SAC Foundation Receives $2.21 Million Transformational Gift from Samueli Foundation to Expand Student Career Pathways

$2.21 Million Investment will fund paid internships, new automotive equipment, and program coordination to increase student living wages.



SANTA ANA, CA, UNITED STATES, September 14, 2026 / EINPresswire.com/ -- Santa Ana College Foundation (SAC) has been awarded a gift of $2.21 million from Samueli Foundation to expand Santa Ana College's paid work-based learning opportunities, strengthen career pathways, and increase living wages for students in Culinary Arts, Automotive Technology, and Diesel-Electric Transportation Technology. This is the single largest private philanthropic gift the SAC Foundation has received in its history and reflects a shared commitment between SAC and the Samueli Foundation to help students complete meaningful degree attainment in conjunction with receiving the vital career exposure needed to move directly into stable, well-paying careers.

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>
> *Santa Ana College President Dr. Annebelle Nery*

The gift builds on SAC's role as a driver of opportunity across Orange County. Santa Ana College supports more than 16,000 jobs and generates $1.6 billion in economic impact for the region each year. This investment aims to grow that impact further, preparing more students for high-demand, living-wage careers close to home, and reflects the Foundation's strategic plan to increase funding in work-based experiential learning.

The funding will support three connected priorities:

$750,000 to launch paid internships through SAC's Career Center, giving students in Culinary Arts and Automotive Technology hands-on, compensated experience with local employers before they graduate.

$1,160,000 for new automotive equipment, modernizing instructional labs so students train on the same technologies that are standard in the automotive industry. This equipment includes electric, hybrid, and alternative-fuel systems that students would encounter on the job.

$300,000 to fund faculty and staff support in coordinating and implementing the college's growing career-readiness efforts. Faculty and staff will lead employer engagement, student support, grant administration, and track outcomes, ensuring that the investment translates into real opportunity and internship access for students.

"We are ecstatic and grateful for this gift, which will help equip our students for the workforce and open a direct pathway to careers offering a full-cost-of-living wage after they graduate from Santa Ana College," said Dr. Annebelle Nery, President of Santa Ana College. "Our care for students extends far beyond their time at SAC, and this gift lets us show them that in a tangible way. A paid internship rather than an unpaid one can change the entire trajectory of a student's future."

Since Dr. Nery set this vision in motion nearly three years ago, SAC's Connect to Career initiative has taken shape through expanded employer partnerships and a growing focus on the social capital that helps students translate a degree into a job — including a pilot funding students who land unpaid internships at sites with strong potential to become hiring pipelines. The Samueli Foundation's investment is the latest and largest step in bringing that vision to scale.

"The relationships that are built through philanthropy represent such a unique intersection, where shared values and visions can be fueled by investments that reflect a mission to better our communities, together. To have the Samueli Foundation's trust, represented in this partnership and this transformational gift, is where the most powerful community synergy is born. The Samueli Foundation's commitment to move this work forward with us has been a significant affirming move in the Santa Ana College Foundation's relentless passion for our students," said Christina Romero, the Executive Director of College Advancement & Foundation.

Gesselle Gomez Ortega, a SAC student in the Culinary Arts program who aspires to open her own coffee shop, shared the impact this donation will make on her department. "This money given to us will be beneficial since we do need a new kitchen setting. It helps to have more space for students, which can increase participation and enrollment," said Ortega. "I really enjoy this program because it got me out of my comfort zone. I've enjoyed learning new culture and dishes as well."

"To have the full support of the college and Foundation was key in this milestone," shared Dr. Nery. "The Santa Ana College Foundation Board of Directors and Santa Ana College's full executive leadership team, including Dean of Instruction and Student Services Lorena Chavez, Dean of Academic Affairs Dr. Matthew Morin, and SAC Foundation President David Valentin. Their work was instrumental in receiving this gift."

To get involved in Santa Ana College's philanthropy work, visit www.givetosac.org or contact the Office of College Advancement & SAC Foundation at foundation@sac.edu.

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