SHEEO

STATE AGENCIES AND SYSTEMS OF HIGHER EDUCATION LEADING FOR EQUITY

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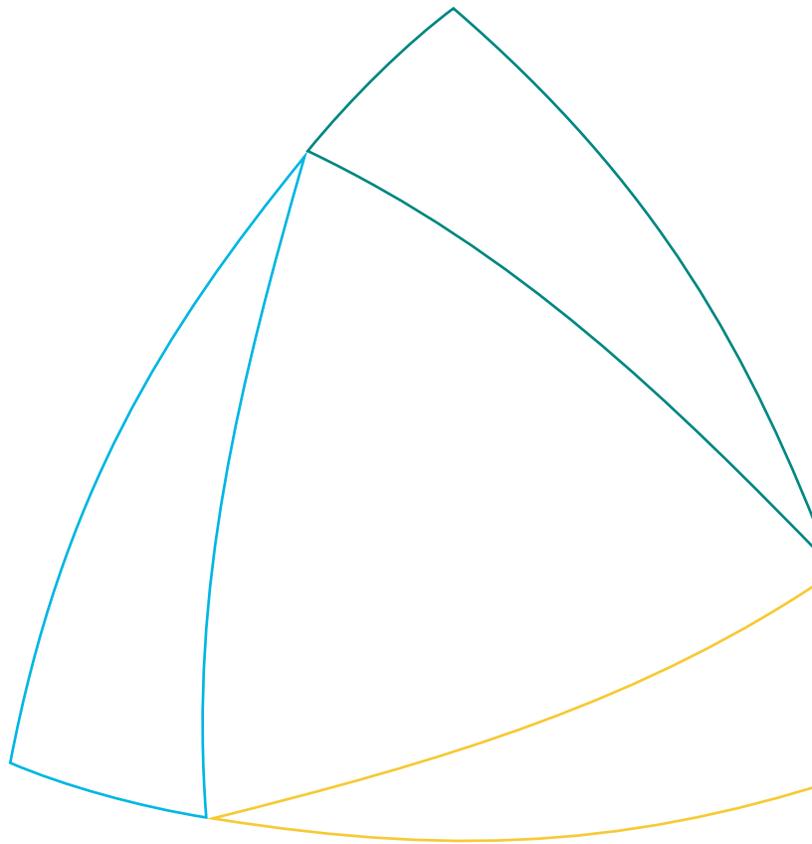
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Leaders of state agencies and systems of higher education (SHEEOs) are in unique positions to expand higher education's positive impact on the human condition through an intentional and systematic focus on educational equity. The opportunities and challenges are noteworthy, and the authors of this paper sought to identify these. It is also the goal of this paper to provide SHEEOs and their staffs with information to support their efforts to ensure positive postsecondary outcomes for all students in their respective states, regardless of race or ethnicity. In essence, this is the fundamental aim of equity in higher education. It's instructive to mention that an important impetus for this paper — *States Leading for Equity* — is the consistent focus on equity-oriented proposals and sessions at SHEEO's annual policy conferences.

For the purposes of this paper, equity is defined as a commitment to policies and practices that ensure the success of every student regardless of their starting point in life.

Following the introduction that frames subsequent discussions, this paper is supported by a review of relevant research and anchored by a survey administered to SHEEO members, which sought to gain deeper insights into how racial equity is positioned in state agencies and systems. As anticipated, degrees of uniqueness were exhibited across states in addition to areas of similarity, which are discussed in the *Summary of Survey Responses*. In total, respondents enhanced our understanding of ways that SHEEO's staff can partner with its members to advance equity-minded leadership, policy, and practice. The conclusion and recommendations at the end are partly intended to inform future collaborative efforts between the association of State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) and its members.

The suggested need for and the notion of changing entire systems can be a challenge for SHEEOs and their staffs, particularly when considering the wide range of cross-sector constituent groups — governors, legislatures, institutional leaders, community leaders, P-12 school districts, and all the students enrolled in postsecondary institutions in their states. Not underestimating the challenge, SHEEOs can access the work of scholars of organizational systems, mission-driven leadership, and change management to guide the planning, implementation, and evaluation of equity initiatives. Referenced more than 7,500 times in research across multiple academic disciplines, Kotter's (1995) seminal work highlights eight major reasons organizational transformation efforts fail, beginning with failure to establish a sense of urgency.[1] Another intriguing model comes from the field of sustainable development offered by Dreirer, Navarro, and Nelson (2019), Key Elements of Systems Leadership, as presented in the figure below.[2]

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1. Kotter, J.P. (1995). Leading change: Why transformation efforts fail. *Harvard Business Review,* April-May. www.mcrhrdi.gov.in/91fc/coursematerial/management/20%20Leading%20Change%20-%20Why%20Transformation%20Efforts%20Fail%20by%20JP%20Kotter.pdf

2. Dreier, L., Nabarro, D. and Nelson, J. (2019). *Systems leadership for sustainable development: Strategies for achieving systemic change.* Harvard Kennedy School, p.4. www.hks.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/centers/mrcbg/files/Systems%20Leadership.pdf

THE KEY ELEMENTS OF SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP

SYSTEM LEADERSHIP

THE SYSTEM
Complex
Systems Insight

THE COMMUNITY
Coalition-building
and Advocacy Tactics

THE INDIVIDUAL
Collaborative Leadership Skills
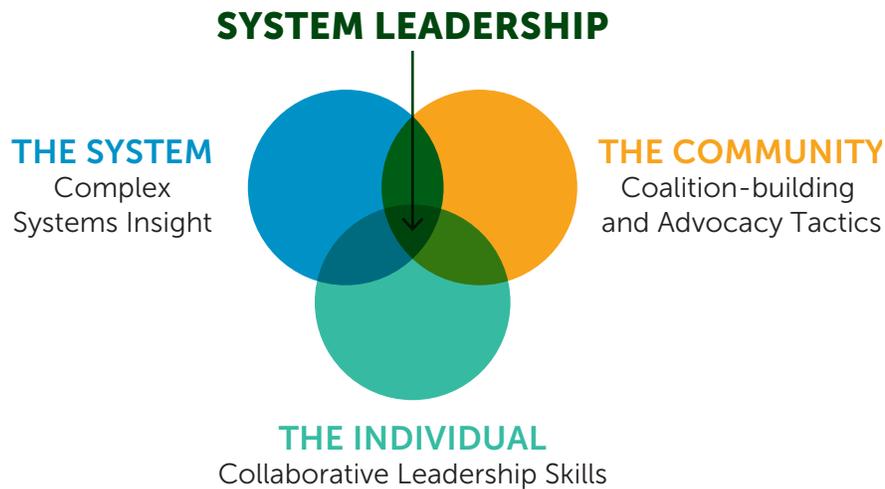
Finally, *States Leading for Equity* recognizes the intersection between postsecondary credential attainment, workforce development, moral imperatives, and educational equity. The challenges and opportunities are complex, which makes discussions like the ones offered in this paper critically important. SHEEOs represent a unique community of leaders with a shared concern for educational inequities in higher education. This paper endeavors to contribute to the growing body of work aimed at erasing racial and ethnic disparities in student outcomes to the benefit of states, communities, families, and individuals. We look forward to strengthening partnerships with SHEEOs, their staffs, and other stakeholders to achieve sustainable systems of educational equity.

INTRODUCTION

> *In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity, it is a prerequisite. Right now, three-quarters of the fastest growing occupations require more than a high school diploma. And yet, just over half of our citizens have that level of education. We have one of the highest high school dropout rates of any industrialized nation, and half of the students who begin college never finish. This is a prescription for economic decline, because we know the countries that out-teach us today will out-compete us tomorrow.*
>
> *– Former President Barack Obama in a speech to the Congress, February 24, 2009*

At the core of the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) partnership with its members is a commitment to promoting environments that value education and its role in ensuring the equitable education of all Americans, regardless of race/ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic status. Accordingly, the matter of educational equity should be central to higher education policy and practice discussions, particularly those linked to economic development and degree attainment. While policymakers and others affirm educational equity as foundational to the country and states meeting their attainment goals, Nettles (2017) illustrated stark inequalities in college degree attainment and made projections based on federal (60 percent of 25-34-year-olds by 2020) and Lumina Foundation (60 percent of 25-64-year-olds by 2025) goals. *Table 1* illustrates ETS's alarming and disparate attainment projections for different racial and ethnic groups.

TABLE 1

WHEN WILL VARYING GROUPS ACHIEVE 60 PERCENT COLLEGE ATTAINMENT?

NOT PROJECTED TO REACH 60% BY 2060	
FEDERAL GOAL	**LUMINA FOUNDATION GOAL**
• African American Males • Hispanic Males • Hispanic Females • American Indian/Alaskan Males • American Indian/Alaskan Females	• African American Males • Hispanic Males • Hispanic Females • American Indian/Alaskan Males • American Indian/Alaskan Females • African American Females

PROJECTED TO REACH 60% BY 2060	
FEDERAL GOAL	**LUMINA FOUNDATION GOAL**
• White Males (by 2038) • African American Females (by 2058)	• White Males (by 2054) • White Females (by 2034)

PROJECTED TO REACH 60% ON TIME	
FEDERAL GOAL	**LUMINA FOUNDATION GOAL**
• Asian Males • Asian Females • White Females	• Asian Males • Asian Females

Source: Educational Testing Service. *Recognizing Inequalities in College Degree Attainment.* (n.d.)

The moral imperative — doing the right thing — for equity is not understated considering the persistence of institutional racism in all sectors of society and the role of education in improving the human condition. To this end and not unlike leaders of institutions of higher education, state policymakers continue to invest — to varying levels — resources (financial and human) to advance educational equity so that all students have access to and complete postsecondary endeavors for the betterment of their lives and the communities in which they live.

While the "why" of educational equity has been clearly articulated and largely undebated, the "how" to achieve educational equity remains somewhat of a challenge for state policymakers, including how to sustain progress made and how to better make a case for equity to a wide range of stakeholders such as legislators, business leaders, and P-16 communities. Many state agencies and systems of higher education have, nonetheless, established strategic plans with specific equity agendas to build capacity and improve student outcomes. These plans are in agreement with the ETS (n.d.) assertion that "cultivating an educated and skilled society will require refocused and tailored efforts for particular groups" and McNair et al.'s (2020) acknowledgment that equity is a process and a journey that begins with the individual. Some of these plans lend themselves to additional analytic opportunities that fall into four buckets: access, funding, pedagogy, and compliance (Simon, 2019). A survey of this work underway across states will be discussed in a later section of this paper.

DEFINING EQUITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Chief executives of statewide governing, policy, and coordinating boards of postsecondary education (SHEEOs) clearly grasp the meaning and principles of equity, while acknowledging the concept can be both controversial and unclear throughout higher education policy and practice environments. Although discussions around equity rarely produce significant opposition to the concept in general, shared understanding of its meaning, value, and role can vary in these settings. Nonetheless, common terms are offered in this introduction to establish shared meaning.

To begin, it is instructive to note that defining equity cannot be done in isolation from the concept of racism. In 1990, the late scholar and equity advocate Asa Hilliard III and his colleague Gerald Pine defined racism as the combination of individual prejudice and discrimination coupled with institutional policies that result in the unjustified negative treatment and devaluing of minoritized racial and ethnic groups. Hence, the practice of racism involves the maltreatment of members of racial and ethnic groups that have experienced a protracted history of discrimination in all spheres of society. Decades have passed since Pine and Hilliard asserted that "prejudice, discrimination, and racism do not require intention" (p.3), and today there is added recognition by policymakers and others that dismantling racism and achieving educational equity requires systemic intentionality in policy and practice across the higher education ecosystem.

Williams (2013) presented four interrelated and fundamental concepts that may add clarity to this discussion: *diversity, equity, inclusion, and multiculturalism*. Summarized, *diversity* refers to all the ways in which people differ — heterogeneity; equity refers to the process of creating equivalent outcomes for underrepresented and oppressed individuals and groups — ending systematic discrimination against people; *inclusion* is about marginalized individuals and groups feeling a sense of belonging — empowered to participate in the majority culture; and *multiculturalism* acknowledges and promotes the acceptance and understanding of different cultures — promoting peaceful coexistence (p. 90-91). Simply stated, **equity is defined here as a commitment to policies and practices that ensure the success of every student regardless of their starting point in life**.

INTENT OF THIS PAPER

While the authors recognize the multidimensional and interdependent nature of educational inequity (e.g., P-16 education systems, and local, state, and national government), this paper focuses on the notion of equity policies and practices in postsecondary education. The overall goal of this paper is to provide a comprehensive examination of the equity landscape within the higher education policy environment and offer recommendations for stakeholders to advance equity goals and objectives. It fundamentally recognizes the relationship between states' attainment and economic development goals, and the role of equitable systems of higher education to achieve these goals. The paper offers a generally accepted definition of equity within the higher education context as a means of level setting for a more in-depth discussion. This context represents a fluid political and policy environment at the national, state, and institutional levels, which can result in shifts in how equity is defined, how it is situated, and how efforts are measured and evaluated across independent yet interrelated settings.

Data are essential tools in informing equity agendas and building capacity. Lumina Foundation's *A Stronger Nation* report (2019) highlights the importance of reliable data and strong partnerships as the foundation to building equitable systems of higher education, in part underscoring the need for collaboration between offices of institutional research and equity and inclusion. Bensimon (2018) asserts that "the authentic exercise of equity and equity-mindedness requires explicit attention to structural inequality and institutionalized racism and demands system-changing responses" (p.97). The notion of systems and sustainability of efforts is increasingly the concern of an expanding list of philanthropic organizations, which includes multiple factors to be considered — funding, planning and evaluation, policy and program development, strategic partnerships, human capital, community engagement, and effective communication strategies, as examples.

Given the complexities, it is common practice for institutions of higher education to hire executive-level staff to guide their diversity, inclusion, and equity efforts. State agencies and systems of higher education are doing the same at varying levels (this will be examined in another section of this paper). It may be useful to note the relative youth of the diversity, inclusion, and equity "profession." In May 2003, at a meeting of the Center for Advancement of Racial and Ethnic Equity (CAREE) at the American Council on Education, it was decided that a national association for chief diversity officers was warranted. In 2006, the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE) was formed "to lead higher education toward inclusive excellence through institutional transformation," and today its members include institutional diversity officers as well as diversity, inclusion, and equity leaders from higher education policy organizations (www.nadohe.org).

The following sections present a review of relevant research, results from an equity landscape survey of state agencies and systems of higher education, and a conclusion with a few recommendations for consideration. The authors acknowledge the large and expanding body of literature, research, and other materials that address educational equity from multiple perspectives. The research presented in this paper represents some of the more relevant information available to stakeholders engaged in educational equity exploration and capacity building, including references and additional resources at the end.

RELEVANT RESEARCH

> *Students of color encounter significant obstacles in higher education. Degree attainment rates are dramatically lower among African-American, Latino, Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native students than white students. Additionally, students of color are more likely to borrow, borrow in greater amounts, and are less likely to be able to pay down their debt than their white peers—even if they graduate. This disproportionate debt burden can cause significant distress and affect their ability to build their path to the middle class...*
>
> *– Letter from Senators Doug Jones, Elizabeth Warren, Kamala Harris, and Catherine Cortez Masto on January 3, 2019*

Higher education remains the surest path to prosperity for all Americans, as numerous studies have shown that college graduates earn more, are more civically engaged, and lead healthier lives (Ma, Pender & Welch, 2019; Ost, Pan & Webber, 2018; Webber, 2016). But as Senators Jones, Warren, Harris, and Cortez Masto (2019) astutely point out, although college is often the best option in the modern economy, outcomes differ considerably by race and ethnicity. Of course, these disparate outcomes cannot exclusively be attributed to our postsecondary system, as we know that those inequities pervade almost all aspects of our society, including the neighborhoods we grow up in (Chetty & Hendren, 2018), the elementary and secondary schooling we receive (Fryer & Levitt, 2006; Reardon et al., 2019), and the labor markets we traverse (Chetty et al., 2019; Fryer, Pager & Spenkuch, 2013). But postsecondary institutions and systems must operate within the environments in which they find themselves. As such, it is incumbent upon our higher education leaders and stakeholders to ensure that higher education is closing those gaps, rather than exacerbating them. What follows is a brief review of the most relevant literature on racial and ethnic gaps within our postsecondary system. For those interested in learning more, please see our additional resources section in the appendices.

Due to systematic inequities, colleges have enrolled Black and African American, Latinx, and Native American and Alaska Native students at lower rates than their white peers (Baker, Klasik & Reardon, 2018). Furthermore, those who do enroll likely do so in lesser-resourced colleges (Black, Cortes & Lincove, 2015; Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Clotfelter, 2017; Libassi, 2018). These disparities play out along the postsecondary spectrum with Black and Latinx students enrolling less frequently in the most selective research universities, but also enrolling more frequently in non-selective four- and two-year colleges (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). Naturally, these non-selective colleges and universities enroll students who are less academically prepared. Still, these are the same schools that are given significantly fewer public dollars than their more selective counterparts (Long, 2016). As has been documented in the K-12 sphere (Jackson, 2018), these resources matter. In fact, there is a burgeoning research base investigating the impact of state funding for postsecondary education on a whole host of student success outcomes that rigorously shows that more funding per student leads to improved completion and post-graduation outcomes (Bound et al., 2019; Chakrabarti, Gorton & Lovenheim, 2018; Deming & Walters, 2018). Given the types of institutions Black and Latinx students attend, it should come as no surprise that underrepresented racial groups are experiencing inequitable degree attainment outcomes (Espinosa et al., 2019).

As Tandberg (2019) points out, "The stratification is even starker and the implications far greater when enrollments and outcomes are compared across for-profit and nonprofit institutions" (p. 7). Black and Latinx students are much more likely to enroll in the for-profit sector, especially when

decreased revenues lead to capacity constraints in open access public institutions (Cellini, Darolia & Turner, 2018; Soliz, 2018). This is consequential because we know that there is a whole host of adverse outcomes associated with enrolling in the for-profit sector (Cottom, 2017; Deming, Goldin & Katz, 2012). Most notably, Scott-Clayton (2018) recently showed that the rate of student loan default among for-profit entrants is almost four times that of community college entrants (47 percent vs. 13 percent). Moreover, even after accounting for college sector, degree completion, family income, and other characteristics, Black undergraduates are still much more likely to default on their student loans (Scott-Clayton, 2018), which could have long-term deleterious effects on their ability to establish credit, secure a mortgage, or even save for retirement.

In looking beyond disparate funding by institutional type, there is a large and growing body of research that examines Black and Latinx students' experiences in college. Scholars such as Estela Bensimon, Lori Patton Davis, Gina Garcia, Shaun Harper, Frank Harris III, and J. Luke Wood, among others, have built up an extensive body of literature that helps the higher education community understand how Black and Latinx student groups navigate the college environment. Many of these studies draw conclusions about students' sense of belonging, given that so many Black and Latinx students are attending primarily white institutions, and much of the foundational student engagement literature identifies belonging as the key to student success (Tinto, 1993). In a review of the literature on men of color in the community college sector, Harris and Wood (2013) highlight a sense of belonging and identity formation as being paramount to student success, and they point out the role that institutions must play in ensuring that success. Though in a different context, Harper, Smith, and Davis (2018) are much more critical of the role institutions play, citing low expectations and a lack of student support services for the alarmingly low graduation rates among Black undergraduates at an unnamed urban university. Finally, Patton's (2009) research on mentorship suggests "there is simply not enough mentoring taking place, particularly for African American women" (p. 533). These and other studies continue to shed light on the inequities in access, persistence, and attainment found within the American postsecondary system.

Though there are a multitude of policies and programs that affect equity, one that state agencies and systems may have more influence over, through conversations with policymakers or on-the-ground implementation, is outcomes-based funding (OBF). A number of studies have called into question the inequitable outcomes associated with OBF. In fact, recent work has shown that minority serving institutions are disadvantaged by OBF policies (Hillman & Corral, 2017; Li, Gándara & Assalone, 2018), while already-well-resourced institutions increase their share of the state appropriations pie (Hagood, 2019). Moreover, there's evidence to suggest that these policies reduce enrollments for Pell Grant recipients (Kelchen & Stedrak, 2016) as well as students of color (Birdsall, 2018). On the other hand, those OBF policies with equity indicators or bonuses have been shown to produce positive outcomes for underrepresented students (Gándara & Rutherford, 2018). In addition to OBF, there are policies state agencies and systems can influence, including how dual enrollment is administered in the state (Patrick, Socol & Morgan, 2020), as well as the awarding of need-based financial aid (Pingel, Sponslor & Holly, 2018). Knowing the evidence that exists, as well as how it may play out in your policy context, is critical to ensuring that new or existing policies do not inadvertently harm Black and Latinx students.

SURVEY OF THE SHEEO LANDSCAPE

Relevant and quality data are necessary to inform and advance equity agendas, modify systems, and enact policies and practices that close opportunity and achievement gaps for traditionally marginalized and underrepresented populations, especially Black and African American, Latinx, Native American, and Alaska Native communities in postsecondary educational systems. Data collected in this preliminary survey are intended to help higher education agencies and systems understand and advance efforts to improve educational equity in their respective states and beyond. To that end, this section presents data from a national survey that was co-constructed with input from a range of stakeholders, including policymakers, researchers, and higher education consultants.

In January 2020, SHEEO surveyed its members to learn more about how state agencies and systems of higher education address matters related to racial equity within their organizations and respective states. A total of 34 agencies and systems responded to the 25-question survey (a 56 percent response rate). Of the 34 respondents, 21 were coordinating boards and 13 were governing boards. Those who responded represent multiple regions in the United States. The survey instrument was comprised of descriptive questions that sought to reveal how the function of equity is situated in the agency/system, how the agency/system addresses racial equity, and any equity-focused work planned for the future. This section of the paper presents a summary of survey responses and key findings. See Appendix A for a copy of the survey SHEEO administered to its members.

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO SURVEY QUESTIONS AND KEY FINDINGS:

RESPONSES TO SURVEY QUESTIONS:

Does your agency have a dedicated staff person(s) who is responsible for leading equity initiatives? If yes, what is their title and position in your agency? What is the scope of their position? If no, how is equity work positioned in your agency? What department or division works on equity initiatives?

Fifty-six percent of respondents indicated their organization does not employ dedicated staff responsible for leading equity initiatives; 44 percent indicated that their staff does include a designated position to lead equity initiatives. Among agencies responding "yes" to having a dedicated staff person(s), there was a range from having one dedicated staff person (chief diversity officer) to having multiple dedicated staff persons, to having existing staff positions/ members that include responsibility for equity work in current work portfolios.

Among SHEEO agencies/systems responding "no" to having a dedicated staff person(s), the survey sought insight into how equity work is positioned in the organization. In these instances, some respondents did not elaborate; others explained that despite not having a designated "equity position," their organization has adopted an equity lens with the expectation that all staff work on equity initiatives and utilize the framework.

It is also noteworthy that several agencies stated they did not have a dedicated staff person, but equity is embedded within the agency, and that it is the responsibility of all staff to address equity. Furthermore, some do not see equity as a defined portfolio of responsibilities/stand-

alone functions, but as a framework that is applied to the work they do as an agency overall. This is noteworthy because while having a person(s) who is dedicated to equity work in an agency may be advantageous, the notion of equity as a shared goal and responsibility is repeatedly asserted. There is consensus that equity work should be embedded in all facets of the agency/system and thus a collective effort and not a task to be completed by one person.

Does your agency have an equity statement or definition of equity?

Fifty-three percent of respondents indicated that their organization did not have an equity statement or definition of equity. Forty-seven percent responded yes, their organization did have an equity statement or definition. Yes respondents were asked to upload their equity statement/definition along with links to associated agency/system Web pages.

It is evident from survey responses that SHEEO agencies are at varying levels of operation regarding racial equity work, with more than 50 percent of respondents indicating that they did not have dedicated staff for leading equity work, an agency equity statement, nor agency equity plan. Additionally, ten SHEEO agencies/systems reported not having any dedicated staff, equity statement, or equity plan.

Does your agency have an equity plan? This may also be a portion of your strategic plan.

Fifty-three percent of respondents indicated that their organization did not have an equity plan, 47 percent indicated that it did. In some instances, it was a component of their strategic plan. *Figure 1* highlights these data by showing how many respondents answered yes and no to questions 4, 6, and 9.

FIGURE 1
**SHEEO AGENCIES WITH AN EQUITY FOCUSED STAFF MEMBER, EQUITY STATEMENT, AND AN EQUITY PLAN**
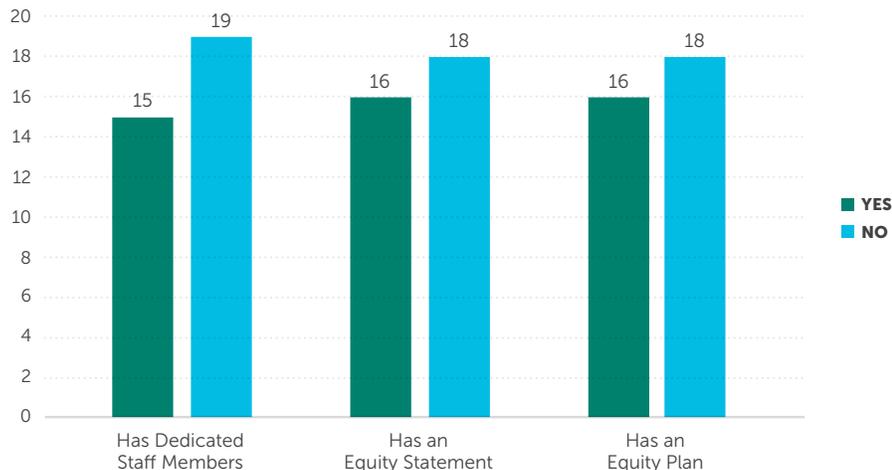
Do you feel that your agency is well equipped with the following options to address equity issues in your state: staffing, expertise, data, and time? Please choose how equipped you are for the options below.

This question sought to gain insight into matters of capacity to pursue equity agendas effectively. Regarding "staffing," 52 percent of respondents perceived they were slightly equipped to address equity issues in their respective states; 39 percent perceived they were equipped; 9 percent felt they were either very equipped or extremely equipped. Regarding "expertise," 3 percent of respondents believed they were not equipped with expertise in their agency to address equity; 39 percent felt they were slightly equipped, 39 percent felt they were equipped, 15 percent felt they were very equipped, and 3 percent felt they were extremely equipped. Regarding data, 12 percent felt they were slightly equipped, 61 percent felt they were equipped, 24 percent feel very equipped, and 3 percent felt extremely equipped. Regarding "time," 9 percent felt they were not equipped, 55 percent felt they were slightly equipped, 27 percent felt equipped, and 9 percent felt very equipped. *Figure 2* shows if agencies felt equipped with various resources, while also disaggregating by board type.

FIGURE 2
SHEEO AGENCY BEING EQUIPPED
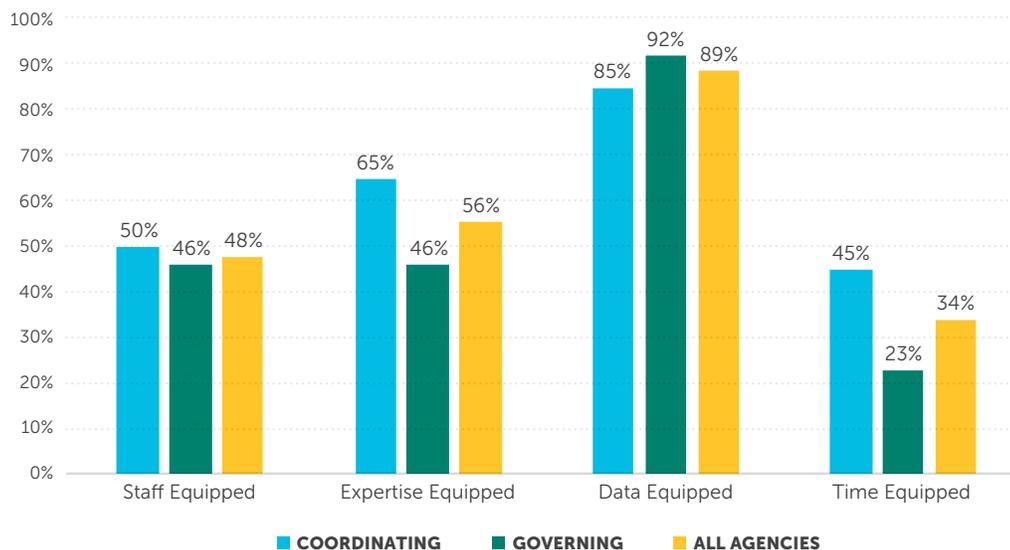
Of the resources above, which is the most needed for your agency, and what is the resource most likely to receive support?

In the follow-up to the previous question, respondents were asked, out of staffing, expertise, data, and time, which is the most needed for their agency and which resource was most likely to receive support? Twenty-two respondents indicated that staffing is most needed, and 10 responded that expertise is the most needed. Data was believed to be the resource most likely to receive support, with 12 agencies responding that way.

Staffing and time were cited as the least likely to receive support, which aligns with previous survey questions and responses. Most respondents perceived they are well equipped with data and would be able to receive data support if needed. Additionally, some respondents indicated that expertise in the growing field of equity was most needed, including in instances where staffing was available.

How challenging is it to engage in equity conversations based on race in your state with the following individuals? Based on your responses to question 14, if you cannot talk about race, what types of equity can you talk about?

These questions sought to gain insights into the perceived level of challenge to engaging in equity conversations based on race with the following stakeholder groups: agency staff, agency board, legislators, institutional leaders, state executives, and constituents. For agency staff, 47 percent perceived it was not challenging to have racial equity conversations, while 32 percent felt it was slightly challenging, 18 percent felt it was challenging, and 3 percent felt it was very challenging.

While institutional leaders and agency staff were viewed as the easiest group to talk about racial equity, legislators were the only group that did not have a majority response as being not challenging or slightly challenging to have conversations about racial equity. More than 50 percent of respondents stated it was *challenging* (n=14), *very challenging* (n=3), or *extremely challenging* (n=1) to talk with this stakeholder group about racial equity.

In response to the question about perceived degree of difficulty in having conversations with various stakeholders, regarding board staff, 35 percent found it was not challenging, 39 percent felt it was slightly challenging, 34 percent found it challenging, and 3 percent found it very challenging. Regarding legislators, 12 percent found it was not challenging to talk with legislators, 35 percent found it slightly challenging, 41 percent found it challenging, 9 percent found it very challenging, and 3 percent found it extremely challenging. Regarding state executives, 41 percent found conversations not challenging, while 24 percent found it slightly challenging, 29 percent found it challenging, and 6 percent found it very challenging. *Figure 3* shows these data.

FIGURE 3

SHEEO AGENCY VIEWS ON RACE EQUITY CONVERSATIONS

Legend: ■ NOT CHALLENGING ■ SLIGHTLY CHALLENGING ■ CHALLENGING ■ VERY CHALLENGING ■ EXTREMELY CHALLENGING
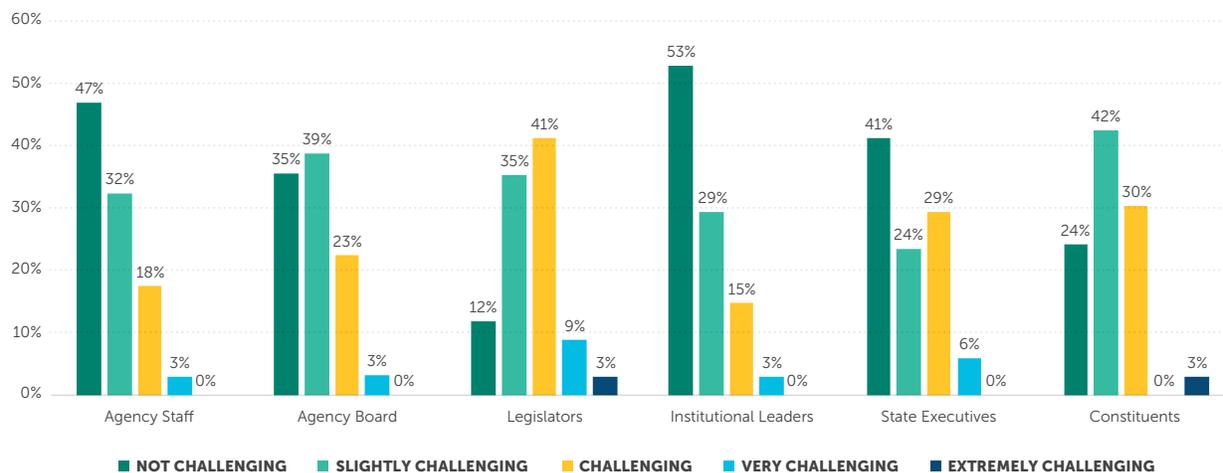
Some agencies responded that in instances when they cannot talk about race, they will speak about socioeconomic status, gender, or geographic region. However, several other states mentioned that they are able to talk about race and that it is important to talk about race continually. Some respondents mentioned that they felt that others are more open to talking about socioeconomic status instead of race. One SHEEO agency mentioned that they can talk about race with their stakeholders; however, when they cannot, it is due to competing priorities instead of a person's unwillingness to engage on the subject matter. Several SHEEO agencies did reiterate how imperative it is to talk about race while also talking about various other aspects of cultural diversity.

Is your agency currently taking steps to address the policy topics below? Topics explored were: 1) Erasing equity gaps based on race, 2) Financially supporting Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-serving institutions, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges and Universities, 3) Recruiting, retaining, and supporting faculty and staff of color, 4) Improving campus climate for students of color, 5) Increased student financial aid opportunities, and 5) Creating/supporting culturally competent faculty and staff.

Eighty-eight percent of respondents said they were taking steps to erase equity gaps based on race, while 12 percent indicated they were not. Seventy-five percent responded that they were financially supporting Asian American, Native American, and Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges and Universities. Sixty-eight percent of respondents indicated they were taking steps to recruit, retain, and support faculty and staff of color. Sixty-one percent indicated they were taking steps to address campus climate for students of color, and 68 percent said they were working to create and support culturally competent faculty and staff. Finally, 91 percent indicated they were working to increase student financial aid opportunities. Respondents were asked to upload relevant documents.

TABLE 1
STATES ADDRESSING EQUITY-RELATED POLICY ISSUES

The remaining survey questions revealed a variety of responses, including some confidential in nature. SHEEO plans to provide opportunities for state agencies and systems to share some of this information in the future (e.g., via blog posts, webinars, etc.). *Table 1* shows how many respondents are addressing the previously mentioned policy topics.

| POLICY	NUMBER OF STATES ADDRESSING POLICY	NUMBER OF STATES NOT ADDRESSING POLICY
Erasing equity gaps based on race in your state	29	4
Financially supporting Asian American Native American Pacific Islanding-Serving Institutions, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges and Universities	24	8
Recruiting, retaining, and supporting faculty and staff of color	21	10
Improving campus climate for students of color	20	13
Increased student financial aid opportunities	30	3
Culturally competent faculty and staff	21	10

EQUITY AT GOVERNING AND COORDINATING BOARDS

When disaggregated by governing and coordinating board, coordinating boards responded yes less frequently than governing boards. Thirty-three percent of coordinating board respondents indicated they have a dedicated staff person, and 62 percent of governing board respondents indicated they have a dedicated staff person. Additionally, 33 percent of coordinating boards responded yes to having an equity statement, and 43 percent had an equity plan; 69 percent of governing boards reported having an equity statement, and 54 percent indicated having an equity plan. These differences between coordinating boards and governing boards align with data from the SHEEO Membership Survey, where 19 percent of coordinating boards and 43 percent of governing boards indicated they perform equity and diversity program functions. *Figure 4* shows coordinating and governing boards that have dedicated equity staff.

FIGURE 4
COORDINATING AND GOVERNING BOARDS WITH DEDICATED EQUITY STAFF
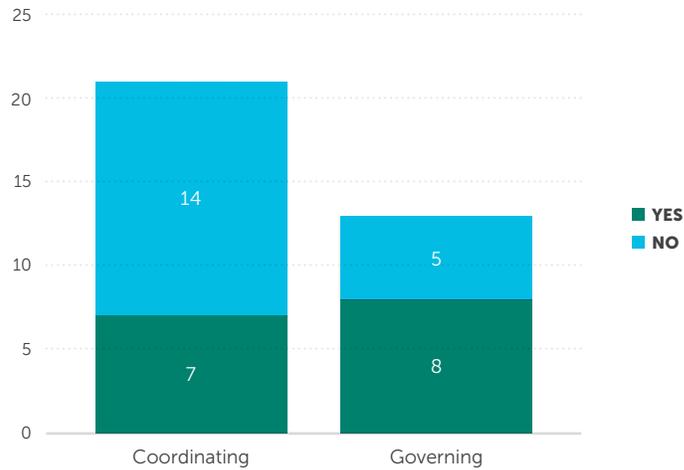
Some SHEEO agencies, mostly governing boards, are working toward incorporating equity into their agency work and performing equity functions. Coordinating boards are also moving in this direction. Furthermore, of the six states that indicated equity was embedded throughout their organization, five were coordinating boards. These data illustrate the various approaches to performing this area of work better but show the different ways each agency is approaching this work. *Figure 5* demonstrates how many SHEEO agencies have equity statements, while *Figure 6* shows how many SHEEO agencies have equity plans.

FIGURE 5
**COORDINATING AND GOVERNING BOARDS WITH EQUITY STATEMENTS**
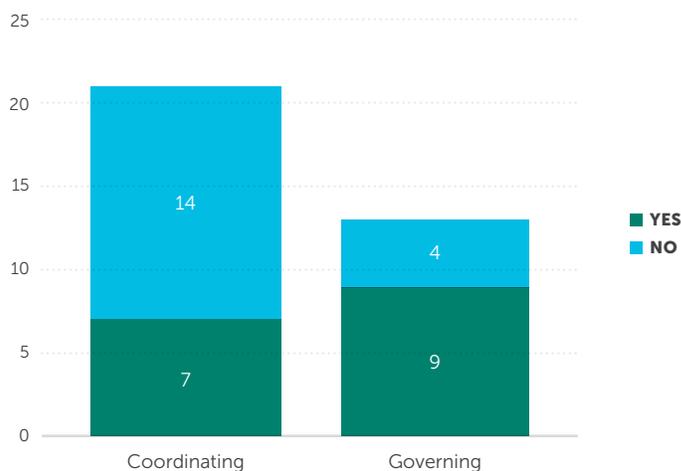
FIGURE 6
COORDINATING AND GOVERNING BOARDS WITH EQUITY PLANS

The overall capacity to address equity also revealed some differences between governing and coordinating boards. Coordinating boards responded that they were equipped with staff (50 percent), expertise (65 percent), and time (45 percent) more frequently than governing boards, while governing boards responded that they were more equipped with data (92 percent) at a slightly higher rate than coordinating boards (85 percent). Collectively, both types of boards responded at high rates for being data equipped, and both responded their lowest rates for being equipped with time.

Another interesting observation is that governing boards were more likely to report that they were not equipped with staffing. However, they typically have more staff in their agencies and more staff dedicated per function. The mean full-time equivalency (FTE) for coordinating boards is 55.8 compared to governing boards' 65 FTE. Additionally, governing boards, on average, have 6.55 FTE per function, while coordinating boards have 4.19 FTE per function.

Lastly, respondents from both coordinating and governing boards expressed that given the expectations to perform a wide variety of functions, they do not have the time or resources to address racial equity properly — in ways that approach equity as more than a set of distinct goals, objectives, and tasks, but rather as a fundamental shift in ways of thinking and behaving that lead to changes in systems, policies, and practices that continue to oppress the success of Black and African American, Latinx, Native American and Alaska Native students.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

> *Equity prioritizes the creation of opportunities for minoritized students to have equal outcomes and participation in educational programs that can close the achievement gaps in student success and completion.*
>
> *– McNair, Bensimon, and Malcolm-Piqueux , in, "From equity talk to equity walk: Expanding practitioner knowledge for racial justice in higher education"*

Despite persistent racial gaps in student outcomes, SHEEOs are increasingly embracing the equity imperative and providing the leadership necessary to make substantive changes in policy and practice. Importantly, this work is being done in collaboration with strategic stakeholder groups, including students themselves. The purpose of this paper was to examine states leading for equity and to present the various ways of thinking about and doing equity work in state agencies and systems of higher education. At its core, the notion of equity-minded leadership, policies, and practices represents a shift in focus from equal access to equal outcomes — eliciting policymakers, institutional leaders, and others to evaluate student success efforts in alternative, equity-minded ways. The Center for Urban Education (CUE) defines equity-mindedness as a way of thinking that focuses on inequity in student outcomes. Accordingly, equity-minded leaders must be prepared to assume greater responsibility for the success of students, and judiciously reconsider their practices. Race consciousness is a key component of this evaluative process, given the history of racial discrimination in American higher education (Center for Urban Education, n.d.).

SHEEOs are favorably positioned to serve as catalysts for profound change in their roles as chief executives of statewide governing, policy, and coordinating boards of postsecondary education. They can engage with government, philanthropic organizations, businesses, P-12 education, community-based leaders, and other intermediary organizations to move the dial on equity-focused policies and practices that remove barriers and promote educational systems that better the underserved racial and ethnic groups discussed in this paper. Closing educational attainment gaps for these historically underrepresented populations should be a top priority for state policymakers if states expect to meet their ambitious higher education attainment goals in the coming years.

As an independent, private foundation committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all, Lumina Foundation (2019) endeavors to build capacity for degree attainment and the equity-minded change it desires as illustrated in its Commitment to Racial Equity and has explicitly committed to:

- Prioritize efforts that address the origins of inequality and inequity.
- Build competence among board members, senior leadership, and staff members to authentically and collaboratively engage communities of color.
- Embed a commitment to racial equity and its foundation of diversity and inclusion in their recruitment and hiring practices, contracting and grantmaking, and investment practices.
- Promote the capacity of contractors and grantees to pursue racial equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- Foster and support efforts to promote racial equity, diversity, and inclusion within philanthropy.

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation provides another example of the philanthropic community's explicit focus on racial equity, which has become one of the three core principles at the foundation in addition to leadership and community engagement. Dedicated to racial equity, the foundation funds projects that apply an equity lens to a variety of social issues, including health, education, and employment, and organizational capacity building. SHEEO was fortunate to receive funding from the foundation to address teacher diversity, which is at the foundation of sustainable educational equity efforts. The initiative is named *Project Pipeline Repair: Restoring Minority Male Participation and Persistence in Educator Preparation Programs* (www.sheeo.org/ppr).

Several SHEEO agencies and systems have established sophisticated equity-minded strategic plans aimed at closing achievement gaps and improving student outcomes for students of color. In March 2020, SHEEO launched a series of webinars, "States Leading for Equity: Profiles in Action." The Minnesota Office of Higher Education collaborated with Minnesota State Colleges and Universities to share some of the mission-driven, innovative, and cross-sector work underway in their state. Other member states are being invited to share their strategies in the future. In the interim, SHEEO will continue to chart a strategic pathway to support its members toward achieving educational equity in their states and beyond. SHEEO is engaged in a variety of mission-driven initiatives in partnership with its members that address educational equity. We are excited about this body of work and look forward to expanding our support and efforts in this critical area of higher education policy and practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

> *A lack of access to high-quality learning opportunities after high school with adequate academic, financial, and social supports has denied Black, Hispanic, and Native American people opportunities to advance economically and to fully participate in society. Racial disparities in the United States are widening, and without concerted efforts, inequity will only continue to grow. Intentionally designed policies and deliberate actions created these unjust conditions. It will take equally focused efforts to achieve racial equity in America.*
>
> *– Lumina Foundation*

The authors of this paper recognize the uniqueness of states, and the following recommendations are presented with that appreciation for the various ways in which these policy conversations and actions are occurring. An overarching theme, however, is the notion of systems change. Recognizing that disparities in student outcomes represent decades of systematic inequities presents an opportunity for state policy leaders to foster seismic shifts in policy and practice. However, leading for equity in today's complex higher education environment will require deeper change within entire systems. Blankstein and Noguera (2015) discuss equity-minded systems change and offer the following recommendations to advance educational equity (p. 47):

- Foster deep commitment to the moral imperative.
- A small number of ambitious goals relentlessly pursued.
- Establish a developmental culture and invest in capacity building.
- Build leadership at all levels.
- Cultivate districtwide engagement.

- Learn from the work.
- Use transparent data to improve practice.
- Monitor for innovation and improvement.

As SHEEO leaders articulate the vision, goals, and objectives for their agency or system, they have the opportunity to embed systems of accountability with key performance indicators to achieve educational equity. Acknowledging the importance of leadership in advancing equity, Williams (2013) offers a strategic diversity leadership scorecard developed to foster change from multiple perspectives. Aligned with clear objectives, leaders can adopt this "scorecard" to establish specific goals, tactics, and indicators. The Strategic Diversity Leadership Scorecard (Williams, 2013) is comprised of the following domains, which provide a framework for holistic strategic planning and evaluation.

- Access and equity
- Learning and diversity
- Multicultural & inclusive environments
- Diversity research & scholarship

The Center for Urban Education has also developed an Equity Scorecard. It is described as both a process and data tool comprised of 1) data tools, 2) an inquiry process; 3) a process of problem-solving, 4) a theory of change, 5) an approach to academic leadership, and 6) an approach to embedding a culture of equity-mindedness. CUE describes its approach as evidence-based, race-conscious, institutionally focused, systemically aware, and equity advancing. CUE further provides five essential equity practices for closing racial equity gaps in college completion. These practices address specific obstacles, including:

- Lack of understanding of racial equity;
- Lack of setting goals by race and ethnicity, and reporting racial outcomes routinely;
- No plan for institutional transformation or strategy to engage institutions in adopting racial equity benchmarks;
- Lack of systematic implementation of racial equity practices; and
- Lack of assessment of policies, practices, and initiatives that undermine racial equity.

The Centers for Educational Equity (CE3) at the University of California at Berkeley offer a model for state agencies and systems to consider. This flagship public university declares a commitment to the most vulnerable students and groups. CE3's efforts can be placed into three broad categories: Access and Opportunity Programs, Independent Student Programs, and Transfer Student Programs. To promote educational equity, CE3 also connects students with critical resources, including academic advising, scholarships, mentoring, career guidance, nutrition, and childcare support — all of which can impact student outcomes. Detailed information can be found at https://ce3.berkeley.edu.

Quality data is critical to moving the equity needle. With that understanding, Simon (2019) proposes the use of equity-based analytics to advance educational equity throughout the postsecondary ecosystem. Mentioned previously are the four distinct areas of equity analytics for consideration (access data, data funding, pedagogy and engagement data, and compliance and risk data). The following table provides examples of these data buckets.

TABLE 2
EQUITY ANALYTICS BY DATA AREA

ACCESS DATA	FUNDING DATA	PEDAGOGY & ENGAGEMENT DATA	COMPLIANCE AND RISK DATA
Underrepresented student admission patters; LGBTQI representation; Community College admission patterns; Conditional admissions decision analysis; High school recruitment analysis and population demographic analysis; and Faculty hiring, tenure, and promotion ratio patterns	Expected Family Contribution (EFC) analysis; Unmet need analysis for retention and risk; Scholarships targeted at diverse populations; and Faculty equity studies including course release studies	Grade distribution data; Mentoring opportunities and tracking; Faculty involvement in support of underrepresented minorities; and Participation studies in student support, academic and co-curricular activities	Title IX tracking; EEO violations; Cleary Act analytics; Audit trail data; and Other state, federal, and accreditation mandate analysis

Simon also shares some common roadblocks for equity-based analytics, including 1) Poor automated data processes, 2) Blind spots in data structures, systems, tables, and fields, 3) Inadequate or non-existent data governance processes, 4) Use of black-box algorithms, 5) Lack of appropriate funding and staffing, 6) Inconsistent political and cultural will, and 7) Unidentified executive sponsorship. Data collected should be intended to inform decision-making, but not in the absence of additional information such as student and community narratives.

The final recommendation in this paper involves the development of effective planning and implementation teams to achieve equity goals and objectives. Williams' (2013) criteria can be easily adopted in agencies, systems, or institutions of higher education and should include members with a mix of the following competencies:

- An ability to provide executive level support
- An in-depth understanding of diversity issues
- Viewed as a committed and vocal advocate for diversity
- Respected by other leaders and faculty
- An in-depth understanding of the institution's/organization's culture
- Able to motivate and inspire others to get involved with diversity implementation
- Vested with the authority to make decisions
- Able to secure the necessary financial resources required to implement the diversity plan successfully
- Brings political relationships and insight that can helpful remove barriers that may inhibit implementation
- Brings legal expertise related to issues of diversity and community

As a closing note, SHEEOs can serve as catalysts for profound change in their roles as leaders of statewide governing, policy, and coordinating boards of postsecondary education. A repeated recommended change in thinking and "doing" equity is from the overall focus on student behaviors to a major focus on agency, system, and institutional behaviors specifically related to those matters within their parameters of control — policies and practices. Given the multitude of pressures facing higher education, including those related to affordability, return on investments, racial inequities, access, retention, completion, and affordability, SHEEOs are challenged to consider major shifts in policy and practice. Adopting an equity-minded approach to leadership and policymaking can better position state agencies and systems of higher education to improve student outcomes and close educational achievement gaps for racial and ethnic minority groups.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – SURVEY TO SHEEO AGENCIES AND SYSTEMS

EQUITY IN SHEEO AGENCIES (ADMINISTERED USING SURVEYMONKEY)

SHEEO continually seeks to partner with its members to promote policies and practices that ensure the equitable education of all Americans, regardless of race/ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic factors. We are currently engaged in work that focuses on equity in the context of state agencies and state systems of higher education. This survey specifically focuses on the ways state agencies and state systems of higher education address racial equity. This survey is the beginning of further conversations and programs aimed specifically at equity.

Please take a moment to complete this brief survey on equity in SHEEO agencies, which will inform our efforts. We would appreciate your responses to the survey no later than January 20.

Thank you in advance for your contributions to this important work.

Sincerely,

Denise Pearson, *Vice President, Academic Affairs & Equity Initiatives*
Brandon Bishop, *Policy Analyst*
Jason Lee, *Postdoctoral Fellow*
State Higher Education Executive Officers Association

1) Respondent name

2) SHEEO agency name

3) State

4) Does your agency have a dedicated staff person(s) who is responsible for leading equity initiatives?
   a. Yes
   b. No

5) If yes, what is their title and position in your agency? What is the scope of their position?

   If no, how is equity work positioned in your agency? What department or division works on equity initiatives? (Free Form)

6) Does your agency have an **equity statement** or **definition of equity**?
   a. Yes
   b. No

7) If you answered yes to question 6, please provide your agency's equity statement and/or equity definition in the box below. Please include links to applicable websites, or upload documents in number 8. (Free Form)

8) Please upload your documents for question 7.

9) Does your agency have an **equity plan**? This may also be a portion in your strategic plan.

a. Yes

b. No

10) If you answered yes to question 9, please provide your agency's equity plan in the box below. Please include links to applicable websites or upload documents in number 11. (Free Form)

11) Please upload your documents for question 10 here.

12) Do you feel that your agency is well equipped with the following options to address equity issues in your state: staffing, expertise, data, and time? Please choose how equipped you are for the options below. (1: Not Equipped, 2: Slightly Equipped, 3: Equipped, 4: Very Equipped, 5: Very Equipped)

   a. Staffing

   b. Expertise

   c. Data

   d. Time

13) Of the resources above, which is the most needed for your agency and what is the resource most likely to receive support? (Free Form)

14) How challenging is it to engage in equity conversations based on race in your state with the following individuals? (1: Not Challenging, 2: Slightly Challenging, 3: Challenging, 4: Very Challenging, 5: Very Challenging)

   a. Agency staff

   b. Agency board

   c. Legislators

   d. Institutional leaders

   e. State executives (governor, lt. governor, etc.)

   f. Constituents

   g. Other (please name)

15) Based on your responses to question 14, if you cannot talk about race, what types of equity can you talk about? (Free Form)

16) Is your agency currently taking steps to address the policy topics below? (1: Yes 2: No)

    a. Erasing equity gaps based on race in your state

    b. Financially supporting Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges and Universities

    c. Recruiting, retaining, and supporting faculty and staff of color

    d. Improving campus climate for students of color

    e. Increased student financial aid opportunities

    f. Culturally competent faculty and staff

    g. Other (please name)

17) What strategies is your state utilizing to close racial equity gaps? Please provide applicable website link(s) or documents. (Free Form)

18) Please upload documents for question 17.

19) In the space below, please provide examples of recent **successful** equity initiatives. Please explain why you believe they succeeded. (Free Form)

20) In the space below, please provide examples of recent **unsuccessful** equity initiatives. Please explain why you believe they were not successful. (Free Form)

21) What could SHEEO do to support the advancement of equity work in your state and/or at the federal level? (Free Form)

22) If there are other groups of students that you feel are left out of equity conversations you believe SHEEO and SHEEO agencies could more strongly support, please list these student groups and provide examples of what the student groups need. (Free Form)

23) Can we reach out to you separately for follow-up if we have additional questions?

24) If you answered yes to question 23, please provide an email for us to contact you below.

25) If you would like, please upload the job description(s) of the specific equity position you described in questions 4 and 5.

APPENDIX B – SELECTED ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

This list of selected additional resources is intended to support state agencies and systems of higher education in their efforts to lead for equity and build organizational and state capacity. You can help us expand this resource list by sending suggestions to any of the paper's authors.

Building a Culture of Equity-Mindedness. "Cultural change takes time, and change is a learning process… Those who hold normative perspectives consider students' motivation, self-efficacy, and behaviors as the sole explanations for whether or not they achieve academic success and expect students to be college ready when they arrive on campus." League for Innovation in the Community College. Kentina Smith and Lori Perez, November 2019. www.league.org/innovation-showcase/building-culture-equity-mindedness

CLEAR Framework for Leading Systems Change. The authors describe five key elements of the systems change process, including 1) Convene and Commit key stakeholders; 2. Look and Learn through system mapping; 3. Engage and Energize diverse stakeholders; 4. Act with Accountability; and 5. Review and Revise. Dreier, Nabarro, and Nelson. (2019). Harvard Kennedy School. www.hks.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/centers/mrcbg/files/Systems%20Leadership.pdf

Equity-Minded Leadership. "Learn how the commission plans are aligned and integrated with the new guided pathways equity principles. Develop clearer and deeper understanding of what we mean by "equity-mindedness" and "equitable guided pathways" and Share ideas and opportunities to implement more equitable guided pathways." Joint Washington Community and Technical Colleges (WA CTC) Equity-Minded Leadership Workshop. Goals: Facilitated by Joe Lott and Debra Bragg, July 2019. www.sbctc.edu/resources/documents/colleges-staff/commissions-councils/ic/equity-minded-leadership-wkshop-sum2019.pdf

Equity Scorecard. "The Equity Scorecard™ is both a process and a data tool. As a process, it combines a theoretical framework with practical strategies to initiate institutional change that will lead to equitable outcomes for students of color. What's unique about it is the engagement of individuals from different departments and divisions in an evidence team which investigates campus data, practices, and policies. Near the conclusion of the process, the team will complete a Scorecard which captures the results of its investigations." Center for Urban Education, USC. cue.usc.edu/tools/the-equity-scorecard

The Frontier Set: Working Together for Equitable Student Outcomes. "The Frontier Set is a select group of high-performing, high-potential colleges and universities, state systems, and supporting organizations, all committed to dramatically increasing student success and erasing attainment gaps by transforming how they operate… The 29 colleges and universities and two state systems (all referred to as "sites") that make up the Frontier Set stand as a diverse cross-section of higher education, encompassing research universities, state systems, regional comprehensive institutions, community colleges, urban-serving universities, and minority-serving institutions including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)." Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). www.aascu.org/FrontierSet/2018FinalReport.pdf

Leading for Change: 8-Step Process. "The 8-Step Process for Leading Change was cultivated from over four decades of Dr. Kotter's observations of countless leaders and organizations as they were trying to transform or execute their strategies. He identified and extracted the success factors and combined them into a methodology, the award-winning 8-Step Process for Leading Change." www.kotterinc.com/8-steps-process-for-leading-change

Outcomes-Based Funding Equity Toolkit. This toolkit "provides practical lessons on how states, systems, and institutions work to address equity in the development and implementation of OBF policy. Broken into four Series focused on equity challenges in distinct phases of the OBF policy process, the Toolkit contains short, individual modules that focus on specific topics and provide lessons learned and recommendations for policymakers and institutional leaders to consider. Content is derived from in-depth study of six states (Tennessee, Indiana, Ohio, New Mexico, Oregon, and Kentucky) and 13 institutions in them." Research for Action (RFA). www.obfequitytoolkit.org

Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education Report. "This report examines over 200 indicators, looking at who gains access to a host of educational environments and experiences, and how these trajectories differ, by race and ethnicity. In addition, invited scholarly essays provide further context around race and ethnicity in higher education that data alone cannot tell." American Council on Education (ACE). www.equityinhighered.org/resources/report-downloads

The State of Higher Education Equity. "As others have expanded access to higher education, we've stagnated. Why? It's because the 7,000 colleges and universities across our states and territories still aren't doing a good enough job getting Black and Latino Americans — whose population numbers are on the rise — across the finish line. And too many policymakers and state leaders are letting them get away with it, failing to make decisions that would increase college access and completion, particularly for historically underserved groups of students. This project offers state-by-state snapshots of where we stand in the quest for racial equity among degree-holders, how far we have to go, and what we need to do to get there." The Education Trust. edtrust.org/the-state-of-higher-education-equity

Using "Adaptive Equity-Minded Leadership" to Bring about Large-Scale Change. "There are many ways to think about change leadership and many theories to describe how it works, or should work. At their best, change leaders recognize that their job is to encourage and support new and different ways of thinking and doing that bring out the best in others and themselves. The theory of adaptive leadership values this perspective and therefore offers a practical approach to leadership that the community and technical colleges (CTCs) in Washington can use to implement three major change initiatives: the Student Success Center, guided pathways, and math pathways." Debra Bragg & Heather McCambly, April 2017 www.sbctc.edu/resources/documents/colleges-staff/programs-services/student-success-center/student-success-resource-center/debra-bragg-equity-minded-leadership-2017.pdf