

Collaborating to Create a Nurturing Environment for Students to Thrive

A large, abstract graphic on the right side of the slide. It consists of several overlapping chevron shapes in shades of blue and green, arranged to form a large, upward-pointing arrow that spans the right half of the slide.

PRESENTED BY
Samantha Liu
CSU Northridge
Michael Quadrino
Brailsford & Dunlavey
Matt Bohannon
Brailsford & Dunlavey
Cecilia Ortiz
CSU Northridge

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.

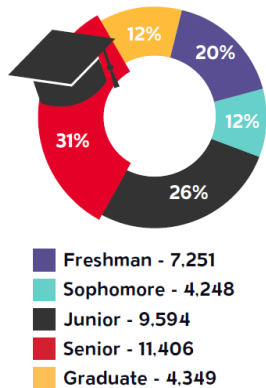
Values

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

CSUN

BY THE NUMBERS

Academic Level

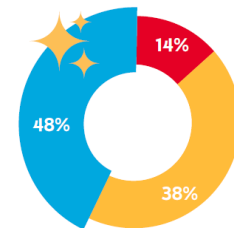


Total Students
36,848



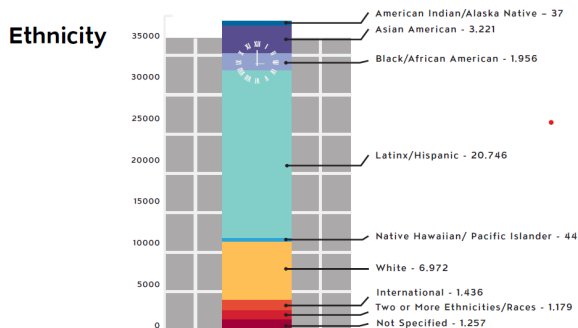
New Students - 11,434
 Continuing Students - 25,414

New Students

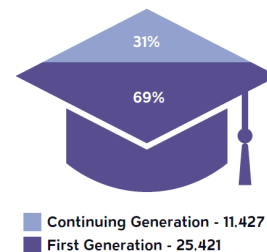


First-Time Freshman - 5,541
 First-Time Transfer - 4,308
 First-Time Graduate - 1,585

Diversity at CSUN



Generational Status



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)

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)



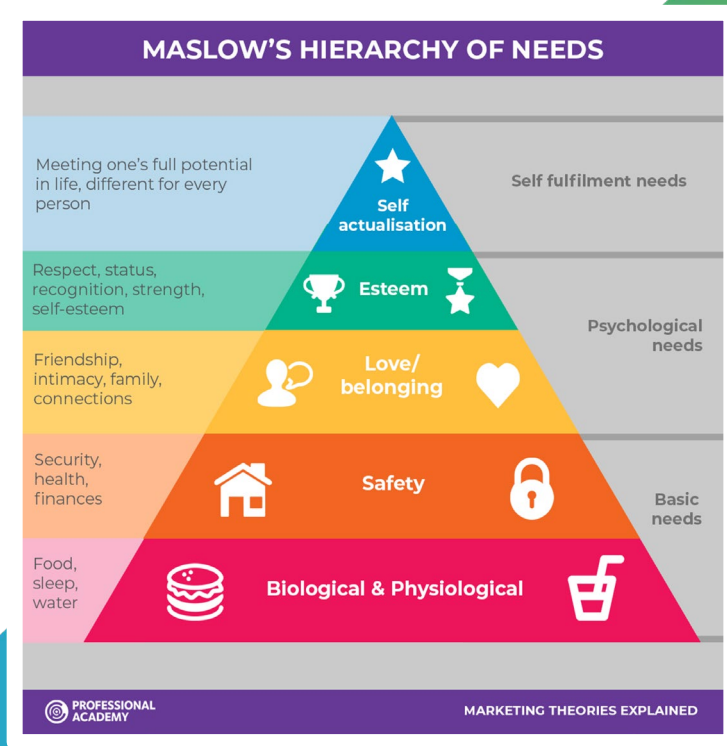
Why This Matters

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.

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**.

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.

2022

During budgeting, the **USU Board of Directors** allocates **\$4.4 million** from capital reserves to keep the project moving forward.

2024

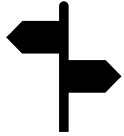
Construction begins on The Valera NEST.



Support for Basic
Needs Suite



Desire for more Dining
Variety and Food
Preparation Stations



Benefits of Branding
and Wayfinding



Centralized
Resource Center
(Rise concept)



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

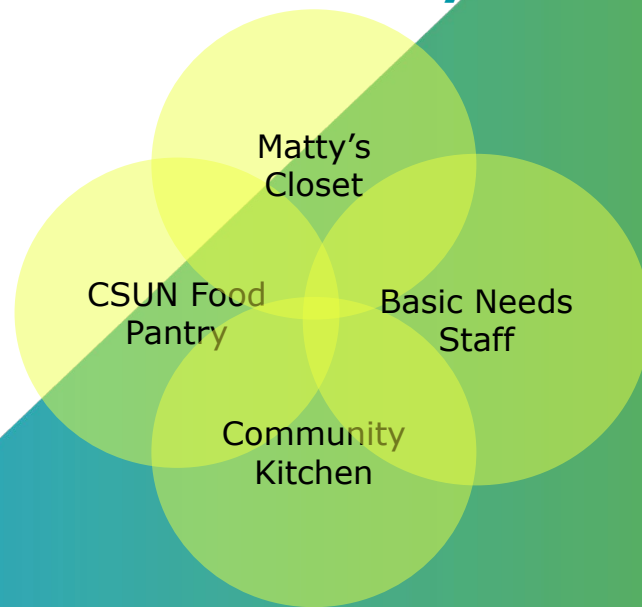


Transformation

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





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

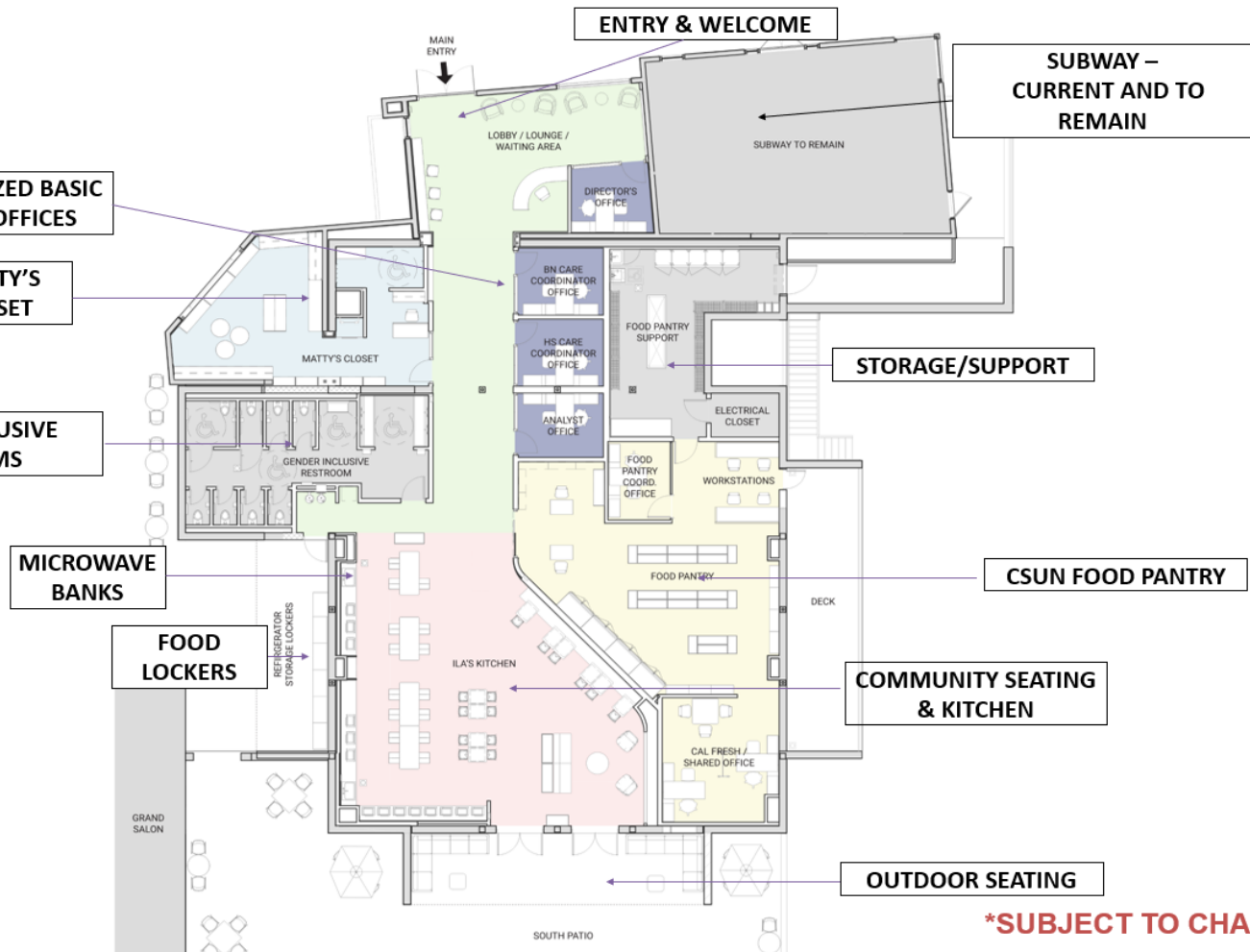


- Additional shaded outdoor seating
- Spaces for individuals or small groups
- Device charging

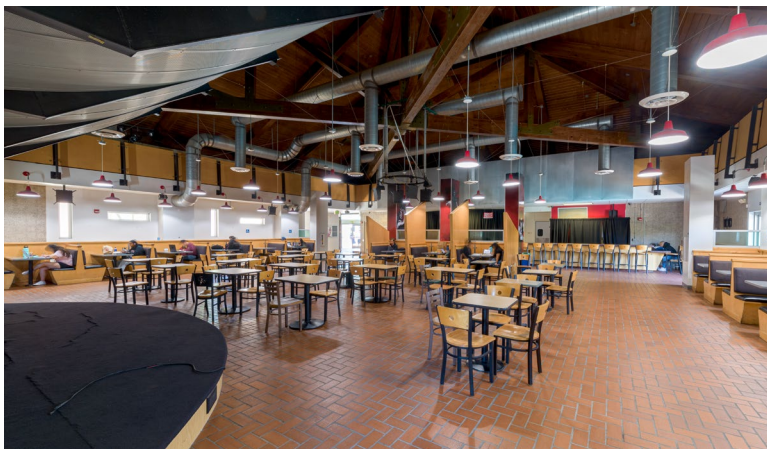
Formerly known as the Basic Needs Suite. Schedule and images are conceptual and subject to change.



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



***SUBJECT TO CHANGE**



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 Fernandeno Tataviam Band of Mission Indians and various academic departments to **ensure the accuracy and cultural integrity of the phrases.**

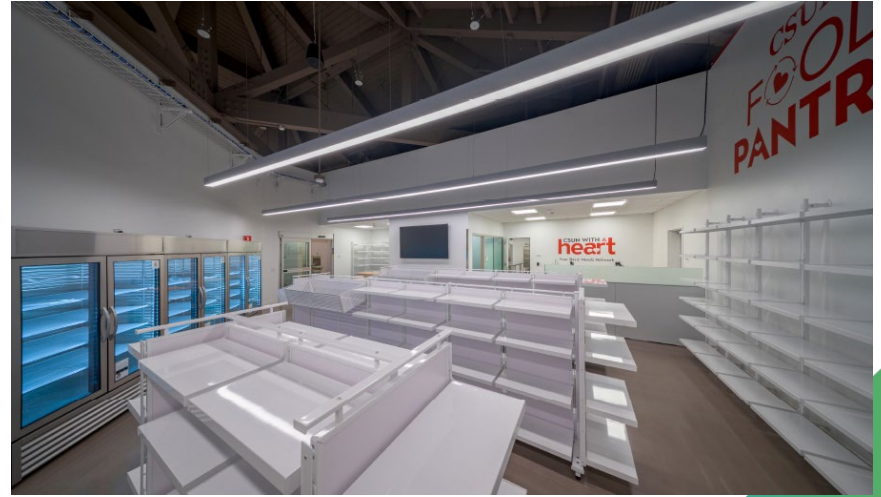
THE *Valera* NEST



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

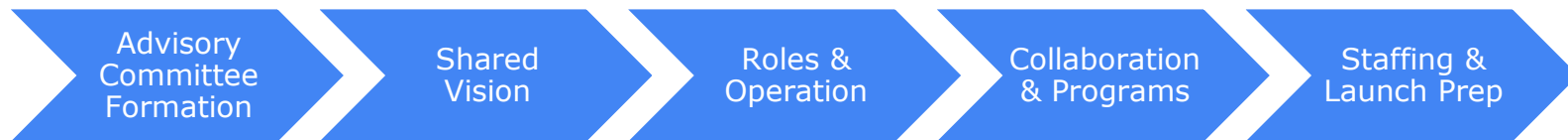
Discussion

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

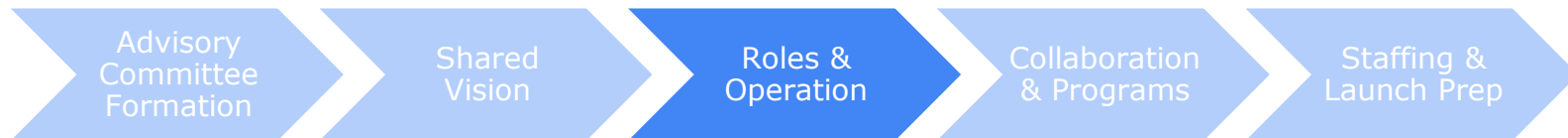


Early in the process, the group held a workshop to define a shared mission statement that would guide how the NEST operates and serves students.

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.



BRAILSFORD & DUNLAVEY

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	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