IMPROVING ATTAINMENT:

Making Equity Part of Your State's Postsecondary Planning

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FOREWORD

Making Equity Part of Your State's Postsecondary Planning

To truly support students who traditionally have faced greater obstacles to accessing and completing higher education, states, higher education systems, and institutions need an explicit *equity focus* to inform all efforts related to this essential work.

What do we mean by equity focus? An equity focus in policy recognizes the need to eliminate disparities in educational outcomes of students from underserved and underrepresented populations. It is deliberately color-conscious, and seeks specifically to eliminate the widening postsecondary gaps for Native American, African American, and Latino students. It prioritizes institutional accountability rather than student deficits, and monitors the impact of all policy on marginalized groups. This perspective is critical because it allows states to see when policies and practices that appear to be beneficial actually are creating or worsening inequality.

In the spring of 2015, Lumina Foundation partnered with the Center for Urban Education (CUE) to develop a Strategy Labs State Policy Academy focused on *Addressing Equity Gaps in State Goals for Postsecondary Education Attainment*. A core goal of the academy was to increase the number of states with higher education attainment goals that address closing the gap for underrepresented populations. According to Lumina, "no state can meet its workforce demands without attention to long-standing equity gaps."

Researchers from CUE began by interviewing state policy leaders in four states that had already embedded equity in their state attainment goals: Colorado, Indiana, Maryland, and Texas. They also reviewed 13 state strategic plans for equity-related language. The purpose was to understand the processes states have used to address equity, how states gain buy-in from key stakeholders, and how states have framed equity within their strategic plans.

The end product of this intensive and collaborative work is a series of three resources that provide guidance to state leaders and policymakers on 1) overcoming common challenges to conversations about equity, 2) embedding equity in state policy, and 3) assessing existing—and future—policies and initiatives.

This guide, *Making Equity Part of Your State's Postsecondary Planning*, would not have been possible without the support of Lumina Foundation. We hope that it empowers state leaders to continue working to improve postsecondary attainment in the United States.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Making Equity Part of Your State's Postsecondary Planning outlines strategies and shares examples that states can use to develop postsecondary policies that address equity and help make higher attainment a reality for all marginalized groups.

The Center for Urban Education (CUE) launched this work by having conversations with policy leaders in four states (Colorado, Indiana, Maryland, and Texas) that have embedded equity in their state attainment goals. CUE also reviewed the strategic plans of 13 states for equity language. We wanted to understand the processes states use to create postsecondary attainment goals, how states build buy-in around the goals, how states structure a process for monitoring and updating goals, and how states frame equity within strategic plans.

Our team found that being intentional about eliminating disparities and ensuring that existing and new policies are aligned with the goals of closing attainment gaps is not always easy, but that there are strategies states use to successfully inform the development of postsecondary policy that emphasizes equity. We do not seek to suggest that all states should follow a similar or prescribed path. Indeed, the first strategy emphasizes that all states are different and planning must begin with a rigorous analysis of local needs and priorities. However, there are some common denominators in the process of developing effective equity-focused strategic plans and goals for postsecondary attainment.

The six strategies detailed in this guide can help states develop work plans to: understand a state's unique attainment gaps; identify the specific equity challenges implicated in those attainment gaps; address those equity challenges rigorously and intentionally in state planning and goal-setting; and build a broad base of support for an equity-focused attainment agenda.

CENTER for URBAN EDUCATION

Since 1999, the Center for Urban Education (CUE) has led socially conscious research and developed tools to help institutions of higher education produce equitable student outcomes. Located in the University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education, CUE is committed to closing racial–ethnic equity gaps and improving student outcomes in higher education. Rather than remediate students, CUE remediates practices, structures, and policies.

Six Strategies for Embedding Equity in State Attainment Goals & Postsecondary Plans

1. **Know your state.** Conduct a rigorous analysis of economic and demographic contexts.

2. **Create goals.** Create attainment goals that are clear, ambitious, and reflect equity priorities.

3. **Build a careful process.** Start the equity conversation by establishing a deliberate, inclusive process of plan development.

4. **Craft a strong message.** Develop a clear "story" about the equity imperative in your state.

5. **Know what works.** Identify policy assets and levers that can reinforce equity-focused attainment goals.

6. **Make the plan a living document.** Monitor and report publicly on progress and update goals regularly.

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MAKING EQUITY PART OF YOUR STATE'S POSTSECONDARY PLANNING

Each of the following six strategies is an essential component of the Center for Urban Education's comprehensive approach to intentionally closing attainment gaps and eliminating racial disparity in higher education through state policy. The strategies should be used by policymakers and facilitators to turn a recognition of the need for equity-minded solutions into action.

The state examples for each strategy are authentic and can be drawn upon for further guidance. It is important to keep in mind that every state confronts its own nuances, so the first strategy aims to help leaders make sense of the unique context in which their state's equity-minded policies and goals will be developed.

The strategies should be used by policymakers and facilitators to turn a recognition of the need for equity-minded solutions into action.

STATE STRATEGY #1
KNOW YOUR STATE: Conduct a rigorous analysis of economic and demographic contexts.

Effective state attainment goals are based on an understanding of *for whom and by how much* higher education access and success must improve. Developing a state plan that is informed through data analysis takes into account:

- *Which populations have the lowest rates of postsecondary attainment historically?*

- *Which populations are the fastest-growing in the state?*

- *Can the state meet its goals for 2020 or 2025 after projecting current rates of educational attainment across different student groups?*

- *How far would closing gaps in attainment (e.g., for Latinos, African Americans, low-income adults without a college education) advance the state toward overall attainment goals?*

- *What career fields and occupations in the state have strong labor market demand currently? In five, 10, 15 years? What are the levels of educational attainment required for those jobs? What are the projected shortfalls of adults with those credentials?*

- *At current rates of educational attainment, will some populations in the state be disproportionately excluded from opportunities in high-wage, high-demand jobs?*

- *What is the potential return-on-investment—in terms of economic growth, increased tax revenue, and other measures—of increasing postsecondary access and success for underserved populations?*

All states are different and planning must begin with a rigorous analysis of local needs and priorities.

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States that have developed strategic plans with a clear focus on equity have conducted these types of rigorous data analyses, often with the assistance of state demographers or external organizations. Postsecondary attainment is part of a dynamic and constantly changing social and economic environment. A state's success in educating its population both affects and is affected by economic conditions. Without knowing specifically what—and who—your attainment strategies need to focus on, strategic plans will reflect general goals rather than frameworks for action.

Equitable state policy goals acknowledge which populations are most likely to be left out of opportunities for jobs that pay family-sustaining wages due to a lack of higher education. Goals aimed at better serving those populations create a strong message that all postsecondary policy must work as a tool for equity—not as a peripheral concern, but as a fundamental ingredient of the state's overall higher education policy agenda.

The experiences of states with equity-focused attainment goals and strategic plans demonstrate that conducting rigorous data analyses and spending time communicating, vetting and revising interpretations of those analyses are worthwhile investments. Indeed, many states have found that setting aside structured time for those developing the state plan to analyze, interpret, debate, and collectively make sense of data—often with the support of an outside facilitator or expert—was vital to the development of robust and defensible state goals.

Regardless of how it is accomplished, a rigorous assessment of both demographic and workforce projections, as well as historical and projected education attainment trends, is a vital baseline for: setting clear and measurable goals (Strategy 2), developing and communicating a plan for achieving those goals (Strategies 3 and 4), aligning current and future policy strategies to the plan (Strategy 5), and monitoring the state's progress (Strategy 6).

Strategy #1 Examples: What States Understand about Themselves

COLORADO: "Colorado has the second-largest degree attainment gap in the country—that is, the gap between the educational attainment of white students and the attainment of the next-largest ethnic group, which in Colorado is Hispanic/Latino. In other words, Colorado's system performs far better for white students than it does for Hispanics or those from low-income families."

—Colorado Competes: A Completion Agenda for Higher Education (2012)

IDAHO: "Poverty is a significant barrier to education. Completion rates by income show a stark reality: young people from high-income families complete college at a 60% rate; those from low-income families complete at a 7% rate. This disparity does not exist because young people from higher income families are smarter or more talented – they are simply afforded more opportunities. This should be a significant concern for Idaho because the primary source of new students is from traditionally underrepresented and underserved populations such as Latinos, Native Americans, and first-generation families with low

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income. The 2010 U.S. Census identified that 11% of the state's population was Latino with a median age of 23, compared to [a median age of] 35 for White non-Hispanics."

—*Complete College Idaho: A Plan for Growing Talent to Fuel Innovation and Economic Growth in the Gem State (2012)*

MASSACHUSETTS: "Further, by 2020, the number of White high school graduates (whose overall college participation and completion rates are significantly higher than those for students of color) will decline by 15 percent. While the ranks of Asian/Pacific-Islander and Latino/a students continue to grow, their numbers aren't increasing fast enough to offset this decline.

Getting more students into college and through to graduation—particularly African-American and Latino/a students—isn't just a matter of social justice. It's also an economic imperative for the state. Consider this: If African-American and Latino/a adults possessed college degrees at the same rate as White adults (60%), the state would easily meet its need for more college graduates by 2025."

—*Degrees of Urgency: Why Massachusetts Needs More College Degrees Now (2014)*

STATE STRATEGY #2
CREATE GOALS: Create attainment goals that are clear, ambitious, and reflect equity priorities.

Advancing a coherent policy agenda to improve postsecondary attainment starts with a clear, measurable goal or set of goals. Attainment goals serve as the guideposts for assessing, aligning, and developing policy measures focused on postsecondary access and success. They symbolize the state's commitment to prioritize educational attainment and to advance equity as a core principle for higher education policy.

States that have set effective attainment goals demonstrating a commitment to equity have found that *clarity* and *specificity* are critical to the effectiveness of those goals. State leaders have considered: (1) the language used in expressing goals related to equity, (2) the design of those goals, and (3) how the goals are expressed within highly publicized documents such as strategic plans versus their expression in lower-visibility technical documents or reports.

Specificity vs. simplicity

State leaders have generally found that specific goals—those that pinpoint for whom and by how much attainment needs to improve—are more likely to provide a meaningful framework for effective policy and institutional action. But the language of goals should strike a balance between specificity and simplicity by focusing on what is known about the state's needs. Greater

Additional resources for state, regional and local equity context analysis:

WICHE: *Knocking at the College Door.* Provides projections of high school graduates by race/ethnicity through 2028.
http://knocking.wiche.edu/

Lumina Foundation: *Stronger Nation 2016.* Provides current and trend data on postsecondary attainment at the national, state, and county levels, as well as for the 100 most populous metropolitan regions.
https://www.luminafoundation.org/stronger_nation2016

PolicyLink National Equity Atlas. Provides data and downloadable graphic illustrations for a comprehensive set of equity indicators at the state, regional and national level, including demographic change, income inequality and unemployment, educational attainment and job requirements, poverty and GDP gains related to racial equity. http://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators

Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. Provides state and national projections of educational attainment required to meet future workforce needs.
https://cew.georgetown.edu/

specificity makes a goal more measurable; simplicity is important for messaging and building broad buy-in.

Some states have found that closing attainment gaps for particular populations (e.g., Latinos and African Americans) is essential to achieving their overall attainment goal and have thus crafted goals specific to those groups. Other states have recognized the importance of closing attainment gaps among a wide array of groups and thus expressed an equity goal in more general terms, such as "eliminating equity gaps for underserved populations." These states have found it important, however, to define clearly who "underserved" includes, through targets or sub-goals for specific groups.

> *Example: "Close attainment gaps for Latino, African American, low-income, and rural populations" is more effective than "Close attainment gaps for underrepresented groups" because it embeds a definition of equity based on the unique demographic contexts of the state, draws attention to specific needs, and avoids ambiguity.*

Equity goal focus and language

State leaders have also been intentional about how to formulate and articulate equity goals using language that reflects an analysis of the state context. There is no "one size fits all" way of expressing equity-focused goals, but the most common formulations of equity-focused goals across states currently are:

1. *To "close gaps" in attainment between groups*—for example, between "underrepresented minority" (typically, Hispanic/Latino, African American, and Native American) populations and white/Asian populations. This formulation has the benefit of focusing attention on the "gap" and can easily be related to disparities in economic opportunity and workforce development needs. But it also suggests that one population is the standard for everyone rather than emphasizing that attainment for all populations need to improve.

2. *To increase rates/numbers of attainment for particular groups.* Some states set goals that target increases in attainment for particular groups rather than (or in addition to) closing gaps. This approach has the benefit of emphasizing that the state needs to increase attainment for all groups, and that some need to see greater increases than others. However, goals expressed in terms of overall increases for separate groups are more complex than goals based on "closing gaps" and may be more difficult to translate into branding and messaging.

3. *To close gaps in specific dimensions of equity.* Many states have specific goals related to increasing equity within different aspects of postsecondary attainment, such as equity in resources (e.g., financial aid), participation, or completion. Goals framed this way may help link equity and attainment goals to a broader postsecondary policy agenda.

Embed equity focus at a high level

Within its 20-point state policy agenda, Lumina Foundation has documented

> Some states set goals that target increases in attainment for particular groups rather than (or in addition to) closing gaps. This approach has the benefit of emphasizing that the state needs to increase attainment for all groups, and that some need to see greater increases than others.

how several states have addressed the closing of equity gaps and articulated attainment goals in statute and/or the state's strategic plan for postsecondary education. If equity-related goals are institutionalized at the state level, they are more likely to serve as meaningful drivers of policy *and* outlast a single commissioner, governor, or legislative champion.

Strategy #2 Examples: How States Create Clear and Realistic Goals

TEXAS: Close gaps and increase overall rates and numbers.

- "GOAL 1: By 2015, close the gaps in participation rates across Texas to add 500,000 more students.

    Interim Targets:

    - Increase the overall Texas higher education participation rate from 5 percent to 5.2 percent (150,000 students) by 2005, to 5.5 percent (175,000 students) by 2010, and to 5.7 percent (180,000 students) by 2015.

    - Increase the higher education participation rate for the Black population of Texas from 4.6 percent to 5.1 percent (22,200 students) by 2005, to 5.4 percent (15,000 students) by 2010, and to 5.7 percent (19,300 students) by 2015.

    - Increase the higher education participation rate for the Hispanic population of Texas from 3.7 percent to 4.4 percent (101,600 students) by 2005, to 5.1 percent (120,000 students) by 2010, and to 5.7 percent (120,000 students) by 2015."

—Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Closing the Gaps (2000; 2006)

INDIANA: Focus on completion as one aspect of attainment.

- "A call to close the achievement gap. Recognizing that Indiana must significantly increase college completion rates for both recent high school graduates and returning adult students, the Commission:

    1. Resolved to cut the college completion gap between underrepresented student populations and Indiana's overall student population in half by the year 2018 and eliminate it altogether by 2025.

    2. Called upon Indiana's colleges and universities to publicly set targets for closing completion rate gaps for underrepresented populations on their campuses.

Pledged to annually publish the college completion rates for student demographic groups and highlight successful strategies for closing the achievement gap as part of the new Indiana College Completion Report."

—Indiana Commission for Higher Education, "Commission sets sights on closing college achievement gap" (2013)

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STATE STRATEGY #3
BUILD A CAREFUL PROCESS: Start the equity conversation by establishing a deliberate, inclusive plan-development process.

State leaders who have developed state plans and goals have noted that the *process* of developing them itself has tremendous value—in terms of building buy-in and generating broad ownership over the priorities. Statewide higher education plans are important as symbolic tools; some leaders have even called theirs the "North Star" for postsecondary policy. They have noted the benefits of an organized and structured process that was deliberate and invested adequate time and resources. Some key aspects of structured approaches are listed below.

- *Carefully selecting a committee or taskforce to develop and take ownership of the plan and goals.* This includes seeking out stakeholders across sectors, community leaders or elected officials with knowledge of higher education, state demographers, the business community, and other community representatives—including those who may be "champions" for advancing equity.

- *Dividing the work into "subgroups" or "workgroups" to allow for in-depth analysis and writing around particular priorities.* Smaller workgroups should meet more often than the core committee to encourage depth and care in the crafting of highly contextualized language, analysis, or goals. These more in-depth small-group working structures help to surface specific equity challenges and engage different perspectives.

- *Creating structured time for group "learning" around state needs, particularly around analysis and interpretation of disaggregated data.* The process for learning from data is most effective as a continuous conversation rather than a one-time event. Anchoring attainment plans and goals in unique state contexts in a meaningful way requires a structured process for learning from data. For example, the committee tasked with plan development in Texas set aside time in a weekly meeting to "grapple with data" and clarify and refine assumptions and priorities. In other states, similar meetings focused on different equity challenges occurred monthly, or in the form of one- or two-day retreats every few months.

- *Hiring trained facilitators to manage the conversation and keep meetings on task.* In some cases, hiring an external facilitator has the added benefit of bringing in an objective or neutral perspective. This can help balance competing priorities and minimize tensions around particularly difficult or politicized topics—such as equity among marginalized groups. Though hiring a facilitator poses an additional cost for the process, some states, including Colorado, have found it to be a worthwhile investment because it brings greater efficiency to the development process.

- *Seeking outside experts to provide guidance on state equity challenges.* Additional expertise boosts the ongoing learning process necessary for leaders to make informed decisions. Particularly around issues of equity,

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states such as Texas and Indiana have found it valuable to invite outside experts to provide national context, big-picture frameworks and ideas, or insights from other states or sectors. To reduce costs, some states have used online venues to reduce costs. Texas, for instance, brought in speakers via Skype.

- *Meeting with campus leaders to understand institutions' unique equity challenges—and strengths.* Institutions will ultimately be responsible for taking the actions and making the changes necessary to yield increases in state attainment and reduce equity gaps. Helping institutions understand campus-level equity challenges and incorporating their unique needs or goals into the planning process can ensure that the goals and plans are meaningful at the institutional level. In some states, this took the form of informal meetings between those developing the plan and campus leaders. Other states used existing institutional councils or other inter-institutional structures as forums for discussions about state goals and plans.

- *Distributing drafts of the plan broadly for feedback to increase buy-in around the equity imperative.* Maryland's commission formally circulated their plan three times to receive feedback from a wide range of key stakeholders. Texas' coordinating board routinely sends committee members to different parts of the state to regional "College Town Hall" meetings to receive feedback from stakeholders—including the postsecondary community, representatives from business and industry, colleagues in the legislature, and other higher education organizations. Such practices have helped states incorporate a wider range of ideas and build support for the initiative.

Strategy #3 Examples: How Some States Build Collaboration and Gather Input.

COLORADO: "The process of creating a new statewide master plan supported by performance contracts for Colorado's public higher education system is inherently time-consuming given the need for full participation and agreement among and across different institutions. Without meaningful 'buy-in' from the institutions, the master plan would be little more than an aspirational document. For this reason, the CCHE made it a priority to solicit input from officers of various units on campuses throughout the state at every stage of the planning process, in spite of the fact that this required additional time and effort. Taking the time for a collaborative process also helped ensure that the performance measures eventually agreed upon would be meaningful, understandable, and achievable."

—Colorado Competes, FY 2013-2014 Executive Summary (2013)

MARYLAND: The Maryland Higher Education Commission established six writing groups consisting of faculty, administrators, and state officials from across sectors of higher education. These six groups—including one focused explicitly on equity issues—developed key ideas and content that fed into the Maryland Ready state plan, providing a broad base of ownership and input.

—Maryland Ready (2013);

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TEXAS: An extensive period of data analysis, internal research, and vetting with external stakeholders was vital to the development and renewal of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board "Closing the Gaps" plan. Leaders in Texas attribute their success embedding equity into the state postsecondary agenda to this extensive and well thought out process. See http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/: "Developing the next long-term higher education plan for Texas" for a detailed description of THECB's planning process.

—*Closing the Gaps (2000; 2006)*

STATE STRATEGY #4
CRAFT A STRONG MESSAGE: Develop a clear "story" about the equity imperative in your state.

Messaging that creates a sense of "urgency" is important to successful equity-focused state attainment goals and plans. A strong strategy will motivate action by building buy-in among the necessary actors, and can lead to a wide array of supporting changes in policy and practice.

Most states have recognized that building an equity-focused postsecondary agenda requires a rationale crafted to frame equity as an important factor in addressing the state's overarching values and priorities. Narratives used to convey the importance of equity are essential for navigating political terrain and ensuring broad acceptance. The most common rationales used across the states to communicate the role of equity are listed below.

Economic growth, workforce demand and state return on investment

The need to ensure the state's economic viability is the most common and compelling rationale for incorporating an equity focus in postsecondary plans. Leaders recognize that reaching attainment goals helps to maintain a skilled workforce and to grow long-term per capita income and state revenues. This "return on investment" (ROI) rationale can be employed to garner support for policy advancing postsecondary attainment from the business community and legislators. It advances equity as a pragmatic and obvious strategy for growing overall human capital in the state.

Demographic change

Demographic shifts in nearly every state indicate that traditional college-going populations are increasingly likely to be non-white. Related to the economic growth rationale—but distinct in terms of the emphasis on the need to respond to shifting demographics—many states have found it effective to frame a focus on equity within a clear presentation of data showing demographic change. This rationale puts forward the idea that the state must help diverse populations enter and succeed in postsecondary education—not just to ensure economic growth, but because the very composition of the state is changing.

Leaders recognize that reaching attainment goals helps to maintain a skilled workforce and to grow long-term per capita income and state revenues.

Equal opportunity and moral imperative

Some state plans note the obligation of state government to give all individuals the opportunity to succeed—a rationale that draws on the narrative of the American Dream and principles of equal opportunity. Others reference an implicit moral imperative for addressing equity. Such rationales may point to the relationships between postsecondary attainment and poverty, access to healthcare, housing, and other factors.

"Branding and selling" the plan

A number of states have found it valuable to "brand" their state attainment plan with a highly recognizable title or logo. Titles or slogans like "Maryland Ready" and "#Memo2MA" capture the emotional component of packaging policy goals and strategies. Oregon's "40-40-20" goal provides a catchy and easy-to-remember slogan. Such brands provide memorable reference points to which the public can connect, and that governors, legislators and other elected officials can easily reference as they lay out their own policy agendas.

Strategy #4 Examples: Clear and Compelling Communication Matters

OREGON: Example of an equity rationale based on economic growth and state ROI. "Oregon faces two growing opportunity gaps that threaten our economic competitiveness and our capacity to innovate. The first is the persistent achievement gap between our growing populations of communities of color, immigrants, migrants, and low-income rural students with our more affluent white students. While students of color make up over 30% of our state- and are growing at an inspiriting rate—our achievement gap has continued to persist. As our diversity grows and our ability to meet the needs of these students remains stagnant or declines—we limit the opportunity of everyone in Oregon. The persistent educational disparities have cost Oregon billions of dollars in lost economic output and these losses are compounded every year we choose not to properly address these inequalities."

—*Oregon Education Investment Board, Equity Lens (2014)*

MARYLAND: Example of an equity rationale based on demographic change. "The State's changing demography influences most of the goals included in Maryland Ready. These changes will force the State and all Maryland postsecondary institutions to examine their outreach and recruitment strategies, teaching and instruction methods, financial aid systems, academic support services, and use of technology. In many ways the State's future social and economic outlook is dependent upon how well postsecondary institutions adapt to the changing demography and educate and support these populations. It is critical that Maryland colleges and universities adjust current philosophies, practices, and policies to accommodate students who are less white, less affluent, and of nontraditional age."

—*Maryland Ready (2013)*

The persistent educational disparities have cost Oregon billions of dollars in lost economic output and these losses are compounded every year we choose not to properly address these inequalities.

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MASSACHUSETTS: **Example of an equity rationale based on demographic change.** "Further, by 2020, the number of White high school graduates (whose overall college participation and completion rates are significantly higher than those for students of color) will decline by 15 percent. While the ranks of Asian/Pacific-Islander and Latino/a students continue to grow, their numbers aren't increasing fast enough to offset this decline. Getting more students into college and through to graduation—particularly African-American and Latino/a students—isn't just a matter of social justice. It's also an economic imperative for the state. Consider this: If African-American and Latino/a adults possessed college degrees at the same rate as White adults (60%), the state would easily meet its need for more college graduates by 2025."

—Degrees of Urgency: Why Massachusetts Needs More College Graduates Now (2014)

COLORADO: **Example of an equity rationale based on promise of equal opportunity.** "Nevertheless, important challenges lie ahead, and failure to meet them may result in disintegration of a system built upon the bold, uniquely American foundational belief that all citizens, from military veterans to low-income inner-city youth, deserve the opportunity to improve their station in life through education."

—Colorado Competes (2012)

OREGON: **Example of an effective goal "brand" or slogan. "40-40-20 Goal."** "The Legislative Assembly declares that the mission of all education beyond high school in Oregon includes achievement of the following by 2025:

1. Ensure that at least **40 percent** of adult Oregonians have earned a bachelor's degree or higher.

2. Ensure that at least **40 percent** of adult Oregonians have earned an associate's degree or post-secondary credential as their highest level of educational attainment.

3. Ensure that the remaining **20 percent** or less of all adult Oregonians have earned a high school diploma, an extended or modified high school diploma or the equivalent of a high school diploma as their highest level of educational attainment."

—Or. Rev. Stat., 351.009 §3 (2011) / Oregon University System (2011)

Consider this: If African-American and Latino/a adults possessed college degrees at the same rate as White adults (60%), the state would easily meet its need for more college graduates by 2025.

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STATE STRATEGY #5
KNOW WHAT WORKS: Identify policy assets and levers that can reinforce equity-focused attainment goals.

Understanding the policies and strategies already in place—and what works—is an essential starting point for making postsecondary attainment goals and plans *actionable* at the state and institutional levels. Many plans with an explicit commitment to equity outline specific state policy or programmatic strategies that can be used to advance equity in attainment. Emphasizing the value of these policies—such as funding models or financial aid—and strategies—such as remedial redesign or structured pathways—as *tools for equity* helps make clear that closing attainment gaps is important and possible.

Two sets of strategies used by states to advance policy aligned with equity-focused goals and plans are detailed below.

Identify existing policy levers available to the postsecondary planning entity to influence institutional behavior (e.g., funding mechanisms, accountability reporting, etc.)

Most often, states with equity-focused attainment goals have reframed resource allocation processes from an equity perspective. A resource allocation system guided by such a lens can help institutions be deliberate about creating programs, policies, and procedures that support students who have not traditionally been well-served by higher education.

Identify policy and programmatic "equity assets"

Equity assets are existing policies or programs that are currently serving—or could be improved to serve—as tools to advance equity. A key strategy evident within several state plans is to explicitly identify these assets. All states have a wide range of existing policies or programs that currently work to advance equity or could be enhanced if evaluated from an equity perspective. State plans that identify these existing equity assets make clear how existing resources in the state can be deployed to more effectively support equity—and thereby make progress towards ambitious attainment goals. Contextualizing the priorities and goals outlined in the plan with existing policies and strategies can help align efforts to achieve equity—and inspire action.

Strategy #5 Examples: Working with Existing Policy Levers

OREGON: **Example of using existing policy levers to embed an equity focus.** "Objective: By utilizing an equity lens, the OEIB [Oregon Education Investment Board] aims to provide a common vocabulary and protocol for resource allocation and evaluating strategic investments. The following questions will be considered for resource allocation and evaluating strategic investments:

> A resource allocation system guided by such a lens can help institutions be deliberate about creating programs, policies, and procedures that support students who have not traditionally been well-served by higher education.

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1. Who are the racial/ethnic and underserved groups affected? What is the potential impact of the resource allocation and strategic investment to these groups?

2. Does the decision being made ignore or worsen existing disparities or produce other unintended consequences? What is the impact on eliminating the opportunity gap?

3. How does the investment or resource allocation advance the 40/40/20 goal?

4. What are the barriers to more equitable outcomes? (e.g. mandated, political, emotional, financial, programmatic or managerial)

5. How have you intentionally involved stakeholders who are also members of the communities affected by the strategic investment or resource allocation? How do you validate your assessment in (1), (2) and (3)?

6. How will you modify or enhance your strategies to ensure each learner and community's individual and cultural needs are met?

7. How are you collecting data on race, ethnicity, and native language?

8. What is your commitment to P-20 professional learning for equity? What resources are you allocating for training in cultural responsive instruction?

Creating a culture of equity requires monitoring, encouragement, resources, data, and opportunity. OEIB will apply the equity lens to strategic investment proposals reviews, as well as its practices as a board."

 —Oregon Education Investment Board, Equity Lens (2014)

MARYLAND: Example of using existing policy levers to embed an equity focus. "As part of the commission's mandatory eight-year regulatory review, MHEC [Maryland Higher Education Commission] will revisit its statutory and regulatory definitions and references to diversity to ensure that the concept is defined broadly, and inclusively, and encompasses those whose opportunity and access to postsecondary education is limited. These groups include underrepresented minorities, older adults, students with disabilities, and independent students.

Implementation Measures/Strategies:

• By FY 2015, the State will review, modify, and amend references to diversity in COMAR [Code of Maryland] to ensure language is more inclusive of Maryland's diverse population.

• By FY 2016, the State will review and use the Attorney General's Strengthening Diversity in Maryland Colleges and Universities: A Legal Roadmap as a tool for expanding the conception, application, and implementation of diversity initiatives beyond race, ethnicity, and gender, without abandoning these areas where their use is in compliance with current law and in the best interest of advancing postsecondary education for all Marylanders.

As part of the commission's mandatory eight-year regulatory review, MHEC [Maryland Higher Education Commission] will revisit its statutory and regulatory definitions and references to diversity to ensure that the concept is defined broadly, and inclusively, and encompasses those whose opportunity and access to postsecondary education is limited.

The commission will work with the public postsecondary segments to ensure that members of the university community develop cultural competence and an appreciation for a diverse range of values, beliefs, and attitudes.

Implementation Measures/Strategies:

- By FY 2018, the State will use information and data gathered from institutional submissions required for the Cultural Diversity Report for Maryland Postsecondary Education to identify postsecondary institutions needing improvement in the cultivation of a culturally competent postsecondary community."

—Maryland Ready (2013)

INDIANA: Example of identifying existing policies that can support equity goals. The Indiana Commission of Higher Education provided research-based ideas that promote equity-focused policies and programs throughout its plan, *Reaching Higher, Achieving More*. For example, three broad focal areas were identified that can help the state meet its equity goals: preparation, remedial redesign, and smarter pathways. Under each area, the Commission made suggestions on how to increase student success, recognizing that improvements in these areas would disproportionately impact success rates for students historically underrepresented in higher education. For example, under the strategy of "Smarter Pathways," the Commission recommends that institutions "implement highly structured, cohort-based programs for high-demand degrees that serve high proportions of low-income and working students" and "promote on-time degree maps that articulate clear pathways for students to earn a certificate within one-year, an associate degree within two-years and a bachelor's degree within four-years." Indiana's plan recognizes that such strategies, which are already being implemented by many states, may serve as tools for equity.

—Reaching Higher, Achieving More (2012)

Three broad focal areas were identified that can help [Indiana] meet its equity goals: preparation, remedial design, and smarter pathways.

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STATE STRATEGY #6
MAKE THE PLAN A LIVING DOCUMENT:
Monitor and report on progress, and update goals to reflect changes over time.

States with long-standing strategic plans that have been effective in guiding policy and building a public agenda have made their plans and goals "living documents." Regular updates ensure that postsecondary plans and attainment goals remain relevant and meaningful. Progress reports to key stakeholders and leaders reinforce the importance of the goals, helping to keep them engaged. This strategy is general, but—*especially* with respect to equity-related goals—constantly shifting economic, political and demographic landscapes make it critical to continually update and communicate the state's commitment to closing attainment gaps.

States have used several strategies to ensure their plans are living documents, and to maintain a focus on equity within the goals.

Reporting through postsecondary attainment dashboards

Some states have developed public reporting mechanisms designed to inform the public about the state's progress toward its attainment goals by providing annual updates on key metrics. The strong examples of public dashboards related to postsecondary attainment goals do the following:

- *Focus on trends and progress towards goals;*

- *Show disaggregated data and reinforce the importance of equity in reaching overall attainment goals; and*

- *Provide data by institution to reinforce institutional commitment.*

Training for new university presidents and trustees

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) provides training to all new university trustees, including an orientation on their institution's status on key metrics associated with the "Closing the Gaps" plan. Other states also incorporate orientation and status updates of progress on state attainment goals in their regular meetings with trustees, presidents, faculty associations, business groups and others. Ensuring that disaggregated data and progress toward equity goals are featured in these updates helps reinforce the state's commitment to equity within the broader attainment agenda.

Ongoing, structured internal learning

States that have worked to make their plans and goals living documents have also emphasized the importance of creating structured processes for ongoing learning within the coordinating board or commission staff. These structured learning processes mirror those described in Strategy 1—and the process of analyzing the state population and tailoring the plan to those unique contexts

The strong examples of public dashboards related to postsecondary attainment goals do the following:

- Focus on trends and progress towards goals;

- Show disaggregated data and reinforce the importance of equity in reaching overall attainment goals; and

- Provide data by institution to reinforce institutional commitment.

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should be ongoing. State leaders have noted the need to be "relentless" about their equity challenges, and to work to ensure that goals and plans accurately reflect the needs of the state and its diverse population.

Engaging institutions in goal-setting and reporting

Finding meaningful ways to engage institutions in a state's postsecondary attainment plan—beyond accountability mechanisms—is critical to ensuring that the plan and its goals become living, actionable documents. States that have focused on making their plans living have noted the importance of consistent communication with institutions. Because the goals of the state plan serve as a framework for institutions to develop strategies to address attainment gaps specific to their campuses, aligning state and institutional goals is vital to sustained progress.

Embedding equity in institutional accountability mechanisms

As described in Strategy 5, a number of states have prioritized equity within accountability and/or performance-based funding models for institutions. Doing so not only reinforces the state's commitment to equity, but also helps make the attainment goals of the postsecondary plan a living framework for action.
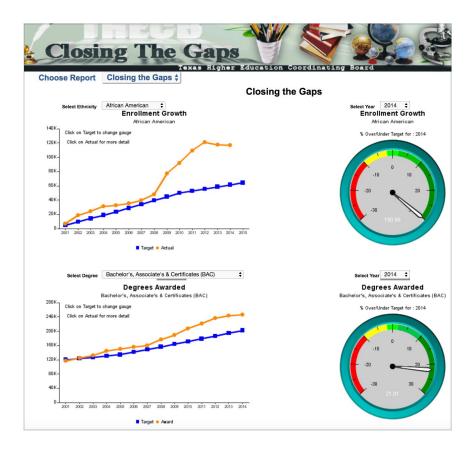
Strategy #6 Examples: Keeping the Public Informed on Progress

INDIANA: **Example of using accountability to reinforce equity goals.** The Indiana Commission for Higher Education (ICHE) made a resolution calling on all public institutions to set goals for closing completion rate gaps for underrepresented populations on their campuses, and annually reports disaggregated data showing progress toward the goal at each public institution. Indiana's outcomes-based funding model also provides additional funding to institutions, based on the completion rates of at-risk students (defined as Pell-eligible).

TEXAS: **Example of reporting through a public dashboard to reinforce equity goals.** The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) maintains a public dashboard with a few select indicators showing progress toward the key interim targets and goals from the state's "Closing the Gaps" plan.

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HAWAII: **Example of institutional reporting and planning to reinforce equity goals.** The University of Hawaii System (UHS) provides annual "Campus Scorecards" with key indicators of student success, including time and credits to degree and others related to on-time completion. UHS also produces Campus Scorecards for each campus in the system showing improvements in success rates for Native Hawaiian students.

Each of the 10 UHS campuses and the system itself are also required to complete and continually update a Hawaii Graduation Initiative (HGI) Work Plan in which they "identify large scale/high impact strategies, develop tactics necessary to implement the strategies, and prioritize next steps."

UHS also produces Campus Scorecards for each campus in the system showing improvements in success rates for Native Hawaiian students.

CENTER *for* URBAN EDUCATION

Since 1999, the Center for Urban Education (CUE) has led socially conscious research and developed tools to help institutions of higher education produce equitable student outcomes. Located in the University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education, CUE is committed to closing racial–ethnic equity gaps and improving student outcomes in higher education. Rather than remediate students, CUE remediates practices, structures, and policies.

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