

Advancing ASU as a public enterprise:

Q&A with COO Chris Howard



For over two decades, Arizona State University has challenged the status quo of the university-model in pursuit of a multi-enterprise approach for operating, researching and scaling. This model allows the university to serve more diverse learners and solve more complex challenges – better meeting the needs of a world with increasing complexity.

“From the smallest molecule to space exploration, ASU is the vanguard of addressing the most complex issues facing society today,” shares Chris Howard, executive vice president and chief operating officer advancing ASU as a Public Enterprise.

Now one year into his role, Howard is continuing his mission to position ASU as an inclusive, dynamic modern university. With a distinguished career in higher education, the military and college athletics, Howard has brought a unique vision to advance the university’s new organizational model to operate as a public enterprise.

“Arizona State University has left behind the outmoded and limited structures of traditional colleges and universities to evolve a new model that has the unparalleled ability to educate, innovate, and be of meaningful service to communities at every level,” shares ASU President Michael Crow. “Operating as an agile public enterprise dedicated to addressing social, economic and cultural needs – ASU is leading a new wave in higher education as an adaptive, national scale and

technologically-enabled force for teaching, learning and discovery.”

In advancing this model, the university is designed to serve more diverse learners and drive innovative approaches that better meet the needs of a world with increasing complexity and opportunity.

Howard furthered this message, adding that, “the [Office of the Chief Operating Officer](#) supports the university’s three enterprises – Academic, Knowledge, Learning and all other enterprise units – and enterprise units to advance ASU as one public enterprise, dedicated to increasing access, excellence and impact.”

We sat down with Howard to learn about some of the accomplishments from the past year and how they will drive ASU forward.

Question: Congratulations on your first year at Arizona State University. Tell us a bit more about the Office of the Chief Operating Officer.

Answer: The role of the Chief Operating Officer to advance ASU as a Public Enterprise is about the optimization and orchestration of the university to ensure that it’s connected, so it fulfills its Charter.

In the last year, we’ve done some pretty phenomenal things locally, nationally and internationally. We’ve supported missions abroad in the Middle East, North Africa and

Europe. We've worked with various members of the entire ASU ecosystem to help support and advance their initiatives in higher education – from academia to research to lifelong learning and fundraising.

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But it's all about strategically leading ASU into an adaptive, inclusive future to fuel creativity and innovation.

Q: How does the launching of a body like the Chief Operating Officer's Enterprise Council (CEC) advance ASU as a public enterprise?

A: We basically assembled a group of superheroes – representing disciplines from media to city planning to military strategy. We brought them together to explore important issues across the university and strengthen the Public Enterprise.

Their mission mirrors the ASU Charter, an ethos of servitude focused on who we include, as opposed to whom we exclude. It's exciting to be leading this group and watching them collaborate to bring brilliant ideas to advance the university's mission.

[Related: Visit the Office of the Chief Information Officer for more information on the COO Enterprise Council.](#)

Q: You have worked closely with Enterprise Technology and ASU's Chief Information Officer Lev Gonick to reorganize IT strategies across the university. What are some of the partnerships and initiatives that have begun transforming technology and the digital ecosystem at ASU?

A: Enterprise Technology is a great catalyst for the future of Arizona State University as a Public Enterprise. It is something that cuts across everything we do – it touches every student, every faculty, every staff member, every alumnus and everyone in our broader ASU community.



We've been able to create partnerships with top leaders in various industries, such as Google, Apple, and Salesforce – to name a few. Our overarching goal is to empower our learners to achieve their hopes, dreams and aspirations in a digitally transformed learning environment, at scale.

There is no ASU without Enterprise Technology because it's the glue that technologically adheres the entire enterprise together.

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Q: How does the ASU collaboration with the Department of Defense reflect the support of learners at a Public Enterprise?

A: The United States of America is at an inflection point when it comes to its national security. The Department of Defense (DOD) realizes that innovation is the only way to be successful, and ensures that our democratic principles go beyond the 21st century.

As a military veteran – retired United States Air Force Lieutenant Colonel – I recognize that ASU has unique and cutting-edge tools that strategically align us with government partners to advance education and innovation, including branches of government such as the DOD. With our many partners and groundbreaking research, only ASU can deliver at scale this level of innovation to enhance national security.

Q: What lessons have you shared with other organizations and educational institutions about the shaping of the ASU Public Enterprise?

A: It's a little bit like the Bruce Lee documentary – which is to be like water. It's a very fluid enterprise that tries to address everyday problems.

One of the many keys to success is fostering a leadership style that has the agility to overcome any unexpected hurdles while moving toward strategic targets that support the community at large. Our approach is to create the best organization, with the best leaders, to address the toughest problems facing our society.

The enterprise model is noted as being entrepreneurial, intrapreneurial and innovative while moving away from the outdated bureaucracy model.

Today, we stand united as a Public Enterprise. Within this public enterprise, we support our Academic Enterprise, our Knowledge Enterprise, our Learning Enterprise, and all enterprise units, with a focus on our learners from pre-kindergarten onward.

We have a series of enterprise partners that support us as a Public Enterprise, helping us to progress in technology and innovation – such as those at Skysong Innovations, the ASU Foundation and more. It's a very deliberate, intentional step by President Crow to position us to be a national service university leading the 21st century.

For more information on advancing ASU as a public enterprise, visit coo.asu.edu.

