



# SHEEO

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STATE HIGHER EDUCATION EXECUTIVE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

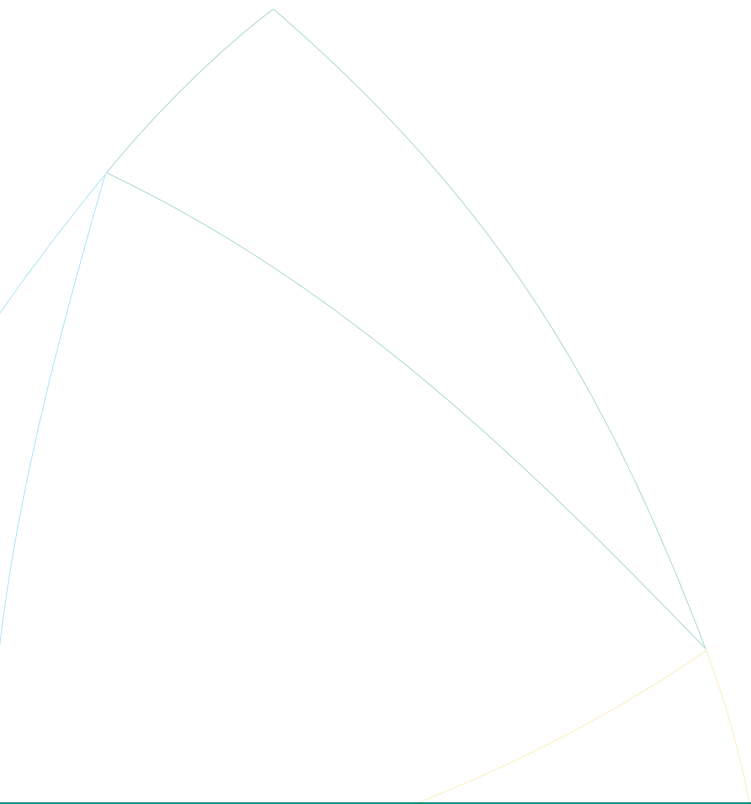
## **THE ROAD TO THE STATE HIGHER EDUCATION EXECUTIVE OFFICE:**

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**PRIOR JOB EXPERIENCES, DEGREE ATTAINMENT,  
AND MINIMUM JOB QUALIFICATIONS OF STATE  
HIGHER EDUCATION EXECUTIVE OFFICERS**

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## BIOGRAPHY

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DISCLAIMER: All opinions, findings, and conclusions are the author's alone and are not necessarily shared by the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association or its members. Likewise, any errors are the responsibility of the author alone.

## INTRODUCTION

In order to address the needs and the problems in higher education, governors and state coordinating and governing boards have relied on state higher education executive officers (SHEEOs) who come to the role with diverse backgrounds and expertise. These individuals lead systems of higher education that educate thousands of individuals.

Due to constrained resources in higher education, institutions and the agencies that represent them have had to adapt to the current political, economic, and financial climate in which expectations are high and resources limited (State Higher Education Executive Officers Association [SHEEO], 2018). This means appointing and hiring individuals to the SHEEO position who can navigate a complex fiscal and political landscape. However, there is no common path to the “SHEEOship.” The complexity of the position lends itself to those with experience in postsecondary education, politics, business, and more.

Understanding the role of the SHEEO is essential. SHEEOs play a significant role and hold important positions in higher education and must be able to work with education and policy leaders, while also supporting students in their respective states. This brief examines the diversity of job and educational experiences SHEEOs bring to the office and highlights the role of SHEEOs in the complex system that is postsecondary education policy.

## THE STATE HIGHER EDUCATION EXECUTIVE OFFICER

The state higher education executive officer is the most senior person charged with guiding postsecondary education public policy in their state. Some states have more than one SHEEO, as some represent university governing boards, state community college systems, or state coordinating boards. In states with more than one SHEEO, governance and coordination can be complex because different SHEEOs have oversight of different sectors of postsecondary education (McGuinness, 2016). The SHEEO can be appointed by the governor, or the governing or coordinating board, or hired by an agency head. Additionally, in some states, SHEEOs must meet a range of requirements to attain their position, as is explored later in this brief.

SHEEOs have many responsibilities and job tasks that require a breadth of knowledge, training, and job experiences. SHEEOs come from a wide variety of jobs before serving in this position. A SHEEO’s previous positions and experience may create diverse skill sets that are brought to the role. Having a diverse skill set is one of the many reasons a person may be appointed to the dynamic position of SHEEO.

Though SHEEOs’ responsibilities may vary between states and coordinating and governing boards, generally, SHEEOs are responsible for maintaining accountability in postsecondary education and providing leadership for postsecondary institutions in their state (Tandberg, Fowles, & McLendon, 2017). SHEEOs work with multiple government agencies, postsecondary institutions, and individuals. They also partner with a variety of key stakeholder groups, including state policy leaders, higher education institutions, parents, and students. By researching prior experience and training of SHEEOs, this brief sheds light on the many roads individuals may take to reach this vital policy position.

## APPROACHES TO RESEARCH

This study's guiding research questions were:

1. What proportion of SHEEOs have postsecondary education experience?<sup>1</sup>
2. What jobs did SHEEOs hold before their appointments?
3. Do states have specific requirements for appointing or hiring a SHEEO?  
If so, what are the requirements?

The policy brief utilizes a 50-state plus Washington, D.C., analysis of SHEEOs who served in 2017. In total, data were collected for 59 SHEEOs, as several states had two SHEEOs.<sup>2</sup> Nine variables were collected to complete the analysis and are detailed in *Appendix A*. In this brief, non-interim SHEEOs were given priority over interim or acting SHEEOs. State SHEEOs were identified by the State Higher Education Executive Officer Association's membership list maintained on their website (SHEEO, 2018). In states with two SHEEOs, both SHEEOs were used for this brief.

Information regarding postsecondary education experience and the immediate prior job experience for three SHEEOs could not be found.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, information for the laws or board rules dictating postsecondary education experience for SHEEOs could not be found for eight states.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, for the analysis, those SHEEOs were left out.

## RESULTS

In 2017, 24 percent of SHEEO agencies had a new person serving in the SHEEO role. SHEEOs are constantly changing, and the data below provides a more in-depth look into the prior education and professional job experiences SHEEOs have had.

### SHEEO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION EXPERIENCE AND IMMEDIATE PRIOR JOB EXPERIENCE

For immediate prior job experience, SHEEOs were sorted into four categories: 1) private business or nonprofit, meaning the SHEEO worked for a private business or company or they worked for a nonprofit organization; 2) postsecondary education, meaning they worked at a postsecondary institution or system before their SHEEO appointment; 3) education policy/politics, meaning the SHEEO previously worked for an education-focused intermediary public policy organization, a SHEEO office, or a government education office; or 4) public policy or politics, meaning the SHEEO previously worked for another type of intermediary public policy organization or another governmental office.

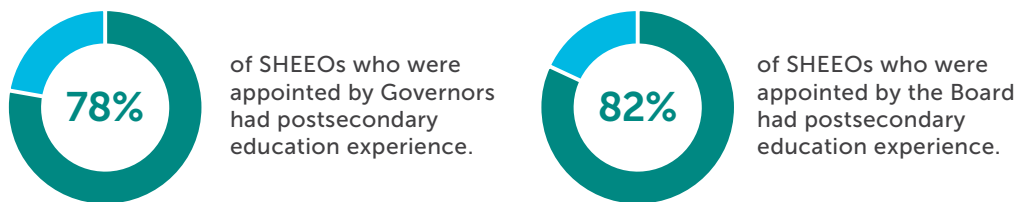
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1. Postsecondary education experience specifically means the individual has worked at a postsecondary institution or postsecondary institution system full time, meaning volunteer positions, such as a trustee, were not counted as postsecondary job experience.
  2. Eight states (Alaska, Connecticut, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont, and Wyoming) have two SHEEOs, with the rest of the states having one SHEEO.
  3. Information could not be found for the SHEEO in South Carolina, the SHEEO at the New York State Education Department Office of Higher Education, or the SHEEO at the New Hampshire Department of Education-Division of Higher Education-Commission of Higher Education.
  4. Information could not be found for the Illinois Board of Higher Education, the Michigan Association of State Universities, the New Hampshire Department of Education-Division of Higher Education-Commission of Higher Education, the New York State Education Department Office of Higher Education, the North Dakota University System, the Oklahoma State System of Higher Education, the Pennsylvania Department of Education Office of Postsecondary and Higher Education, or the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Government of the District of Columbia.

Overall, 81 percent (44) of SHEEOs have worked in postsecondary education institutions and systems at least once in their career. This is displayed in *Figure 1*. Seventy-eight percent of SHEEOs who were appointed by governors had postsecondary education experience, with two SHEEOs appointed by the governor removed from the calculation due to lack of information. Eighty-two percent of SHEEOs who were appointed by the board had postsecondary education experience, with three SHEEOs removed from the calculation due to lack of information (see *Figure 2*).

**FIGURE 1:  
SHEEO POSTSECONDARY JOB EXPERIENCE**

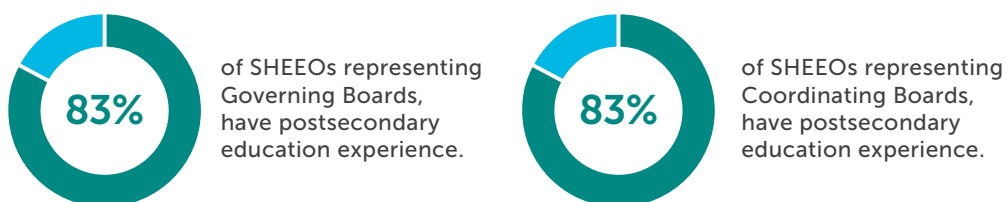


**FIGURE 2:  
SHEEO POSTSECONDARY JOB EXPERIENCE BY APPOINTING ENTITY**



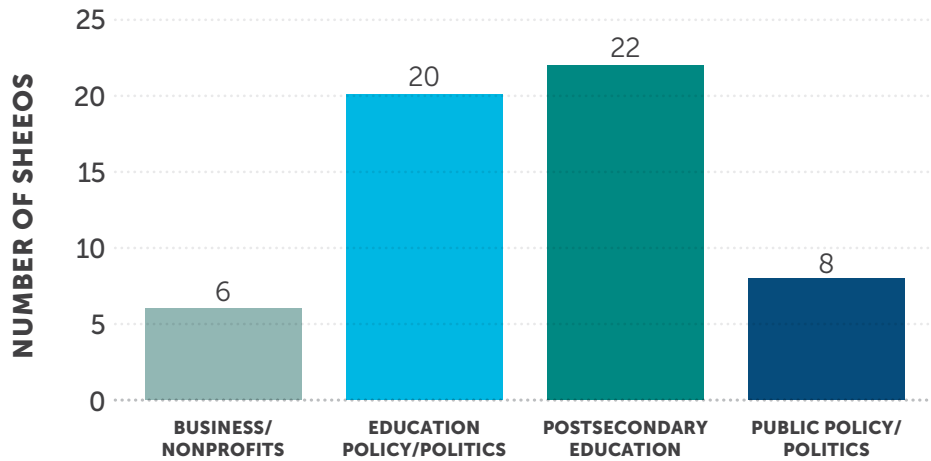
*Figure 3* demonstrates the percent of SHEEOs with postsecondary education experience broken down by governing and coordinating boards. SHEEOs representing governing boards are just as likely to have a SHEEO with postsecondary experience as those representing coordinating boards.

**FIGURE 3:  
SHEEO POSTSECONDARY JOB EXPERIENCE BY STRUCTURE TYPE**

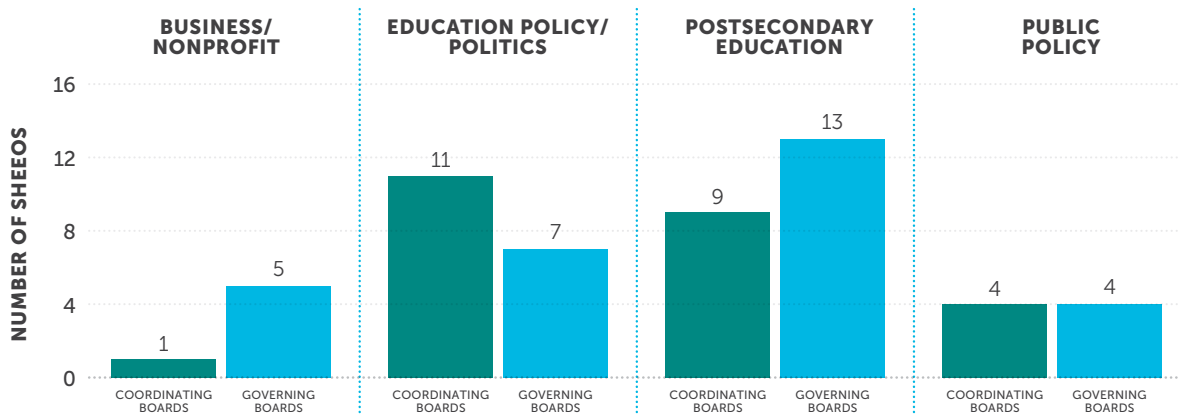


Of the 56 SHEEOs researched for “immediate prior job experience,” it was found that six (11 percent) SHEEOs were appointed from the private/nonprofit industry, 20 (36 percent) SHEEOs were appointed from education policy jobs, 22 (39 percent) SHEEOs were appointed from postsecondary education jobs, and eight (14 percent) SHEEOs were appointed from public policy jobs and political positions (see *Figure 4*). However, when SHEEOs with prior education policy jobs and public policy jobs/political office are combined, they account for 50 percent of all SHEEOs. *Figure 4* shows immediate prior job experience for SHEEOs. These data are disaggregated by coordinating board and governing board in *Figure 5*.

**FIGURE 4:**  
**SHEEO IMMEDIATE PAST JOB EXPERIENCE**



**FIGURE 5:**  
**SHEEO PRIOR JOB EXPERIENCE BY COORDINATING AND GOVERNING BOARD**

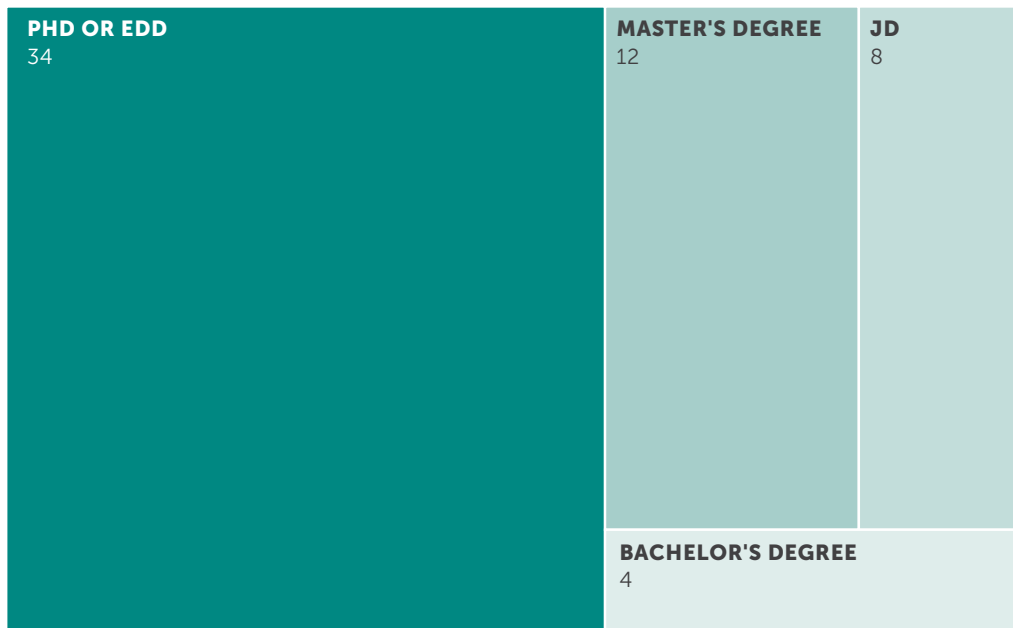




## DEGREE ATTAINMENT AND DISCIPLINE OF SHEEOS

Of the 59 SHEEOs, degree information was found for 57. Thirty-four SHEEOs have a Ph.D. or an Ed.D., with eight SHEEOs holding a J.D., while 12 SHEEOs hold a master’s degree, and four SHEEOs have a bachelor’s degree. This is shown in *Figure 6*.<sup>5</sup>

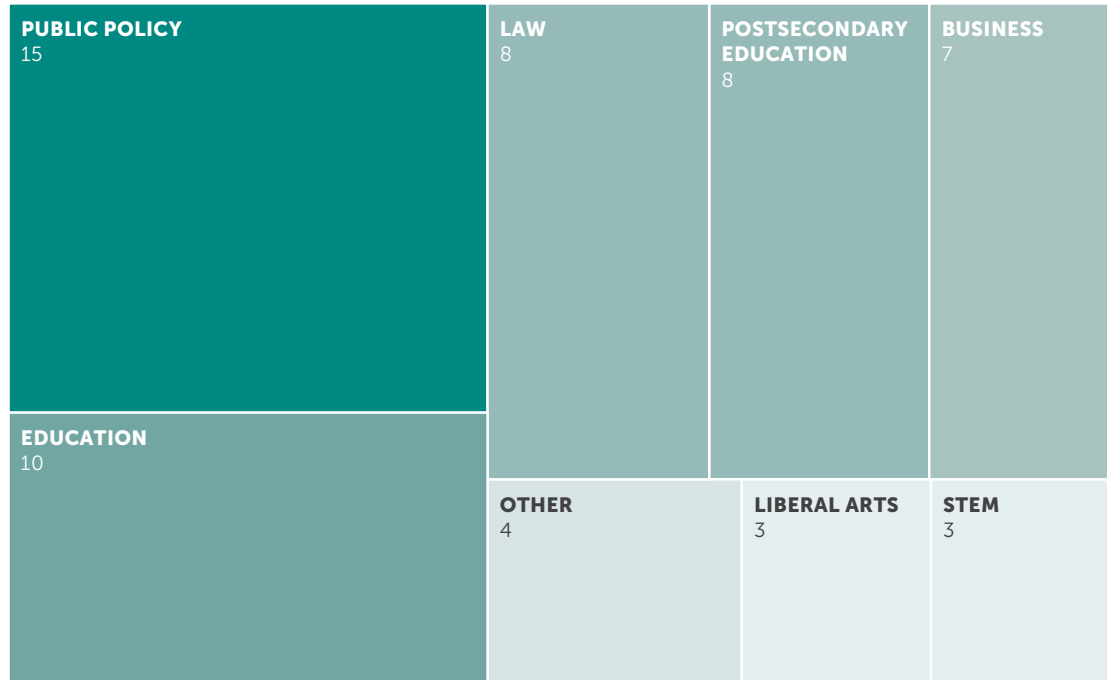
**FIGURE 6:**  
**SHEEO FINAL DEGREE ATTAINED**



When disaggregated, SHEEO final degree discipline data are sorted into eight categories. The data reflect the SHEEOs’ final degree disciplines. Fifteen SHEEOs received degrees in the fields of public policy/politics/international relations; 10 SHEEOs received degrees in education; eight received degrees specific to higher education; eight received law degrees; seven received their degrees in business; three received degrees in the liberal arts; three received degrees in STEM; and four received degrees in the “other” category, meaning they had degrees that did not fit one of the other seven categories. *Figure 7* describes the degrees held by SHEEOs, broken down by the field in which SHEEOs received their most recent degree.<sup>6</sup>

5. One SHEEO received both a Ph.D. that was sorted into the public policy section and a J.D. Both degrees were counted for the purpose of the research.
6. One SHEEO received both a Ph.D. that was sorted into the public policy section and a J.D. Both degrees were counted for the purpose of the research.

**FIGURE 7:**  
**SHEEO FINAL DEGREE ATTAINED-DISCIPLINE**



### STATE REQUIREMENTS FOR SHEEO EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE

Of the 59 SHEEO agencies that were researched, only seven have specific statutes or rules that dictate that a person must have postsecondary education experience before they are appointed. Another seven SHEEO agencies/states have a statute or rule requiring a person to have general experience before their appointment, without specifying postsecondary experience. For example, New Mexico requires individuals to have experience in higher education, experience in a senior administrative position, and public policy experience. West Virginia requires the SHEEO to have an “established national reputation as a professional in the field of higher education.” However, Utah requires that the board “select a commissioner on the basis of outstanding professional qualifications.” The remaining 37 SHEEO agencies/states do not have any specific SHEEO requirements. *Appendix B* shows the SHEEO agency state, whether the requirement is a state law or board rule, and the requirement.

## DISCUSSION OF PRIOR JOB EXPERIENCE, DEGREE ATTAINMENT, AND JOB REQUIREMENTS

It is apparent that SHEEOs have a wide range of experiences and educational knowledge. The road to the SHEEO position is diverse and does not come with extensive formal hiring requirements, as seen in *Appendix B*. The needs of the SHEEO agencies reflect the diversity of the states. Each SHEEO brings a wide breadth of knowledge and experience that is different from any other SHEEO, making the field of education policy more diverse and expansive with each new SHEEO.

As the data make clear, the road taken by a majority of SHEEOs includes postsecondary education and education policy. However, when these data are disaggregated by coordinating and governing boards, it is apparent that SHEEOs have different types of backgrounds respective of the type of board they serve under. Forty-five percent of SHEEOs at governing boards come directly from working in a postsecondary institution, compared to the 36 percent of SHEEOs at coordinating boards. Additionally, 44 percent of SHEEOs at coordinating boards come directly from education policy/politics, compared to the 24 percent of SHEEOs at governing boards. This could be due to governing boards overseeing university systems while coordinating boards tend to be state agencies and represent multiple types of institutions (Lingenfelter, Novak, & Legon, 2008). SHEEOs from governing boards may need more postsecondary experience to better navigate educational systems and to build trust with university leaders, compared to SHEEOs from coordinating boards who may need more policy and political expertise to build rapport with state policy leaders. See *Figure 4*, which shows that 50 percent of all SHEEOs come directly from public policy/political roles or education policy roles.

SHEEOs are expected to work with different groups and serve diverse stakeholders, such as postsecondary institutions, state policy leaders, the public, and students. Therefore, they must have the ability to navigate numerous types of systems in both higher education and policy environments. Being able to navigate different environments allows SHEEOs to more easily advocate for the wide variety of stakeholders a SHEEO agency represents.

Finally, seven states have postsecondary education requirements explicitly stated in either their board manual or state statutes. The states that have requirements vary in how stringent or vague the policies are. The differing requirements allow for a wide array of people being appointed to the position, thus further diversifying the roads to the SHEEO position.

## CONCLUSION

As is clear, there is no single road taken for SHEEOs. From the data collected, we see that SHEEOs do not take just one path; individuals follow their own, diverse paths to the position of SHEEO. The SHEEO serves many masters, and those stakeholders can be very different; therefore, it comes as no surprise that there is not a specific road map to becoming a SHEEO. Understanding the backgrounds of SHEEOs does not just help individual SHEEOs, it helps SHEEO agencies, those who work in SHEEO agencies, and intermediary public policy organizations in supporting SHEEOs. Understanding SHEEOs' prior professional and educational experiences may help prepare individuals for the job, allow for better support and assistance for SHEEOs, and may aid in the development of professional development and technical assistance programs for SHEEOs and the people who work in SHEEO agencies.

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## APPENDIX A: DATA DESCRIPTION AND SOURCES

Variable	Where this information was collected from
State higher education executive officer full name	State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) website
Served as interim/acting SHEEO	Gathered from state higher education office and SHEEO Biography on websites
Appointed by governor	Gathered from state constitutions, state statutes, or governing/ordinating board bylaws
Appointed by board	Gathered from state constitutions, state statutes, or governing/ordinating board bylaws
Is the SHEEO office a coordinating board or a governing board?	Gathered from state constitutions, state statutes, or governing/ordinating board bylaws
Did the SHEEO have postsecondary education experience prior to serving as SHEEO? <sup>1</sup>	Gathered from SHEEO biographies, CVs, and résumés
SHEEO's previous job	Gathered from SHEEO biographies, CVs, and résumés
Does the state have specific rules and laws dictating that the SHEEO must have educational experience?	Gathered from state constitutions, state statutes, or governing/ordinating board bylaws
SHEEO's degree attainment	Provided by SHEEO, SHEEO biographies, CVs, and résumés

1. The variable "SHEEO postsecondary job experience" specifically means that the individual has worked at a postsecondary institution or postsecondary institution system full time, meaning volunteer positions, such as a trustee, were not counted as postsecondary job experience.

## APPENDIX B: STATE HIRING REQUIREMENTS FOR SHEEOS

SHEEO Agency	Type of Board	State Law or Board Rule	Specific Law/Bill	The Requirement
Colorado	Coordinating	State Statute	Senate Bill 08-018, Section 23-1-110	The governor shall appoint, with consent of the senate, an executive director qualified by substantial training and experience in the field of higher education.
Kentucky	Coordinating	State Statute	Kentucky Revised Statute 164.013	The president shall possess an excellent academic and administrative background, have strong communication skills, have significant experience and an established reputation as a professional in the field of postsecondary education, and shall not express, demonstrate, or appear to have an institutional or regional bias in his or her actions.
New Mexico	Coordinating	State Statute	New Mexico Statute 9-25-5	The administrative head of the department is the "secretary of higher education", who shall be appointed by the governor with the consent of the senate and who shall serve in the executive cabinet. The secretary shall possess a terminal degree from a regionally accredited post-secondary educational institution, a minimum of five years of senior administrative experience, experience in higher education and experience in the development of public policy at the state or federal level.
Ohio	Coordinating	State Statute	Ohio Revised Codes 3333.01	The chancellor shall be a person qualified by training and experience to understand the problems and needs of the state in the field of higher education and to devise programs, plans, and methods of solving the problems and meeting the needs.
South Dakota	Governing	Board Rule	Policy Manual, Section 1:5	The Executive Director shall be responsible to the Board and removable at the pleasure of the Board, shall have a post-graduate degree from a recognized college or university and shall by training and experience be familiar with the operations and problems of institutions of higher education.
Texas	Coordinating	State Statute	Texas Education Code, Chapter 61, Section 61-028	The commissioner shall be a person of high professional qualifications having a thorough background by training and experience in the fields of higher education and administration and shall possess such other qualifications as the board may prescribe.
West Virginia	Governing	State Statute	West Virginia Code §18B-1B-5	The commission shall set the qualifications for the position of chancellor and shall conduct a thorough nationwide search for qualified candidates. A qualified candidate is one who meets at least the following criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Possesses an excellent academic and administrative background;</li> <li>(2) Demonstrates strong communication skills;</li> <li>(3) Has significant experience and an established national reputation as a professional in the field of higher education;</li> <li>(4) Is free of institutional or regional biases; and</li> <li>(5) Holds or retains no other administrative position within the system of higher education while employed as chancellor.</li> </ul>

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