions have multiple governing structures that conflict with SACSCOC expectations. SACSCOC slaps hand since expectations don’t align with state. Allow flexibility to satisfy state requirements – especially with states getting involved.” Similarly, another respondent noted the impact of these misalignments, “Some standards are based on system decision, and the institution has little control on the outcome and institution could be marked non-compliance by SACSCOC committee. It can be hard for the institution to provide information or reasoning when asked, if it’s outside of their control.”

Further, attendees encouraged SACSCOC to consider accepting documents submitted to and/or decisions made by other members of the triad on similar requirements. For example, one individual noted, “If program has programmatic accreditation, then the faculty roster for that program should not have as much scrutiny.” Likewise, another participant suggested “Some standards have been met by a state requirement (e.g., an audit) and should be accepted by SACSCOC instead of additional work to satisfy the standard.”

3. ACCREDITATION REVIEW AS BUREAUCRATIC EXERCISE

Participants often view accreditation as a bureaucratic exercise that detracts from meaningful institutional progress. For institutions, this leads to viewing the accreditation process as not being connected to innovation and missional achievement. One attendee reflected that accreditation reporting “can feel like minutia and this overshadows the big picture of getting better...” Similarly, other respondents did not see “the value-added” of the standards and wondered about “return of what we get for all the paperwork institutions have to turn in.”

While these claims were leveled at the accreditation process in general, the following five specific topics were identified: *a)* substantive change, *b)* faculty, *c)* assessment, *d)* QEP, and *e)* supporting evidence. Each will be outlined below.

Attendees stated that Substantive Change was “burdensome” with excessive “bureaucratic reporting processes.” Participants did not see alignment between SACSCOC and federal requirements associated with sub change. One comment identified “burdensome substantive changes – we have 53, only 19 are required [by federal government].” Attendees saw Sub Change process as a barrier to implementing needed changes. For example, one individual held that “substantive change...slows down innovation.” Another respondent observed that “SACSCOC is a hurdle in creating international programs.”

Participants do not see the benefits of the current process that is based on the information contained in the faculty roster document. They see it as “rigid” and “time consuming.” For instance, one attendee stated, “The faculty roster review process is not a value to the institution, especially when it comes to tenure track faculty.” Further, the participants appear to perceive that faculty qualification compliance reviews often raise elevated minutia to a level of serious concern. For example, one attendee noted, “Committee can use some of that time with important things. Spending time to correct your information for a roster, double signing COI forms is nitpicking.”

Assessment requirements seem to influence institutions into constructing unnecessarily complex processes that “divide curricular cycle” and focus on reporting meaningless indicators rather than meaningful outcomes. One respondent shared “Assessment system is inflexible (too driven by accreditation requirements) – I’m not telling you the good things we do...” Participants call on SACSCOC to refocus from mechanistic assessment processes and structures on actual outcomes, “More holistic view of looking at institutional assessment systems – it’s not about counting, it’s about hitting the benchmark.” Concerns about general education assessment included:

Since Gen Ed/Core is not a credential, not a program in most instances, it is difficult to assess Gen Ed competencies at large, complex institutions, and may also be reported to public university system. Creates unrealistic expectations of onus of proof. Feels artificial when writing to the standard.

Regarding the QEP, attendees deemed it as being superfluous to or duplicative of their existing planning and assessment activities. Attendees seem to agree that any QEP elements not addressed by existing

standards could be integrated into revised standards where it makes sense to do so. Two comments exemplifying attendee view of the QEP are “We already have QEP items built in – we were doing it any way. Perhaps it could be included or addressed in another standard such as 7.1.” and “We don’t find the QEP valuable because we have such a robust continuous strategic planning process that includes metrics, budgeting decisions, etc. – layering a QEP is an added burden.”

Another bureaucratic aspect of the accreditation process is what attendees deem to be the volumes of documents that must be submitted during the accreditation process due to the ‘supporting evidence’ framework. To be clear, attendees did not express a desire to not have to submit supporting evidence, they simply have determined that the amount of documentation needed or produced can be excessive. For example, “We submitted over 2,000 documents for our CCR. That’s too much. As a reviewer, you can’t look at 2,000 documents.” One participant noted, “We should avoid volume and focus on quality and meaningful[ness]” of supporting evidence.

While criticisms of current practices can abound, solutions at times tend to be more challenging to identify. The ensuing attendee comments provide potential solutions on how to make the accreditation process less mechanistic, rigid, and bureaucratic.

First, attendees suggest that standards be more aspirational. For instance, one participant stated, “Standards should focus on where you want to go, not where we are now.” Second, attendees generally agree that the Commission needs to clearly articulate the rationale for each standard to explain how the standard can be of value to the institution and students. For example, one respondent encouraged the Commission to “look at the real value of each standard – what does it actually mean.” Third, participants suggest that there should be a clear emphasis on students and academics rather than operations and on outcomes rather than processes. Attendees tend to view current standards as having “too much emphasis on process...and not result.” One participant elaborated by explaining that current “standards are not focused on student success...they are focused on governing board, processes, etc. Student success gets buried and granular and doesn’t make clear how the standards benefit the students.”

4. UNCALIBRATED PEER EVALUATORS

Concerns were raised about inconsistency and bias among peer reviewers, suggesting a need for better training and understanding of institutional missions. As noted in responses to Question 1, peer evaluation is highly valued by academics and is critically important for the accreditation process, but there are some concerns about the quality of peer reviews.

Attendees emphasized the need to change the evaluators’ perspective. For instance, one participant stated that many evaluators “are too rigid and inflexible.” Another individual observed, “Reviews – based on past trauma ... Reviewers can hold an institution as being wrong for something because their own institution was called on it even though it’s not wrong.”

In addition, attendees observed “lack of consistency” and called for expanded training opportunities. For example, one participant held there is a “Need to have ongoing peer reviewer training it enables the Commission to right the ship and help institutions – everyone can learn. We can help get rid of lore.”

Participants also suggested a more proactive role of committee chairs and SACSCOC vice presidents in ensuring appropriate perspective and consistency in reviews – e.g., “reviews...often depend on ... chair strength and VP strength.” Finally, attendees asked the Commission to appropriately rotate reviewers and utilize new evaluators. One participant expressed a common sentiment, “been on the [evaluator] registry so long, has never been asked [to serve].” Yet again, there is an obvious need to reconsider how the Commission is staffing evaluation committees.

5. LACK OF POSITIVE REINFORCEMENTS IN REVIEWS

The perception that SACSCOC operates in a punitive manner may discourage open dialogue between institutions and the Commission. A number of participants noted a lack of positive reinforcement in SACSCOC reviews. In other words, they perceive that the Commission focuses exclusively on compliance and fails to recognize and reward institutional excellence. For example, one attendee noted,

“SACS does not show support or appreciation.” Another participant echoed the sentiment that “SACSCOC [is] seen as oppositional instead of supportive.” Yet another respondent observed, “The institution works very hard to complete the process but feels as they aren’t receiving enough recognitions.” Overall, attendees point out that “punitive nature of peer-review process is not valuable.”

One of the suggestions made by the summit participants is to reconsider the typology of accreditation review outcomes by developing a more descriptive and nuanced nomenclature instead of the current “binary determination of compliance vs non-compliance.” For example, one participant shared “The whole process feels punitive, the process is binary and SACSCOC can get you.” Another attendee made an interesting suggestion to “Classify some [accreditation review outcomes] as emerging and developing – move beyond compliance and non-compliance. Nobody wants to be in the news.”

Question 3: HOW MIGHT ACCREDITATION HELP R1 INSTITUTIONS COMMUNICATE THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORKFORCE?

Attendees were also asked about their institution vis-à-vis workforce discussions, dynamics, and trends. Comments centered largely on **1) general observations, 2) indicators of workforce development, 3) ways to stimulate workforce development, and 4) the role of SACSCOC in workforce development.**

1. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

General observations focus on important topics such *a) definitions, b) the role of institutional missions, and c) limitations associated with impacting and/or tracking workforce trajectories of graduates.*

There is a need for clarity around what constitutes "workforce" and how institutions can articulate their contributions effectively. One key focus of attendee responses was the question of how to define and describe workforce, and whose purview it is to drive the conversation. For example, one attendant stated that a "definition of workforce" is needed to engage in meaningful conversation on the topic. Similarly, one respondent noted "Question to the question what do you consider workforce?" Essentially, attendees concluded that there was no established definition of what is meant by workforce. One attendee noted "We are not reviewing the workforce as workforce, it's a field-based definition." Another respondent, cautioned, "No use of word 'skills' – equates to welding/hvac."

Participants underscored the importance of the specific institutional mission and its environment in discussions of workforce topics. For example, one respondent stated that "The mission statement is what draws [attention to workforce development]." Another attendee pointed out that workforce development requirements should take into consideration "student or location specific details, i.e. if in area that has more agriculture, than those standards would reflect that industry. Land grant institutions focus on extension and ag programs in every corner/area of the state."

Participants also discussed limitations to assessing their institutional impact and success regarding workforce. For example, one attendee pointed out that institutions "don't have ability to follow each individual student throughout their career." Another respondent stated that it is "Important to recognize that institution has no way to intervene in Workforce/Career issues after student leaves the institution." In addition, current workforce measures exclude certain categories of students, for example, "The metrics only include Title IV, the international students aren't included."

2. INDICATORS OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Attendees also address the question of what specific indicators would capture and demonstrate workforce development? This discussion demonstrated that workforce is multifaceted and not amenable to simplistic definitions or accounts. Attendees urge the Commission to consider "multiple measures." One participant saw that "There is not just one measure of workforce, needs to be something that captures the complexity of workforce success. It must be carefully thought out."

What follows are five closely inter-related but distinct aspects of Workforce Development that respondents discussed considerably: *a) labor market, b) research and innovation, c) economic development, d) community development, and e) personal development and self-actualization.*

Labor market dynamics were identified as a factor to consider when thinking about and describing workforce development. For example, one attendee stated, "Programs produced based on what the state says is needed." Another commented, "How the institutions contribute to the workforce: of those in the workforce what percentage did we supply, doctors, nurses, managers, etc.?" Comments show that a key part of workforce development is whether students, after attending the institution, are gainfully employed and meeting the needs of the labor market. "If you live in a region with drops in enrollment, you have to show the ROI – parents want to know if Johnny is employable."

Attendees also discussed elements of research and innovation activities as an important component of workforce development. Some sample comments include: "Research /grants are important to R1s" and "The future is research and innovation that creates a new workforce for the country." Participants

emphasized that R 1 institutions prepare students for future needs. For example, one attendee pointed out that “R1 degrees prepare students for jobs that don’t exist yet, positioning them for future economies.” Another respondent echoed by observing that R 1 universities focus on “knowledge, discovery, innovation, creation to generate the new knowledge that creates jobs that don’t exist today.” In sum, research and innovation as a part of workforce development is crucial because it drives the creation of opportunities for new careers and new skills that the country needs. In the words of one participant, “R1 creating opportunities to employ people.”

Respondents also stated that economic development is another dimension of workforce development. Emphasizing the importance of this aspect, one attendee suggested that related language nomenclature “should be changed from workforce development to something along the lines of Economic Impact as ROI.” Another comment supporting this concept stated considering “The ROI of the institutions to the community. We need one that says ROI – focus on economic impact.” Here attendees highlight the role that their institutions play in the economy in terms of impact, i.e., the amount of positive economic activity traceable back to the institution and its former students. In fact, some attendees saw this as being relevant to accreditation.

Closely related to economic impact is the idea of community impact. Respondents made several comments including “ROI does not have to be monetary it can be a social impact” and “ROI doesn’t have to be just pay, but what’s contributed to society.” In addition, this comment looks beyond ROI, “Want civic engagement, volunteerism, ... to be valued.” This demonstrates that educational institutions are seen by attendees as contributing to the overall good of the community, not just to economic indicators.

There is also the personal dimension to workforce development which can often be overlooked. For example, attendees mentioned several personal aspects including social mobility and continued personal development. One participant stated that “It can be as simple a defining the next step – graduate schools - interested in knowledge acquisition at next level. How do you measure that continuum?” Another recommended “Expand beyond a focus on employment and wages. Look at personal satisfaction.” Overall, attendees appear to share the sentiment expressed by one participant that “The value of education is often tied to employment and wages, but this is not the only value. Volunteerism, civic engagement, personal satisfaction, and other positive outcomes are often overlooked when focusing only on wages.”

3. HOW TO STIMULATE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT?

Respondents also discussed how to improve, support, or grow workforce development. They provided comments that coalesced around the following three main points: *a)* leadership and communication, *b)* involvement of businesses and employers, and *c)* curriculum and assessment.

Participants pointed out that workforce development, like many other aspects of college operations, depends in large part on the explicit support by senior leadership. For example, one respondent stated that “Not enough focus is given to workforce development by leadership in institutions” and another observed that “Workforce development is in the ‘Top 5’ priorities of institutional leaders. However, it’s assumed, not a specific focus.” In addition, institutional workforce priorities and contributions should be clearly articulated and communicated. Participants emphasized the need to hold “larger conversations about the [workforce] impact the institution has” to be able to make “the case we are contributing to the workforce.” It is critically important that faculty members are engaged in such conversations. One attendee observed a common situation, “One challenge is the academy – traditional faculty fight back against a focus on the workforce and prefer to focus critical thinking and other traditional faculty focus. We would like to engage faculty in that conversation, but it is threatening to many faculty.” Another participant shared, “We are starting to have a conversation with faculty and for courses to tie them into the student’s programs and they are motivated by the state saying if a degree has no value, it will be closed.”

Respondents also stated that it was important for businesses, employers, and community leaders to be actively involved in institutional strategic planning, curriculum development, and academic program review. One participated suggested that institutions “Incorporate industry input into strategic planning.” Other participants recommend including business needs in academic evaluation, “Academic program

reviews should take industry feedback to make changes in the curriculum” and “Consider involvement of employers/advisory councils in programmatic strategic planning and continuous improvement (i.e., curriculum, needed skills set).”

Continuing to explore the relationship between curriculum, assessment, and the workforce, attendees stated that there is increasing pressure from state governments to demonstrate the worth of programs. Respondents are concerned that all valuable learning does not have conspicuous connections to employment after college. For example, one attendee observed that “not all valuable learning directly ties to immediate employment, even when states set rigid expectations.” In fact, directly or indirectly, in the words of one participant “All education makes contribution to the workforce.” The critical issue in the workforce development conversations is that some programs that are valuable to student success and achievement might not have clearly articulated links to employment and/or post-college earnings. One of the ways to demonstrate those links is via meaningful post-college outcomes assessment processes. Far more than employment rates, according to attendees, such an assessment includes indicators the former student is prepared for their career and thriving in it. This will involve institutions asking themselves, “What are we preparing students to do?” and collecting longitudinal data to inform curriculum development in all programs.

4. ACCREDITOR ROLE IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

While most attendee comments offered insights into the constructive role accreditors can play in workforce development, there were a few that were clearly opposed to accreditors having any sway in how the institution approaches such. One such comment stated that “Accreditors have no role in determining or reviewing what workforce development looks like for the institution.” With those opposed in mind, it is important to restate that most comments indicate that accreditors, while not being overly prescriptive or punitive, can help focus institutions on practices and questions that will be beneficial to workforce development via two mechanisms: *a)* standards and reporting requirements and *b)* providing data support and advocacy.

Accreditors can help institutions take positive steps towards workforce development by asking member institutions to identify how they define, measure, and work to improve student success and achievement after college. One participant stated that “What’s mandated is what gets measured. Elements connected to workforce are already measured – we must show salary, graduate school and licensure.” This could be accomplished through “A carefully constructed Standard that allows institutions identify how they develop it” or through a “List all of the programs in the [Institutional] Summary [Form]: explain what you are doing for the workforce.”

Attendees also provided some profound insights into how the Commission, outside of accreditation standards and requirements, can play a significant role in supporting institutional workforce development. First, participants yet again asked SACSCOC to provide expanded data support services. One illustrative comment indicated that SACSCOC should “Figure out a way for us to get the information needed. We can only get information on our graduates by quarters through the state. If they leave the state of Texas, we lose that information. Unless states have a sharing agreement, then we don’t get that data. Getting other states – CHEA folks – to get data sharing agreements with other states regarding graduates.” Second, attendees asked SACSCOC to facilitate a forum that would help institutions to articulate and publicize their workforce development success stories. One participant suggested that “SACSCOC should help us get our stories out, do publications that show this is what our institutions are doing, and this is the value they create.”

Question 4: HOW MIGHT WE BETTER REPRESENT THE MISSION AND OPERATIONS OF AN R1?

Participants were also asked how the Commission can better represent the mission and operations of an R1 institution. Attendee responses predominantly centered on the following three topics: **1) Stories of Research and Economic Development Impact of R1s**, **2) Implement Differentiated Review by Institutional Segment**, and **3) SACSCOC Advocacy**.

1. STORIES OF RESEARCH AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IMPACT OF R1S

Attendees want accreditation discourse to focus more on what matters to R1 institutions: how research is translated into real world impacts and benefits, patents, grant funding, science; how R1 institutions distinguish themselves; partnerships; and what their graduate programs produce. Essentially, participants ask the Commission to design an approach that would afford telling their stories of knowledge creation and boosting economic development, as one participant put it “communicating the origins of innovation and industry ties” or, in the words of another, “For R1s talk about patents, research, grant funding, science, things that come out of our graduate programs – that’s how we distinguish ourselves, partnerships, etc.”

Indeed, attendees want to be able to integrate their core mission activities (e.g., research, innovation, economic impact) into the accreditation process. Comments indicated that some would “Re-frame the accreditation narrative to focus on research and innovation” while others see a smaller change, “Add a question that allows institutions to elaborate on its impact, as defined by the institution.”

2. IMPLEMENT DIFFERENTIATED REVIEW BY INSTITUTIONAL SEGMENT

Attendees, in general, also advocated for an accreditation approach that reflects the realities and uniqueness of R1 institutions. They emphasized that the Commission should “Avoid a one-size fits all approach.” Without such differentiation, participants were concerned that it would be easy “for R1 institutions to get lost in the mix of non-research institutions within SACSCOC pool.” Below are some additional, interrelated, points regarding how attendees determined accreditation can acknowledge and reflect the differences between R1 and other institutions, along with the difference even among various types of R1 institutions.

Attendees suggest more descriptive categorization than the current SACSCOC level system be used at least for meaningful analysis of and work with such institutions. While the SACSCOC level system is based on type and number of degrees offered, “Level 6 is measured by doctorates not by research and that can be problematic. Classification systems of the membership need to be detailed.” As noted by one participant “There is a hierarchy within the R1s.” Consequently, some of the comments suggest that the Carnegie classifications add value especially to understanding the role and impact of the institution to the community. “Carnegie classifications add value to understanding role and impact in the community, not sure about its relation to accreditation. Unintended consequences of Carnegie, however, can be more valuable than the levels.”

Attendees generally stated that standards should reflect what is relevant and appropriate for R1 institutions, and that some standards were either superfluous or unnecessary. They tend to believe that in order for the accreditation review process to become more meaningful and impactful, fewer, more relevant standards should be established for R1 institutions that consider their specific missions and operations. Suggestions for making the accreditation review process more meaningful and impactful include having “Fewer standards to check boxes.” One participant suggested that SACSCOC “Review and refine what standards are needed for R1’s.”

Attendees provided several suggestions regarding the peer review process. First, summit participants voiced support for removing some barriers to individuals becoming a peer evaluator (i.e., “Lift the requirements for presidents to approve evaluators representing the institution, allow the IALS to have approval power”) and to individuals serving on committees (i.e., “Lift the restriction of committee

members serving in the same state”). In addition, they echoed previous comments and voiced support for “Conduct[ing] more through reviewer training, especially for the decentralized nature of R1 institutions.”

Attendees also called for more R1 representation in the accreditation process. Specifically, “People being from R1 should be reviewing the ones going thru the review.” In addition, attendees noted that while there are fewer R1 institutions, they need “Increase[d] representation on the board (R1s have a huge amount of enrollment even though a smaller count of institution).” As a result of there being a lower amount of R1 compared to other institutions, their needs may not receive as much needed attention when developing accreditation policy, standards, practices, and processes. One participant made an interesting suggestion aimed at increasing involvement of R1 leadership in the process:

Consider redefining the ‘CEO’ peer evaluator. For example, Provosts of R1 institutions often hold Executive or Senior Vice President title and/or Chief Academic Officer or Chief Operating Officer titles – with multiple areas reporting to them (e.g., Deans, Student Affairs leadership). This could be an opportunity to broaden the definition and/or qualifications of those who could serve as the ‘CEO’ peer evaluator.

3. SACSCOC Advocacy for R1s

Attendee comments regarding data support and advocacy are nearly unanimous in their focus on SACSCOC conspicuously articulating their success, accomplishments, impacts, value, and achievements to the public. One participant stated that “An accreditor can help us focus that it is about the work of R1’s that is important and not the title.” One attendee indicated that “Communication and promoting [the] R1 story and value would be the most important. The ranking of institutions is biased towards northern institutions.” Another comment requested that SACSCOC “Start communicating out the good things, tell social and individual stories, blast it on social media (linked in, etc.), amplify the story.” This is supported by other comments related to R1 institutional impact on knowledge, information, innovation, and industry as significant to advocacy. Respondents also stated that recognizing institutions and establishing designations and distinctions would be helpful. Institutions want positive news about their accomplishments coming from their accreditor.

Question 5: AS PART OF OUR 100-DAY PACKAGE, THE CONCEPT OF A SANDBOX OF INNOVATION WAS ANNOUNCED. HOW MIGHT YOUR INSTITUTION UTILIZE THIS INITIATIVE?

As part of the 100 Day package, the Commission announced a Sandbox of Innovation initiative. Attendees were asked to provide their thoughts on how the initiative could be utilized.

Overall, summit participants sought clarification on the concept of the Sandbox of Innovation as their institutions require clearer guidance on how the sandbox works. Attendees indicated that they wanted to understand what they can do and how much time the Commission provides to institutions to try their experimentation and innovations in the Sandbox. Specifically, institutions could benefit, they stated, if the sandbox provided enough time, perhaps as much as 10 years, to try the innovation. Furthermore, respondents stated that institutions could benefit if sandbox members can share what works.

Respondents also discussed several topics they determined are relevant to considering a sandbox. Their comments and analyses are below.

1. PROGRAMS

Academic programs can be an important component of the sandbox initiative. The sandbox is seen as an opportunity for institutions to scale-up existing effective educational experiences and/or experiment with new academic programs, credentials, accelerated degrees, and innovative instructional approaches. Consequently, attendees provided several insights on what can encourage academic programs to be a successful element of the sandbox initiative.

The sandbox is seen as a great opportunity to engage in truly creative new programs, assuming the framework allows it. Participants indicated the sandbox could assist in developing “new programs in emerging disciplines and inter-disciplinary programs” and further promote “stackable credentials, micro-credentials.” The ideas mentioned here signal that genuinely new program concepts can emerge. For example, the comments mention new fields, emerging disciplines, and even programs in areas (e.g., nuclear) that have undergone substantial transformations since their inception. Concomitant with these exploratory program concepts attendees want the flexibility necessary in the sandbox to pursue these activities without negative consequences or cumbersome processes. One comment described this as “Being able to pilot program while it is still in development (while pieces are coming together) without sub change.”

Another sandbox idea proposed is the accelerated degree. This could include opportunities to “Evaluate baccalaureate degrees with less than 120-credits” or “Field-specific skipping over bachelor’s straight to a master’s degree.”

Attendees also see the sandbox as an opportunity to scale up and enhance innovative strategies to what institutions accept or consider as counting towards a credential. These include potential changes to approval – e.g., “Competency Based Education- sub change approval is currently required for each competency-based program.” Other areas of exploration and expansion include “Credit for non-credit work – develop crosswalks to see how it would look before making decisions on how to implement” and “Utilizing military credits to obtain bachelor’s degrees.”

Respondents also see the sandbox as an opportunity to explore how faculty are validated in programs. This could include “Faculty Credentialing Variation – permission to think differently,” exploring non-faculty instruction, for example, by individuals from industry. There is also the view that in a sandbox, faculty “might be more creative.” Another participant advocated for “more flexibility for Inter-Disciplinarity of programs as it relates to Section 6 of the POA, especially Standard 6.2.a and 8.2.a.” Importantly, commenters also acknowledged that some degree of rigor needs to be maintained, “Leniency of faculty credentials to expand by industry people to come & play a role in student skill acquisition – incorporating non-faculty in instruction – expanding current parameters for alternatively credentialed instructors (but still need targets for success).”

As has been mentioned several times, Substantive Change policies and processes are viewed as an impediment to innovation. Here, it is cited as one of the reasons that more locations, branch campuses, and international relationships are not pursued. Comments included providing “OCIS more flexibility in exploring different programs without the work of a Sub change prospectus,” and “Branch campuses, international relationships – too much work to do regarding SACSCOC (or federal processes).”

2. PARTNERSHIPS

Here, attendees stated that they think partnerships with other higher education institutions and businesses would be very beneficial. Such partnerships can benefit institutions because expertise would be shared. Students, attendees stated, would also benefit. The types of partnerships mentioned include “Joint degree, dual degrees” and “Create a program with corporate partners. Collaborating with any non-Title IV industry. Give us time to see if this is a durable partnership that we want. Reliability of the partnership needs to be vetted. Do it in a way to protect students. Hold students harmless.”

3. AI APPLICATIONS

Respondents also mentioned the desire to explore how artificial intelligence can be integrated into higher education. This includes both teaching (“Looking at ways to leverage teaching and practice AI- getting ahead of the student curve”) and curriculum (“Try this new program in Sandbox for two years. New AI design critical not just for something like what is said we were responding to the need to educate about something that’s happening in the world but translating some of the research that we’re doing into course things like certificate translating that research into”).

4. SACSCOC REVIEW PROCESS

One general idea that attendees mentioned is that changes to the accreditation timeline be considered. For example, one participant recommended:

Staggered and distributed model of standard review cycle- potentially replace Fifth-Year Interim Review; Suggests a constant review instead of just when SACSCOC comes around. Institutions would submit a subset of the standards each year for several years, leading up to reaffirmation, ending with a large chunk of the standards. Still stay with same designated reaffirmation cohort. This would send a message to institution’s employees that this is an ongoing process. Helps balance out the workload of employees supporting accreditation process. But could do Federal Requirements in Fifth-Year (if continues) and Decennial review.

Another point mentioned is that there could be “Floating accreditation specialists (like traveling nurses) that could be hired to help an institution prepare for reaffirmation.”

Question 6: WHAT MEASURES OR INDICATORS OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT WOULD YOU RECOMMEND FOR R1s THAT WOULD HIGHLIGHT THE IMPACT OF AN R1 EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE ON POST-COLLEGE SUCCESS AS WELL AS THAT OF GRADUATE AND/OR PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL COMPLETION.

Attendees were also asked about their views on how to capture and articulate R1 post-college success. Although participants did voice that “While a university may offer job placement services and career advisement centers, post-university activity is somewhat out of the university’s locus of control,” they offered several insights on this topic. There were three themes that emerged from their comments: **1)** what to consider when selecting post-college success indicators, **2)** what post-college success indicators or approaches to use, and **3)** the methodological considerations that must be addressed in such an effort. Below are their comments and summary analysis.

1. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS IN CHOOSING POST-COLLEGE SUCCESS METRICS

Attendees pointed out that the following two key considerations need to be kept in mind when selecting post-college success indicators: *a)* drawing on the mission of the institution and *b)* using multiple measures.

The importance of the institutional mission is a recurring topic in the comments of the summit participants who repeatedly emphasize that “there is not a one size fits all.” Attendees were largely in agreement that the institution should be able to select metrics that are “Mission specific measures.” Participants cautioned the Commission against imposing specific indicators like the approach taken by federal government in the gainful employment context, “Concern about Feds setting standards for student achievement, not considering institution specific data.” In fact, attendees asked SACSCOC to provide options for selecting specific indicators so that institutions can match indicators and their missions. For example, one respondent recommended, “Mak[ing] it so that institutions can select from a list of metrics.” Another attendee echoed this suggestion, “Let the institution choose which rates are valuable to the institution and have meaning for the institution. The institution can rationalize an addition to the list.” Finally, participants also state that institutions should be able to establish any performance benchmarks that would reflect their institution’s mission, educational programs, and student population, reinforcing that they “Want the institution to be able to set the target.”

One attendee noted “Success can be individually defined, as each individual has a unique set of criteria that helps them define success.” Respondents shared several important insights on this topic. First, post-college success is a very broad concept that can’t be reduced to a single indicator. Indeed, attendees point out that student achievement is a multifaceted phenomenon and, thus, “success needs a broader definition.” Second, drawing on the previous topic, participants hold that if differences in institutional mission are recognized and appreciated, then the Commission should be “allowing different measures of student’s achievements.” Third, participants encouraged the Commission to consider two types of indicators: those that capture the level of achievement and those that capture the dynamics or degree of improvement in reaching a target, “Reward accomplishment and growth.” Finally, attendees noted that different measures might be needed and that it “Depends on the audience.” With multiple measures available, the Commission can implement a system that “allow institutions to select metrics from a list.”

2. SAMPLE POST-COLLEGE SUCCESS INDICATORS / APPROACHES

Although post-college success is the goal, attendees stressed the need to continue capturing student success while at college. Various approaches to measuring curriculum progression and credential completion were mentioned by summit participants. These include, “Collecting graduation, retention & progress rates” and “Our academic progress rate – Academic Progress rate (retention rate and GPA – they were retained and have a GPA above 2.0).” Metrics for graduate programs could include “Comparison of 5yr (for master’s degrees) /10 yr (for doctoral degrees) completion rates against other state institutions.”

Respondents also provided insightful examples of what metrics can be included in an expanded conception of post-college success metrics. These suggestions would provide a more detailed and helpful

account of student post-college success and would provide institutions with more useful information they could use to act. For example, Pell student employment rates would help identify truly transformative institutions, while providing peers with a member colleague they can collaborate with in a partnership to share expertise. Participants also recommend expanded data on licensure and board certifications to help institutions identify strengths and weaknesses in the former students' education experiences. This can be used to drive improvements and target resources.

More details on employment rates can help institutions assess the degree to which students are in fields that align with the institution's mission, goals, and strategic objectives. It can also help the institution better assess its impact on local, regional, and state economies and communities. Attendees recommended some novel approaches including "Percentage of high need jobs in state (4/5 star jobs," and "Placement in 'services field'."

Detailed salary information such as "Starting salary (including benefits, PTO, & work quality safety)." However, another participant suggested that "If income is considered it needs to be five years out. There are too many steps in the professional program." Other earnings metrics that could be considered include "Median wage," or "Time-to-Value calculation; compare earning of those with high school diploma vs UG/G degree(s)." Attendees also pointed out a critical need to contextualize salaries with college cost and loan data, for example "Costs to the student (what the students actually pay after financial aid – not loans)" and "Debt load (10 years)."

Participant suggestions regarding research productivity represent what is core to R1 institutions: research, knowledge creation, furthering academic pursuits, and contributing to the body of academic knowledge. While these metrics are rarely measured, or even conceived, they nonetheless represent a tremendous opportunity. Attendees recommended metrics including "Students involved in research at the undergrad level collaborations and publication where they can be authors" and "Research publications and patents of graduates," along with "Research measures/ productivity post-college." Other recommended metrics include "Internship into placement" and "Enrollment into graduate programs."

Attendees also identified the importance of capturing personal satisfaction, self-actualization, and social mobility as indicators of post-college success. One respondent indicated that "Satisfaction over salary should be a consideration, because it takes students' individual goals/career path into account. Recognize that students may define success/satisfaction very differently." Others indicated "Civic learning & engagement" were important measures. Last, "Measures that reflect more personal growth" and "Qualitative measures of student experience contributing to their growth and preparations" were recommended.

3. METHODOLOGICAL (DATA COLLECTION) CONSIDERATIONS

Many attendees shared a common sentiment that there are significant challenges in tracking graduates after they leave the college. Participants discussed limitations in collecting data on students once they leave the institution through statements like "Consider that it is hard to get graduates to complete surveys" and "Difficult but worthwhile to collect from alumni."

Indeed, attendees want easy access to the data that is not costly or cumbersome. For instance, one participant noted that "access to data is potential barrier" and urged the Commission to "lower/remove barriers to federal/state data".