



SHEEO

STATE HIGHER EDUCATION EXECUTIVE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE:

IMPROVING EQUITY AND OPPORTUNITY THROUGH POSTSECONDARY DATA

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Presentations from the convening are available on the [SHEEO Postsecondary Data website](#). The information in this report and accompanying website may be freely used with the appropriate attribution and citation: State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO).

The State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) serves the executives of statewide governing, policy, and coordinating boards of postsecondary education and their staffs. Founded in 1954, SHEEO promotes an environment that values higher education and its role in ensuring the equitable education of all Americans, regardless of race/ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic factors. Together with its members, SHEEO aims to achieve this vision by equipping state higher education executive officers and their staffs with the tools to effectively advance the value of higher education, promoting public policies and academic practices that enable all Americans to achieve success in the 21st century, and serving as an advocate for state higher education leadership. For more information, visit sheeo.org.

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INTRODUCTION

State postsecondary education data systems are vital assets for policymakers, researchers, and the public. The State Higher Education Executive Officers Association's (SHEEO) Communities of Practice project builds upon SHEEO's efforts to measure the capacity and effective use of state postsecondary data systems and provides states with opportunities to develop solutions to common system issues. Since 2010, SHEEO has conducted periodic studies of the content, structure, and use of state postsecondary data systems through its Strong Foundations survey. Building on that work, in 2017 SHEEO began convening an ongoing series of Communities of Practice. These events provide opportunities for information sharing, professional development, and technical assistance to state postsecondary policy analysts and researchers. Each of the Communities of Practice also gives participating states opportunities to learn from national experts, connect with intrastate and interstate peers, and reflect in-depth on their data systems' capacities, uses, and barriers. Over the project's life, 39 states and the District of Columbia have participated in one or more Communities of Practice.

The seventh Community of Practice convening, "*Improving Equity and Opportunity through Postsecondary Data*," was held September 28-29, 2022, in Denver, CO. The two-day meeting included more than 80 representatives from 17 states: Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawai'i, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Washington, and the District of Columbia. Teams included representatives from SHEEO agency academic affairs, workforce, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and research and data offices and their partners at state agencies and two- and four-year postsecondary institutions.

Given the recent impacts on higher education from the COVID-19 pandemic, social justice unrest, and economic pressures facing the country, a focus on equity and opportunity was timely for this Community of Practice. SHEEO agency staff communicated a need to inform state attainment and economic goals through improved collection and use of postsecondary student unit record data. Within and across state teams, Community of Practice attendees were able to learn more about the nuances and impacts of equity-and opportunity-focused data collection, disaggregation, and visualization; to better understand how to effectively communicate and illustrate the need for and the contributions of equitable student success in their states; and to reflect on their capacity, partnerships, and resources available to effectively engage in this work.

In this paper, SHEEO shares the presentations, resources, and team activities from the convening. This information can be used by SHEEO agencies to reflect on their current practices, plan and develop effective data policies, and better use data to improve postsecondary equity and opportunity outcomes in their states.

MAKING THE CASE FOR EQUITY AND OPPORTUNITY

Postsecondary data is a powerful tool to meet increasing calls for progressing toward student success and state economic goals. When used simultaneously to advance equitable outcomes associated with student attainment and workforce metrics, opportunity for all can be realized. To set the stage for the Community of Practice convening, SHEEO invited experts from advocacy, academic, and philanthropic organizations to share successful examples and useful resources for how equity and opportunity focused data work can improve policy, practice, and the lives of students and state stakeholders.

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE KEYNOTES & WORKSHOP INFORMATION

KEYNOTE: MEETING THE MOMENT - USING DATA TO ADVANCE RACIAL EQUITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Chris Nellum, executive director of The Education Trust-West provided the *opening keynote* for the convening by underscoring the importance of higher education at this historical juncture. Drawing from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and historic skepticism about the value of a college degree, Nellum argued that colleges and universities, and the states in which they operate, must attract, retain, and support students in entirely new ways, including a bold focus on racial equity. According to Nellum, the equitable use of data plays an integral role in guiding states toward new approaches—and closing persistent equity gaps as they do so. As higher education navigates today’s unpredictable landscape, racial justice and data must go hand-in-hand to meet societal and economic demands. Nellum shared resources and examples of how data are being used to address systemic disparities through equity- and opportunity-oriented interventions, policies, and programs.

KEYNOTE RESOURCES

Data Equity Walk Toolkit by The Education Trust-West

Mapping the Digital Divide by The Education Trust-West

The Color of Law by Richard Rothstein

Supporting Student Parents at Fresno State

The California State University Graduation Initiative 2025

KEYNOTE: EMBEDDING EQUITY IN DATA INFRASTRUCTURE - TAKING A SYSTEMS-BASED APPROACH

If using equity and opportunity is an imperative to improve student and economic outcomes, it is also necessary that data be accessible and shareable across sectors. Providing the *second keynote* of the convening, Nicole Ifill, deputy director for data at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) highlighted the importance of effectively integrating data across P20W systems and shared examples of measuring, connecting, and communicating the value of equity and economic security to postsecondary and state priorities. In her presentation, Ifill highlighted the importance of equity in data systems, how equity can be better measured, and equity's value for improving K-12, higher education, and workforce outcomes. She also shared BMGF-funded examples of equitable data use frameworks and value propositions, including the Institute for Higher Education Policy's Postsecondary Value Commission Framework and Mathematica's Education-to-Workforce Indicator Framework.

KEYNOTE RESOURCES

Education-to-Workforce Indicator Framework: Using Data to Promote Equity and Economic Security for All from Mathematica

Data Equity Principles from Mathematica

Postsecondary Value Commission from IHEP

Postsecondary Value Commission Measuring Value from IHEP

WORKSHOP: ENGAGING STATE BOARDS AND LEADERSHIP IN EQUITY WORK

To effectively inform state goals, data associated with equity and opportunity must be effectively communicated. Felecia Commodore, associate professor at Old Dominion University, presented a workshop on communicating equity and opportunity to state leadership during the convening. *In her presentation*, Commodore argued that equity should be considered a mindset and responsibility that guides the work of all of those tasked with improving higher education. Building on her research with institutional boards, Commodore discussed four approaches to communicating the importance of equity to leadership in a way that contextualizes equity to broad perspectives: equity as a value-add (which requires an understanding of what drives leaders' interests and values); equity as interest convergence (which works to align equity goals with overarching state and leadership goals); equity in the public interest (which works to align equity work with the broader stakeholder values and concerns); and equity as an economic advantage (which pairs equity with state's and leadership's return on investment priorities). Teams were then led through a *case study exercise*, wherein they employed these varied strategies to communicate equity and opportunity priorities to fictionalized state boards based on differentiated structures, state priorities. References to Commodore's research that informed the workshop can be found in *Appendix A*.

INFORMATION FOR REFLECTION, PLANNING, & ACTION

While the keynote and workshop speakers articulated the needs, scope, and communications associated with equity and opportunity work, the bulk of the convening was focused on SHEEO agencies providing information on how they are engaging in equity and opportunity work. State team speakers addressed developing equity frameworks and associated data metrics, disaggregation, and visualizations, as means for improving equity and opportunity in their states. After each of the state team presentations, states were given time to work collaboratively within and across their state teams on the issues discussed by presenters. At each Community of Practice, SHEEO facilitates these state team times, allowing attendees to reflect on and incorporate what they have learned and to make plans for employing that learning after the convening's conclusion. Below is information on the presentations, resources, and team time activity prompts. This information can be used by state higher education leaders to reflect upon current practice and plan for future change.

DEVELOPING AN EQUITY LENS FRAMEWORK TO IMPROVE DATA AND OUTCOMES

Equity lens frameworks are important foundational tools for informing states' progress toward student and economic goals outcomes. Equity frameworks are mechanisms that allow states to reflect on and articulate their shared values, goals, and assumptions and how those inform their data collection and use. These frameworks can be used as tools for evaluating and improving data, policies, programs, and practices. At the convening, Rudyane Rivera-Lindstrom, director of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and Amy Cox, director of the office of research and data, from the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission (OHECC), and Laís Martinez, assistant commissioner for equity, diversity, and inclusion, and Carrie Mayne, chief economist, at the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE), shared the equity lens frameworks they have developed at their SHEEO agencies. Through their presentations and associated resources, they conveyed how and why the frameworks were developed and how they use their frameworks to improve their states' data collection, reporting, and policy efforts.

Using OHECC's and USHE's frameworks and information as models, SHEEO created a team time activity to encourage state teams at the CoP to begin articulating the values, goals, and assumptions related to their data work at the intersection of equity and opportunity. States interested in developing equity lens frameworks of their own can also use these resources and the activity prompts here and in the sections below to start reflecting on their values and goals and assessing their current and future practices.

PRESENTATION RESOURCES

USHE Presentation
USHE Equity Lens Framework
USHE Equity Lens Handout
USHE Strategic Plan
Oregon HECC Equity Lens
Oregon HECC Equity Impact Protocol
Oregon HECC Equity Progress
Oregon HECC Equity Work Expectations
Oregon HECC Statewide Higher Education Snapshots
Oregon HECC Strategic Roadmap
Oregon HECC Real Opportunity Video

TEAM ACTIVITY

Instructions: Within your team and informed by the presentations and resources on equity lens frameworks, work together to develop your team's equity lens framework by answering the questions below. If you have already begun this work, think about where you want to go next in answering these questions.

1. **Values/Beliefs/Definitions:** What are our shared values, beliefs, and definitions related to equity and opportunity? How do we currently define equity, diversity, and inclusion? Who is included or centered in those definitions? What do we need to add or augment?
2. **Goals:** What are our equity- and opportunity-informed goals? How/do those goals map to other goals or strategic plans for our state/system/agency?
3. **Assumptions & Questions:** What are we currently missing or what could we improve on (including data!)? Whose insight/perspective are we lacking? What barriers or opportunities exist to improving equity in our practices? In our broader state/system context?

EQUITY- AND OPPORTUNITY-FOCUSED METRICS AND DISAGGREGATION

Employing an equity lens framework is one way to examine and improve the data collected and used to inform equity and opportunity efforts. Using an equity lens approach, CoP attendees heard from their colleagues on ways to improve the metrics they use and how they use them to inform data work. Gregory DeSantis, vice president of student success and academic initiatives, and Jan Kiehne, interim associate vice president for research and system effectiveness and data privacy officer, at the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU), and Kate Akers, assistant vice chancellor of advanced analytics data, at the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE), have focused their data strategy on metrics measuring equity and opportunity progress and initiatives. Both states presented their use of equity- and opportunity-focused metrics and key performance indicators to explore and improve student and state opportunities and outcomes.

Improving equity and opportunity is not just reliant on what data elements are collected, but how those elements are disaggregated. Postsecondary data systems have long collected and used disaggregated data to inform decision- and policy-making. Many of these disaggregations are informed by National Center for Educational Statistics' (NCES) Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data System (IPEDS) reporting standards.¹ However, to advance equity and opportunity, SHEEO agencies are increasingly disaggregating data beyond IPEDS standards. Doing so allows states to better understand the nuances within various demographic groups to better support student and state outcomes. Pearl Iboshi, director (retired) of institutional research and analysis from the University of Hawai'i (UH) system, and Meredith Fergus, director of research at the Minnesota Office of Higher Education (MOHE), shared how their two states have implemented categories of data disaggregation beyond IPEDS standards to improve the quality of data interpretation and use. They presented on the need, levels, and impacts of data disaggregation in their states.

Relying on the presentations and resources shared in this session, SHEEO developed prompts to encourage state teams to reflect, from an equity and opportunity perspective, on their current data collection, use, and disaggregation practices—including levers and barriers to this work. States began discussing within their own teams and with other teams at their tables and then SHEEO facilitated a larger group discussion on ways to improve equity and opportunity by improving data.

PRESENTATION RESOURCES

CSCU Presentation

CSCU Key Performance Indicators

PASSHE Presentation

PASSHE DEI Dashboard

PASSHE Climate Survey

UH Presentation

MOHE Presentation

MOHE Elevating Equity Through Better Data 2021: Proposal for Changes to the Office of Higher Education's Student-Level Data Collection

1. nces.ed.gov/ipeds/report-your-data/race-ethnicity-collecting-data-for-reporting-purposes

TEAM ACTIVITY

Instructions: Within your team, take 20 minutes to read and discuss the following questions and then be prepared to report out to and discuss with your colleagues.

1. Data & Metric Definitions, Collection, and Use

- a. What equity- and opportunity-focused data do you collect and which metrics do you currently measure? Why these data and metrics and not others? Which are individual/student focused versus structurally/institutionally focused?
- b. How are you defining these metrics, both internally and externally, to stakeholder groups? Are those definitions changing? If so, how, what, or who is informing that change? What are the implications of that change?
- c. How are you using these data and metrics? How do they inform policy and practice? How do they inform or align with or go beyond your state's education and economic goals? What could be improved or changed?

2. Data Disaggregation

- a. Who is currently represented in your data? Who is not? What are the implications of your current level of disaggregation?
- b. Are you working to further disaggregate your data? If yes, how are you doing this and who are you including in this process? If not, why, and what barriers exist to further disaggregate data?
- c. What lever, resources, or partnerships are you using to inform data disaggregation work?

COMMUNICATING EQUITY & OPPORTUNITY THROUGH DATA VISUALIZATIONS

Focusing on equity- and opportunity-associated metrics and working to disaggregate data are important ways to improve data and outcomes. However, along with those efforts comes a responsibility to ensure that data are communicated and visualized appropriately. Alice Feng, data visualization developer at the United Nations Development Programme and coauthor of the Urban Institute's *Do No Harm Guide*, which conveys principles, examples, and a checklist for appropriate data representation of people in demographic groups, and Elizabeth Stoddard, director of analytics and reporting at the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS), whose data dashboards employed the Do No Harm Guide's principles, shared best practices for appropriately visualizing data about group differences in communications and dashboards.

In the team activity that followed, SHEEO asked state teams to reflect on their data visualization practices and consider how people are represented through their data. Using the resources and prompts below, teams worked within and across state teams to talk through the considerations, nuances, challenges, and opportunities associated with data visualization and dashboard work.

PRESENTATION RESOURCES

Do No Harm Presentation

NCCCS Presentation

The Urban Institute's Do No Harm Guide

The Urban Institute's Racial Equity in Data Visualization Checklist

The Urban Institute's DEI in Data Visualization:

General Recommendations

Tableau's Data Equity Hub

Data Humanism by Giorgia Lupi

Are there good words to divide the world? By Mirko Lorenz

TEAM ACTIVITY

Instructions: Take 20 minutes to read and discuss the following questions at your table and then be prepared to report out to the larger group.

1. How are you communicating data through dashboards and other visualizations? Are your visualizations forward-thinking in representation of individuals and groups? Do the dashboards/visualizations have a clear purpose? An identified audience?
2. Thinking about the presentation you just heard and your current data communications, what changes would you make in future dashboards/visualizations (e.g., colors, icons, representations, etc.) and who would be involved in that process?
3. How can you work to encourage a feedback loop that helps inform future data visualization work? Who should be involved in that process?
4. What communities, resources, training, or capacity issues do you need to consider in advancing equity- and opportunity-focused communications?

PLANNING FOR EQUITY AND OPPORTUNITY

SHEEO facilitated the final team session as a round robin activity. State teams traveled to various stations to identify conditions to address and advance equity and opportunity goals in their state. During the activity, teams were asked to communicate what resources and partnerships exist that could be leveraged to improve equity and opportunity efforts in their states. They also thought through the capacity realities and technical assistance needs to accomplish this work. As a part of this activity, state teams were encouraged to share ideas and strategies with their colleagues in other states.

The instructions below were crafted for the Community of Practice. However, should states want to conduct this as a round robin group activity in their own systems or agencies, these instructions and the activity can easily be applied to that setting. This activity can also be augmented to guide reflection and planning for smaller groups or for individuals within system or agency departments.

TEAM ACTIVITY

Instructions: Take 10 minutes to read through the questions listed below. There are sticky notes and pens at each table. Take a few of the sticky notes and a pen. Around the room are white paper pads with the letter R (for resources), C (for capacity), P (for partners), or T (for technical assistance) noted. With your colleagues, write down your answers to these questions on the sticky notes and then apply them to the associated white paper. You'll have 10 minutes at each section (you'll travel from station to station), where you can talk through, as a group, shared or differentiated answers. After all the sections are completed, the group will engage in large group report out and conversation.

1. **Resources:** What resources exist that we can leverage for this work? What data? What funds? Which partners or stakeholder groups?
2. **Capacity:** What different or additional capacity needs exist to engage in this work? What current initiatives or programs exist that you can build upon (for example, non-credit activity, credentials of value, dual-enrollment, transfer, etc.)? What new or different approaches are needed?
3. **Partnerships:** Who are the key stakeholders in your system? Who are the people/partners/stakeholders with whom you can partner in this work? How do you/will you need to tailor your communications or outreach with these varied groups? How can you involve them throughout the process of improving equity in your data, systems, structures, policies, and practices?
4. **Technical Assistance:** What sort of technical assistance do you need to advance equity and opportunity in your data systems?

CONCLUSION

Not every state has mandates, strategic plans, or initiatives that require or encourage a focus on equity and opportunity, use of equity lens frameworks, specification of equity and opportunity metrics, or requirements for data disaggregation or visualization. Regardless, use of equity frameworks and best practices related to data metrics, disaggregation, visualization, and communication can act as a mechanism for encouraging and embedding equity and opportunity work into policy and practice, ultimately improving outcomes for states and their stakeholders. SHEEO hopes you will use these resources and activities to reflect on your current practices and inform future progress toward your equity and opportunity goals.

APPENDIX A: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Working collaboratively with state team participants during the CoP, SHEEO sourced additional equity- and opportunity-associated resources. Those are shared below:

SHEEO Resource: *State Agencies and Systems of Higher Education Leading for Equity*

Data for Equity Protocol from High Tech High Graduate School of Education

We All Count: Data Equity Framework

A Toolkit for Centering Racial Equity Throughout Data Integration - UPenn's Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy

Advancing Equity with Data from the U.S. Census Bureau

Talking Equity from the Lumina Foundation

Equity Assessment from the Lumina Foundation

Iowa Student Outcomes Interactive Charts

Arkansas State University System Resources (Tableau Dashboard)

WORKSHOP REFERENCES:

Rall, R. M., Morgan, D. L., Commodore, F., Fischer, R. A., & Bernstein, S. (2022, August 11). Introducing boards to the equity conversation: State-level governing boards and discourses of social justice. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. Advance online publication.

Morgan, D.L., LePeau, L.A. & Commodore, F. Observable evidence and partnership possibilities for governing board involvement in diversity, equity, and inclusion: A content analysis. *Research in Higher Education* 63, 189–221 (2022).

Morgan, D. L., Rall, R. M., Commodore, F., Fischer, R. A., & Bernstein, S. (2021). Hiding in plain sight: The potential of state-level governing boards in postsecondary education policy agenda-setting. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 92(4), 570-595.

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