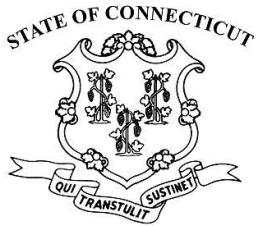


# An Action Plan for the University of Connecticut to Become a Member of an Association of Research Universities

1 JANUARY 2026



**UCONN**  
UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT



***Substitute House Bill No. 7095***

***Special Act No. 25-3***

***AN ACT REQUIRING AN ACTION PLAN FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT TO BECOME A MEMBER OF AN ASSOCIATION OF RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES.***

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. (*Effective July 1, 2025*) The University of Connecticut shall develop an action plan to increase the likelihood of receiving an invitation to become a member of an association of research universities in the United States. Such action plan shall include, but need not be limited to, specifications for (1) the metrics that said university will track, the time frame and resources required to meet such metrics and the state-wide economic impact of such membership, and (2) any recommendations for legislation to assist said university in meeting such metrics and to support such membership, if granted. Not later than January 1, 2026, The University of Connecticut shall submit, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes, such action plan to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to higher education and employment advancement.

Governor's Action:

Approved May 29, 2025

# AN ACTION PLAN FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT TO BECOME A MEMBER OF AN ASSOCIATION OF RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES

This Action Plan is presented to the Connecticut General Assembly joint standing committee on higher education and employment advancement pursuant to State of Connecticut Substitute House Bill No. 7095, Special Act No. 25-3: *An Act Requiring an Action Plan for the University of Connecticut to Become a Member of an Association of Research Universities*.

## 1 CONTEXT: THE IMPACT OF UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ACTIVITY ON THE ECONOMY

Universities with large, vibrant research enterprises serve as engines for economic development in their home states. Research universities fuel economic development in a number of ways. First, research activity brings federal dollars and direct investment to their states. Research activity also generates intellectual capital and entrepreneurial ventures, building innovation-based economic growth and creating jobs. Existing industries benefit from federally-funded joint research programs with university researchers that promote competitiveness and sector leadership by bringing innovation to their product and business lines. Finally, research activity builds the skilled workforce, particularly in the life sciences, physical sciences, and engineering, that is urgently needed by employers in all sectors. Workers with experience in research environments are exposed to leading edge discovery that influences their ability to transfer new knowledge to the organizations and businesses where they are employed.

The nation's most economically vibrant regions are nearly all anchored by one or more major research universities, and the most significant of these innovation ecosystems are driven by research universities that are members of national associations of highly active research universities, such as the Association of American Universities (AAU). This is certainly true for California's Silicon Valley and North Carolina's Research Triangle. At the core of these hotbeds of innovation and technology development are AAU institutions whose research capabilities and reputations attract talent and capital that are leveraged for enormous economic impact.

### **Snapshot: Research Triangle, North Carolina**

- The GDP of the Research Triangle area was estimated at \$178B in 2024.<sup>1</sup>
- Its leading economic sectors are high tech<sup>2</sup> and pharmaceutical.<sup>3</sup>
- The triangle region is home to over 4000 tech companies and 600 life science companies.<sup>4</sup>
- The region is anchored by two AAU universities.<sup>5</sup>
  - Duke - \$1.5B in research expenditures
  - UNC Chapel Hill - \$1.5B in research expenditures

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1 <https://kenaninstitute.unc.edu/commentary/from-tobacco-to-high-tech-manufacturing-in-the-piedmont-triad-and-the-research-triangle/>

2 <https://www.cnbc.com/2024/09/16/how-the-research-triangle-helps-north-carolina-economy.html>

3 <https://innovation.org/casestudy/north-carolinas-research-triangle-powerhouse/>

4 <https://raleigh-wake.org/blog/research-triangle-parks-historic-role-in-shaping-north-carolinas-economy>

5 <https://ncsesdata.nsf.gov/profiles/site?method=rankingbysource&ds=herd>

### **Snapshot: Silicon Valley**

- The region has a GDP of approximately \$840B.<sup>6</sup>
- Major economic sectors are technology and communications,
- The innovation ecosystem is driven by three AAU universities:
  - Stanford - \$1.5B in research expenditures,<sup>7</sup>
  - UC Berkeley - \$1B in research expenditures,<sup>8</sup> and
  - UC Davis - \$962M in research expenditures.<sup>9</sup>

Silicon Valley and the Research Triangle are standout examples of research-driven innovation and economic impact. But similar patterns can be seen in smaller and less celebrated ecosystems. Below are data from other AAU research universities, several of whom are in UConn's peer and aspirant group. In each case, advanced capabilities and reputation lead to strong research expenditures that are leveraged and multiplied into significant economic impact.

### **Snapshot: UT Austin**

- Contributes \$18B per year to Texas economy.<sup>10</sup>
- Key regional economic sectors are technology/semiconductors, advanced manufacturing, energy, and healthcare.<sup>11</sup>
- \$1.04B in research expenditures.<sup>12</sup>

### **Snapshot: University of Maryland**

- Generates \$3.7B in annual economic impact for Maryland.
- Key regional economic sectors are life sciences, cybersecurity and information technologies, aerospace and aviation.<sup>13</sup>
- \$1.39B in research expenditures.<sup>14</sup>

### **Snapshot: Rutgers**

- Delivers \$5.2B in annual economic impact for New Jersey.
- Key regional economic sectors are healthcare, technology, food/agriculture, business/supply chain and logistics.<sup>15</sup>
- \$831M in research expenditures.<sup>16</sup>

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6 <https://thoughteconomics.com/the-reality-of-silicon-valley/>

7 <https://ncsesdata.nsf.gov/profiles/site?method=rankingbysource&ds=herd>

8 <https://ncsesdata.nsf.gov/profiles/site?method=rankingbysource&ds=herd>

9 <https://ncsesdata.nsf.gov/profiles/site?method=rankingbysource&ds=herd>

10 <https://www.utexas.edu/impact-on-texas>

11 <https://www.dallasfed.org/research/heart/austin>

12 <https://ncsesdata.nsf.gov/profiles/site?method=rankingbysource&ds=herd>

13 <https://business.maryland.gov/key-industries/>

14 <https://ncsesdata.nsf.gov/profiles/site?method=rankingbysource&ds=herd>

15 <https://www.rutgers.edu/about/serving-new-jersey/economic-engine>

16 <https://ncsesdata.nsf.gov/profiles/site?method=rankingbysource&ds=herd>

### Snapshot: Arizona State University

- Generates \$6.1B in annual economic impact for Arizona.
- Key regional economic sectors are semiconductors, aerospace, national defense, and bioscience.<sup>17</sup>
- \$903M in research expenditures<sup>18</sup>

**The scale of research funding to an institution matters.** Universities with highly active, well-funded research programs generate economic activity and prestige for their states and institutions through transformative discoveries, publications, patents, and honors. Research activity generates more research activity, creating a virtuous cycle of discovery, economic and social impact, recognition, and, consequently, additional funding. Reputational gains through research activity in turn attract productive, creative faculty who, in turn, strengthen the research enterprise and contribute to the economy and wellbeing of their states.

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17 <https://impactarizona.asu.edu/>

18 <https://ncsesdata.nsf.gov/profiles/site?method=rankingbysource&ds=herd>



## 2 BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP IN AN ASSOCIATION OF RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES

The universities that are members of America's leading association of research universities, the AAU, account for the majority of competitive federal research funding in the US.

**Table 1:** Federally funded research expenditures awarded to United States members of the leading association of research universities vs. all others, FY2023

	Current Association Members (69 Universities)		All Others with HERD Data (589 Institutions)	
	\$ 1,000s	% of total	\$ 1,000s	% of total
Federally Funded Research Expenditures	38,228,920	65%	20,564,093	35%

Source: FY23 Higher Education Research and Development (HERD) Survey

Institutions with strong research programs contribute significantly to the economies of their home states through direct investment, secondary economic impact on state economies, employment opportunities, and growth in innovation and entrepreneurial ventures. At UConn, sponsored program awards reached \$368 million in FY25, and major federal agencies continue to fund UConn researchers at increasing rates. The economic impact of UConn's FY24 total research activity for the state of Connecticut is \$747 million, reflecting grant spending, job creation, industry partnerships, and innovation. For federal research funds specifically, UConn currently generates \$8 in statewide economic impact for every \$10 of federal research funds received. (UMass Donahue Institute, 2025)

In addition, member universities play an outsized role in shaping research policy, impacting federal research appropriations as well as financial aid and scholarship/ fellowship opportunities for students. Advocacy by the association potentially helps align federal funding opportunities with member university interests.

Membership in a national association of research universities would bring UConn national and international prestige, increasing its reputation and rankings and its competitiveness for research funding (including large research center grants). Student interest and enrollment would likewise be influenced by an improvement in UConn's reputation and rankings. Membership in a national association of research universities could also improve UConn's potential for invitations to the top athletic conferences in the country. For example, all university members of the Big10 conference are also members of the leading national association of research universities.

By requesting that UConn "shall develop an action plan to increase the likelihood of receiving an invitation to become a member of an association of research universities in the United States," the State of Connecticut recognizes the benefits of membership to its citizens and economy. The University's response is provided in this document.

## 3 MEMBERSHIP CRITERIA

Members in a national association of research universities are expected to have strong programs in graduate student education and research across a wide range of disciplines. Accordingly, existing and potential members are expected to demonstrate the quality of their research enterprise through strong performance in metrics that include the following:

- Competitive federally funded research programs
- Faculty honors, awards, fellowships, and memberships
- Research citations
- Book publications
- Number of PhD degrees granted
- Number of postdoctoral researchers

All of these metrics are driven by the quality and productivity of the faculty.

## 4 THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT'S CURRENT POSITION RELATIVE TO MEMBER UNIVERSITIES

A comparison of the University of Connecticut to other universities that are members of a national association of research universities generally indicates that UConn is qualified for membership.

Table 2 reflects UConn's ranking on key metrics relative to the 69 US-based member universities in the AAU as well as the 10 most recently elected member universities. The output per faculty is normalized to allow for comparisons across institutions of different sizes. For instance, a smaller institution with a higher number of awards per faculty may rank higher than a larger institution with more total awards. Data confirm that UConn's metrics are within range of current and recently accepted member universities. However, UConn's overall performance on relevant metrics is on par with the lowest 25-40% of current members.



**Table 2:** UConn performance on membership metrics relative to current US-based and recently-elected member universities of the leading national association of research universities, the AAU

	UConn Value per Faculty* (Range of US-based Members' Values)	UConn Rank Among All US-based AAU Members (N=70)**	UConn Rank Among New AAU Members (Since 2019) (N=11)***
Federally funded research expenditures 2018-2023 (\$1,000s)	\$873 (\$680-\$6028)	66	8
Prestigious awards, fellowships, and memberships in the national academies	1.12 (1.00-5.10)	62	8
Citations (2018-2023)	192 (132-923)	60	8
Book publications (last 10 years)	0.46 (0.24-1.02)	40	9
Noncompetitive federal funding, state, and industrial research funding (2018-2023)	78.3 (13-1242)	65	9
Number of PhDs granted annually (10 year average)	0.27 (0.15, 0.65)	56	8
Number of postdoctoral appointees (2018-2023 annual average)	0.18 (0.10, 3.86)	64	8

\*Values are normalized by number of tenured and tenure-track faculty

\*\*N=70 refers to 69 member universities plus UConn

\*\*\*N=11 refers to 10 newly-elected members plus UConn

Taking, for example, the recently added members of the leading national association of research universities (the AAU), UConn ranks between 8th and 9th within the cohort of 11 institutions in most key membership metrics (Table 2). UConn also ranks 9th within that group in the level of state and industry funded research per faculty member. UConn's value of \$78,270 per faculty member for state- and industry-funded research expenditures is approximately half of the average value (\$150,140) for the other 10 institutions. Many of the AAU members, including recently added members (e.g., University of South Florida, Arizona State University), utilize non-profit research foundations to enhance the university's research infrastructure and streamline industry partnerships. **Focusing on hiring top-tier faculty and exploring innovative ways to improve the UConn research infrastructure will make an impact on UConn's normalized rankings and UConn's overall viability for membership.**

## 5 ACTION PLAN

The action plan below identifies actions to be taken that can strengthen UConn's performance in key metrics and enhance its attractiveness as a candidate for association membership.

Given that the primary metrics tied to membership are driven by the quality and productivity of the faculty, actions that strengthen the faculty and their ability to conduct research will have the most significant impact on the membership metrics.

To strengthen its attractiveness for membership in a national association of research universities, UConn plans to undertake the following actions:

1. **Recruit and hire top tier faculty.** The quickest impactful step the University can take to elevate its research portfolio to the level expected of leading national research universities is to recruit top tier faculty with strong research portfolios and internationally-recognized scholarly reputations, as measured by highly-prestigious awards and honors, citations and/or book publications, research funding, and other measures. Research-intensive faculty members generate substantial external research funding and will increase publications, invention disclosures, and industry partnerships. Therefore, in its hiring decisions, the University will prioritize hiring internationally acclaimed scholars.
2. **Prioritize investments in and maintenance of strategic research infrastructure.** Outstanding research infrastructure is an incentive for attracting and retaining high-performing faculty. The University will work with the State and other partners to ensure that strategic research infrastructure, particularly resources that are aligned with federal funding priorities and emerging high-impact research areas, is available to support its faculty.
3. **Support existing faculty to increase productivity on priority metrics through increased availability of seed funding, which is critical for pursuing significant federal grants.** UConn's return on its investment in seed funding is, at minimum, 10:1. UConn will also strategize with faculty to develop mechanisms (e.g., further training, research development support, award/recognition opportunities) that will lead to improvements in both the absolute and normalized rankings. UConn has made a concerted effort over the past 5 years to double its faculty membership in the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine.

## 6 METRICS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

To assess its progress toward strengthening its position for membership in an association of research universities, UConn will track the following metrics relative to the composite ranking of current members of an association of research universities:

- Research expenditure data
- Faculty awards, fellowships, and memberships in the national academies
- Citations
- Book publications
- Noncompetitive federal funding, state, and industrial research funding
- Number of PhDs granted annually
- Number of postdoctoral appointees

## 7 TIMEFRAME

Improvement is conditional upon our ability to secure top-tier hires, build and maintain the necessary infrastructure to support research, and increase scholarly productivity relative to other institutions. UConn anticipates immediate impact on the citation and awards metrics upon the hiring of top-tier faculty. Other improvements in metrics will require approximately 3-5 years to see noticeable change.

UConn will regularly analyze its metrics relative to existing members and other universities who may be potentially competitive for membership. This analysis will allow UConn to assess progress and quickly identify areas in need of further action.





## 8 RESOURCES AND LEGISLATIVE ACTION REQUIRED

Given that the most impactful avenue for quickly improving research strength and reputation is through hiring top-tier faculty, the University strongly encourages the State to release funds to support the salaries and start-up of ten high-impact faculty hires over the next 3 years.

Top-tier senior faculty have established research programs that will require significant investment to recruit and move their operations to UConn. On average, each top-tier senior faculty hire requires a \$5.5M investment, as follows:

- \$2.5M in salary and fringe benefits over 5 years (Typical salaries of world-renowned experts are \$250k-\$350k)
- \$2M in startup funds to support laboratory and equipment infrastructure
- \$1M in personnel (graduate students, post docs, laboratory technicians, etc.)

Each hire is expected to generate \$1M in annual research expenditures and direct national centers of excellence within 3 years of hiring. These faculty hires are also expected to immediately positively impact UConn's citations and awards metrics upon hire. These accomplishments will result in at least an additional \$1.8M of economic impact for the State (based on \$8 of economic impact for every \$10 of federal funding expended) and greatly increase the reputation of UConn and the State. Collectively, a \$55M investment in these hires is expected to generate over \$100M in economic development for the State in less than 10 years.

The University also encourages the State to continue its investments in research infrastructure improvements and maintenance at UConn. Such infrastructure encompasses both facilities and personnel costs.

Personnel support for research includes:

- Central research administration (research and regulatory compliance, research security, grants administration)
- Local operations staff that directly support research-active faculty

No new legislative action is envisioned currently. Rather, the University looks to the State to employ existing mechanisms to make available additional support for new faculty hires, startup packages, infrastructure maintenance and improvements, and operations personnel support.



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