

Collaborating to Create a Nurturing Environment for Students to Thrive



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What You'll Learn

TODAY'S PRESENTATION

- **A clear picture of the basic-needs landscape and why it matters now more than ever**
- **A look inside the Valera NEST as a model for collaborative, student-centered design**
- **Practical ideas your campus can apply—no matter your structure or resources**



CSUN

UNIVERSITY STUDENT UNION

USU Mission

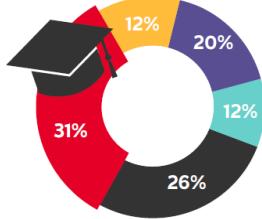
The University Student Union, as the heart of campus, uplifts and empowers students to achieve educational, personal and professional goals by providing leadership development, meaningful employment, and innovative programs, services and facilities. We promote equity, inclusion and well-being, while encouraging social justice advocacy to help Matadors feel heard, respected and connected to CSUN.

Values

- Accountability
- Integrity
- Collaboration
- Learning
- Communication
- Respect
- Creativity
- Service
- Fun

CSUN BY THE NUMBERS

Academic Level



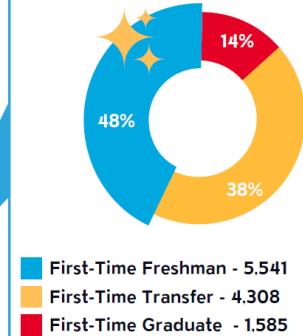
- Freshman - 7,251
- Sophomore - 4,248
- Junior - 9,594
- Senior - 11,406
- Graduate - 4,349

Total Students
36,848



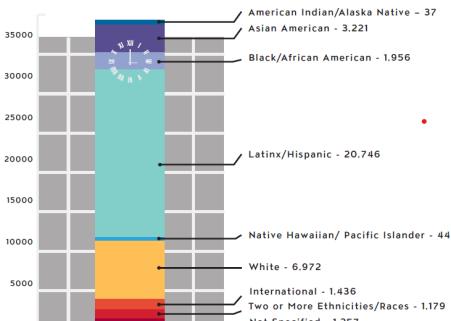
New Students - 11,434
Continuing Students - 25,414

New Students



Diversity at CSUN

Ethnicity



Generational Status



- Continuing Generation - 11,427
- First Generation - 25,421

Gender



Student Basic Needs

2018 CSU Study

41.6%

of CSU students reported food insecurity

- 20% low food security
- 21.6% very low food security
- Food insecurity U.S. households - 12.3% (low and very low)
- College students emerging as a new food insecure population of concern

(Source: Coleman-Jensen, Rabbitt, Gregory, & Singh, 2017)

10.9%

of CSU students reported homelessness one or more times in the last 12 months

(Source: Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Department of Education)



2026 AOA
ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Student Basic Needs

2018 CSU Study

Students experiencing food insecurity, homelessness, or both:

- Had lower academic achievement
- “Inactive days” (poor physical/mental health)

First generation and African American students:

- Highest rates of **food insecurity** (65.9%)
- Highest rates of **homelessness** (18%)

Students experiencing food insecurity and homelessness:

- Influenced **most facets of life** - academic struggles, long work hours, and negative impact on mental/physical health

January 2018

This research was funded by the California State University Office of the Chancellor Conducted and co-authored by:

Rashida Crutchfield, EdD, MSW
Principal Investigator
Long Beach State University

Jennifer Maguire, PhD, MSW
Principal Investigator
Humboldt State University

Food Security

2019-2020 CSUN Study

Most student aware of food pantries (76.6%), but only 27.6% had used the food pantry.

More than 50% of the most food insecure students had not used food pantry.

Barriers: Embarrassment, not knowing the hours, location, or if they qualify.

4% response rate (473 of 10,000)



Why This Matters

BASIC NEEDS

Post-pandemic rise in student insecurity and mental health concerns.

National/statewide data: (statewide crisis in food, housing, financial insecurity).

CSUN-specific data: campus survey mirroring these challenges.



Discussion

TODAY'S PRESENTATION

- **What research has your campus conducted on basic needs — and what have you learned about how these issues affect students' ability to be successful?**
- **Even without formal research, what needs feel most pressing on your campus today — food insecurity, housing, mental health, financial stress, something else?**
- **How does your campus address these needs? Is support centralized anywhere, or spread out across different offices and organizations?**



Timeline

2019

CSUN students pass a **referendum** to increase student union fees, funding a major modernization and expansion of USU facilities.

2021

Design work on the USU modernization resumes, **integrating the Basic Needs Suite concept** into the project.

2020

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, **CSUN administrators explore ways to better address students' Basic Needs**, considering space within the University Student Union to support resources like the food pantry and Matty's Closet while reducing stigma around services.

2023

The project design is finalized, with a total cost of \$18.3 million. **CSUN announces key donations from Debbie and Milt Valera and Barbara and Rick Levy**, helping to make the project a reality.

2025

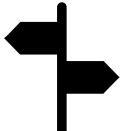
The Valera NEST Advisory Committee begins planning operations for the **Grand Opening in 2026**.

2024

Construction begins on The Valera NEST.



Support for Basic Needs Suite



Benefits of Branding and Wayfinding



Centralized Resource Center (Rise concept)



Desire for more Dining Variety and Food Preparation Stations



Desire for additional Seating Options with Charging Capabilities

63% of respondents feel they are **more likely** to utilize **campus-based basic needs resources** if they were in **one location**

"I strongly feel that addressing basic needs from a central place at the USU is extremely important. I have come to school for hours without a way to **keep my food cold** or to **heat up my food** in a place where there is seating available. It's **difficult to carry my food** around school all day. Having **food resources available** to students in a **quick and easy** fashion to provide meals if needed or snacks or fruits or vegetables to students free of charge **in an inclusive way** will **normalize** receiving these things and increase the nutrition for students. ... **Extremely grateful to the amazing professors and leaders at CSUN driving this progress.**
Let's do it!"

- survey participant

1 out of 2 students

are interested in having the ability to **store and prepare** food I've pre-cooked myself or purchased on campus utilizing **food storage areas, microwaves, toasters, hot water, etc.**

"Changing to match the students **needs** are important. Thank you"
- survey participant



Transformation OPPORTUNITY

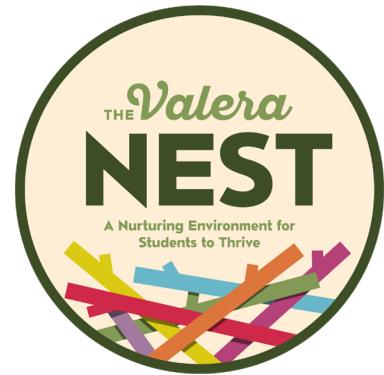
- The Student Union is a bridge between academic success and wellbeing.
- Introducing The Valera NEST as a model for collaborative, student-centered design.
- Centrally located, one-stop shop.
- Shifting the narrative to emphasize a strengths-based, inclusive and empowering approach (vs. deficit approach).
- Basic Needs staff easily accessible and front-facing to students, staff, faculty and campus community.
- Welcoming, student friendly space where community building also takes place.

Future Reality



Driving High Impact Practices
and **STUDENT SUCCESS**





COMING SPRING 2026

This renovated space will address basic needs, promoting synergy, collaboration and partnership between various campus resources while normalizing the experience of students who seek supportive resources.

INCLUDING

Basic Needs Offices



- Care Coordinators assist students with resources related to:
- Food Insecurity
- Emergency Housing
- Financial Support
- Wrap-around services

INCLUDING

CSUN Food Pantry



- Food and toiletries, dry goods, produce and refrigerated food
- Food assistance programs (i.e. CalFresh)

INCLUDING

Ila's Kitchen



- Lounge area, seating and tables
- Food preparation stations including microwaves and hot water dispensers for food warming



Cold Food Lockers

Storage for:

- Food pantry orders after pickup
- Meals for eating while on campus all day

INCLUDING

Matty's Closet



- On-campus professional clothing resource for students
- Tips on professional dress for job interviews and internships

INCLUDING

Outdoor Lounge



- Additional shaded outdoor seating
- Spaces for individuals or small groups
- Device charging

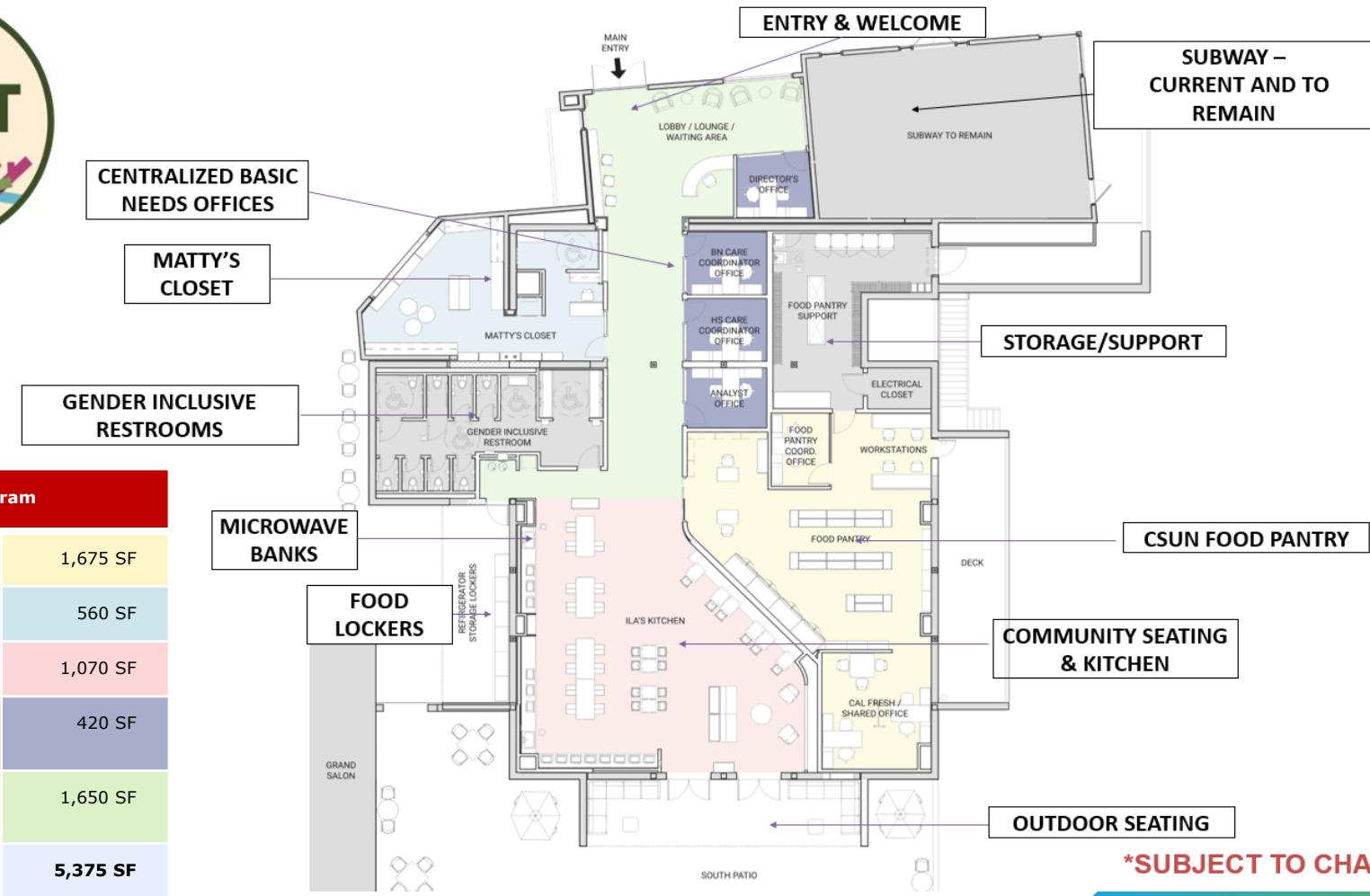
Formerly known as the Basic Needs Suite. Schedule and images are conceptual and subject to change.

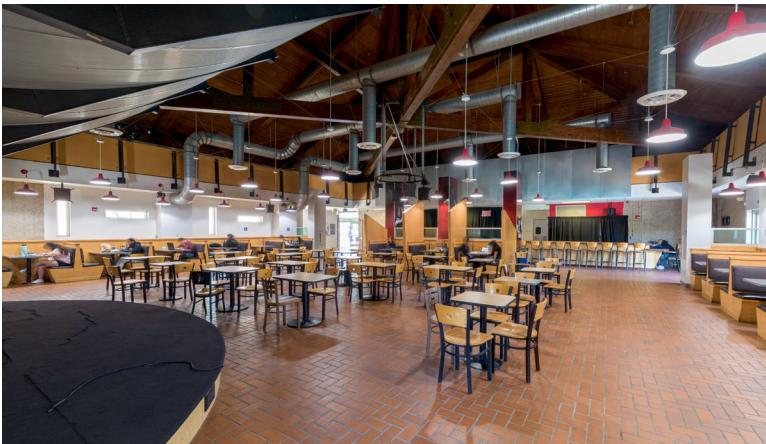
CSUN





Valera NEST Program	
Food Pantry	1,675 SF
Matty's Closet	560 SF
Ila's Kitchen	1,070 SF
Basic Needs Advising	420 SF
Shared Resources	1,650 SF
Total Assignable SF	5,375 SF





THE Valera NEST



Lobby

THE Valera NEST



Ila's Kitchen



Embracing Diversity in Every Detail

- Through partnerships with CSUN's Office of Institutional Research and International and Exchange Student Center, we **identified and represented diverse CSUN student demographics**.
- We collaborated with representatives from the Fernandeño Tataviam Band of Mission Indians and various academic departments to **ensure the accuracy and cultural integrity of the phrases**.

THE Valera NEST



Matty's Closet

THE Valera NEST



CSUN Food Pantry

THE Valera NEST



Outdoor Lounge

Project Funding

\$20 MILLION

Project Funding Sources

State of California and
Assemblywoman Pilar Schiavo
California State University Northridge (CSUN)
CSUN Foundation
CSUN University Student Union (USU)
CSUN Student Affairs
Project Donors (see images)

Project Collaborators

CSUN Student Affairs (Basic Needs & Career Center)
Brailsford & Dunlavey
CSUN Health and Human Development Faculty
The University Corporation
Chartwells



Milt & Debbie Valera



Barbara & Rick Levy



Discussion

TODAY'S PRESENTATION

- Has your campus taken intentional steps to destigmatize basic-needs services – either through language, branding, location, or staff approach? What has worked well, and what still feels like a challenge?
- Does a centralized model for basic-needs support feel right for your campus culture and student body? Why or why not?
- Of the services we've highlighted today – food pantry, clothing closet, wellness supports, case management, etc. – which feels most relevant or urgent for your students? Are there other services you would prioritize instead?



Preparations

Readiness through Collaboration



Preparations

Readiness through Collaboration



The NEST Advisory Committee was established in early 2025 to bring together perspectives from all campus entities involved in the success of the new facility:

University Student Union
CSUN Basic Needs Office
CSUN Food Pantry
Matty's Closet

CSUN College of Health and Human Development
Associated Students

Preparations

Readiness through Collaboration



Early in the process, the group held a workshop to define a shared mission statement that would guide how the NEST operates and serves students.

The mission of The Valera NEST is to provide access to Basic Needs resources that promote equitable experiences for a vibrant and thriving Matador community.

Preparations

Readiness through Collaboration



The Advisory Committee engaged in a RACI Matrix exercise to clarify each entity's roles and responsibilities for operations, programming, marketing, and promotion of the facility.

Building on that foundation, the USU and B&D developed an Operational Playbook to guide onboarding and ensure that every department understands how to deliver on the mission and purpose of The Valera NEST.

THE VALERA NEST
 FACILITY OPERATIONS "RACI" MATRIX

Responsible: The person or team that completes the work. (A few or more)
Accountable: The person or team that is responsible for the outcome. (Exactly one)
Consulted: The person or team that provides input and advice. (Only value-adding)
Informed: The person or team that is kept up to date on progress. (Minimum Involvement)

	University Student Union (USU)	CSUN Basic Needs Department	Matty's Closet	CSUN Food Pantry	CSUN College of Health & Human Development (HH&D)	TUC/Chartwells	CSUN Division of Student Affairs	Associated Students (AS)
OVERALL FACILITY								
Open and lock NEST main entrance doors according to operating hours	A	R	R	R				
Oversee custodial services (daily cleaning, etc.) for the NEST building and exterior seating area	A							
Address operational needs and submit maintenance requests (e.g., annual inspections, repairs)	A	R	R	R				
Develop and implement long-range facility improvement plans	A	I	I	I		C		I
Staff and supervise the NEST front desk to welcome and assist visitors	A	C	C	C				
Promote and maintain a cohesive brand strategy across all NEST services	A	C	C	C				
Participate in the Valera NEST Advisory Board	A	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
Collect and analyze data to track success against Advisory Board metrics	A	R	R	R				
Maintain and update shared-space signage and digital displays	A	R	R	R				
Ensure technology infrastructure (internet, cables, connections, etc.) is functional and accessible	A	I	I	I		C		
Receive and distribute US mail delivery	A							
Receive and distribute mail and package deliveries	A	R	R	R				
Manage hours of operation	A	I	I	I				
Contact Department of Police Services in the event of an emergency	A	R	R	R				
BASIC NEEDS OFFICES								
Open and secure office doors according to operating hours		A						
Ensure professional staffing of Basic Needs offices	I	A						
Guide students on available Basic Needs services per CSUN policies		A						
Complete university-mandated reporting on service recipients		A						

Preparations

Readiness through Collaboration



Together, the USU and NEST partners have outlined a first wave of programs and events that will activate the facility in Fall 2026:

- Tabling Events
- Matty's Boo Boos
- Cultural Collaborations
- Healthy Living Food Demonstrations

Preparations

Readiness through Collaboration



Staff from each partner organization have begun touring the new facility to consider how their operations will evolve and expand within this more capable space.

As the facility operator, the USU has created two new positions—including a NEST Coordinator—to ensure the facility runs smoothly and delivers on its full potential across all departments.

The USU front desk team will also receive training on how to help students navigate the range of available resources in a way that **destigmatizes Basic Needs** and encourages all CSUN students to engage with what the NEST has to offer.

Discussion

TODAY'S PRESENTATION

- **Which group on your campus could become a stronger ally in this work if roles and expectations were clearer?**
- **If you had to name one 'collaboration gap' that slows things down, what would it be?"**



Valera NEST

FINAL TAKEAWAYS

- **Center the Student Experience**
- **Break Down Silos**
- **Destigmatize Support & Provide Access**
- **Lead with Data and Empathy**
- **Invest in Readiness**
- **Think Beyond Facilities**
- **Remember Your WHY**





2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE OAKLAND, JANUARY 11 - 13

AUXILIARY ORGANIZATIONS ASSOCIATION

THE NEXT ERA OF AUXILIARIES
SHAPING TOMORROW