

Faculty Groups Gather to Craft a United Stand on Higher-Education Policy

By Audrey Williams June

About 70 faculty members who work at public colleges across the country gathered in California over the weekend to lay the groundwork for a national campaign they hope will allow professors to strongly influence the national debate over the future of higher education.

With public colleges in particular under pressure—California's governor just this month [proposed slicing](#) an additional \$1.4-billion from that state's higher-education budget—the consensus among the meeting's attendees was that "the voices of people in the trenches" must be heard," said Lillian Taiz, president of the union that represents the 23,000 faculty members who work at California State University. "We have to ensure that the conversation that's swirling around about higher education actually leads to a solid future for our students."

The union Ms. Taiz leads, the California Faculty Association, was one of several groups represented at the meeting. At the table were faculty members affiliated with the American Association of University Professors, the American Federation of Teachers, and the National Education Association, from 21 states including Hawaii, New York, South Dakota, Michigan, and Vermont. The meeting drew professors from research institutions, rural and urban four-year institutions, and community colleges who shared information about how [budget cuts](#), enrollment caps, and students' struggles to pay tuition are playing out on their individual campuses.

"We're at a crossroads, and we all know it," said Ms. Taiz in a phone interview on Sunday. She will join other faculty leaders for a news conference on Monday about the meeting.

Last fall, the California Faculty Association began contacting various faculty groups to gauge their interest in working together to aggressively promote a vision for what higher education should look like. The association created a [draft document](#) that outlines a set of principles it believes should undergird higher-education policy over the next decade. Among them: Higher education must be inclusive, the curriculum must be broad and diverse, and faculty members must have academic freedom and enough support from their institutions to do their jobs. The group also calls on government and education leaders to "avoid the lure of reductionist measures and simplistic goals" in the quest to measure quality and success in higher education.

At the meeting, attendees agreed to take the document back to their campuses to discuss it with colleagues and garner their support. Another next step, Ms. Taiz said, will be to line up allies inside and outside of the academy—students, their parents, civil-rights groups, and think tanks, for instance.

Cary Nelson, national president of the American Association of University Professors, said in an e-mail that the meeting was "remarkably productive and enthusiastic." He said the statement of principles discussed at the meeting would be formally introduced in rolling teach-ins in April.

Ms. Taiz said that although it is sometimes a challenge to maintain the momentum behind initiatives when the people involved are scattered across the country, she doesn't expect that to be an issue because so much is at stake.

"For everyone in the room, this wasn't just finding an answer to a policy question," Ms. Taiz said. "This is the sum total of their life's work."