Putting Equity First: Removing Policy and Practice Barriers for Racially Equitable Success

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Agenda

1. Introduction from Lumina Foundation

2. Overview of RFA's Ongoing Study of TIE

3. Overview of Massachusetts Department of Higher Education TIE Efforts

4. Discussion

Source: https://www.luminafoundation.org/stronger-nation/report/

Our Equity First Approach

Definitions

We believe that **equity** is achieved when outcomes – such as the likelihood of having a high-quality postsecondary credential – cannot be predicted by a person's race or ethnicity.

And that **racial justice** will be realized when the policies, practices, systems, and root causes that lead to inequitable outcomes are dismantled and eradicated.

Lumina's State Policy Agenda

Agenda overview

Lumina Foundation's state policy agenda seeks to build a fairer, more racially just system supported by three pillars:

- Robust and equitable state financing of the public colleges, universities, and training centers that serve the greatest numbers and highest percentages of students of color, students from families with low incomes, and working-age adults.

- Coherent, comprehensive programs of student financial aid that serve those in the greatest financial need, especially among students of color.

- Fair and consistent systems for assessing and validating people's knowledge and skills that create inclusive pathways for adult students of color to earn quality credentials.
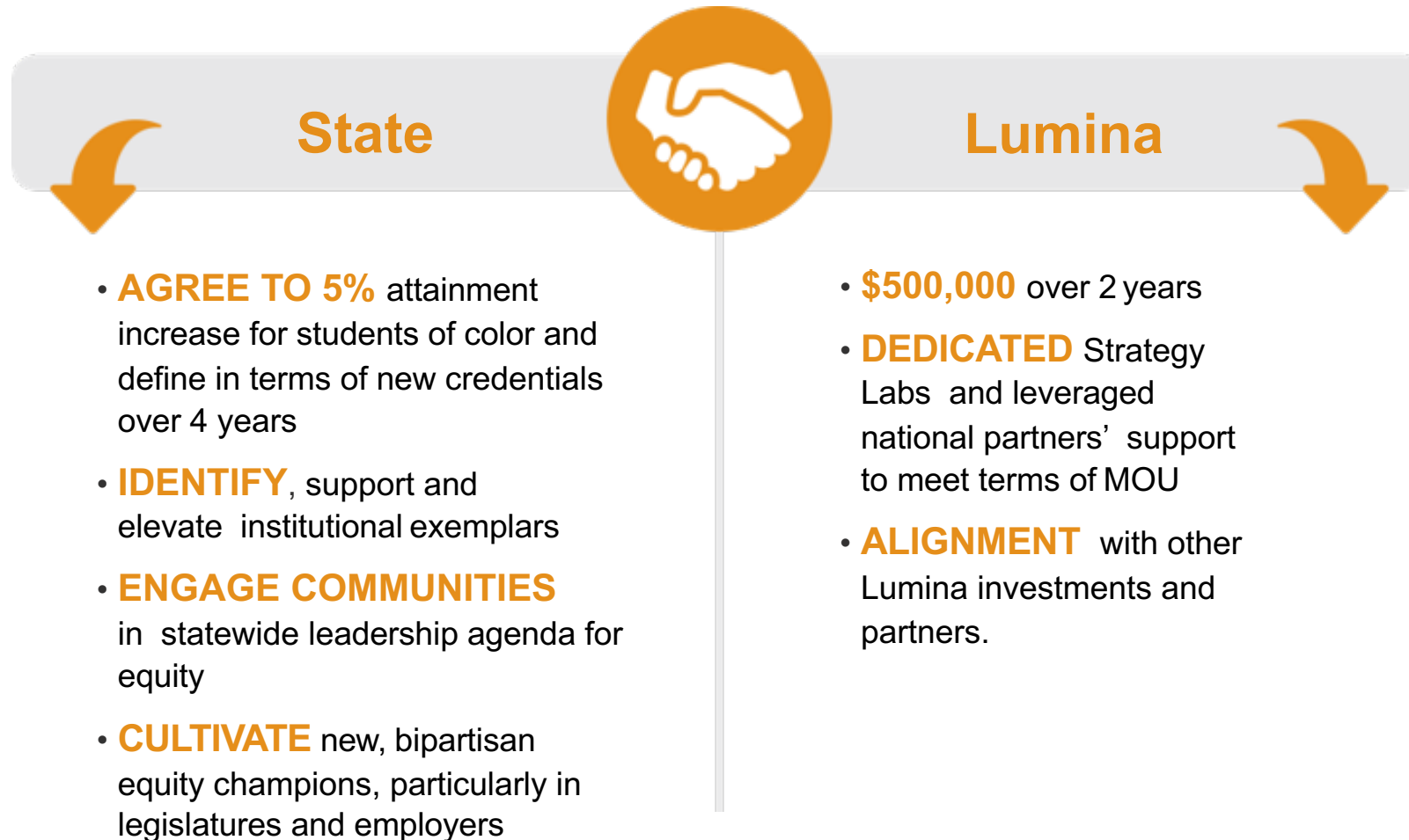
TALENT, INNOVATION, AND EQUITY (TIE)

Two-year grant to generate aggressive 5% increase in attainment among students of color in four years.
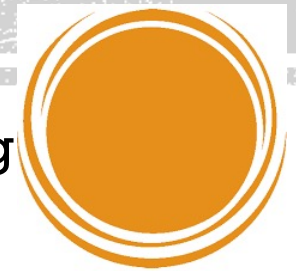
TIE States: Colorado, Tennessee, Oregon, Virginia and Massachusetts

TIE PARTNERSHIP

State

- **AGREE TO 5%** attainment increase for students of color and define in terms of new credentials over 4 years

- **IDENTIFY**, support and elevate institutional exemplars

- **ENGAGE COMMUNITIES** in statewide leadership agenda for equity

- **CULTIVATE** new, bipartisan equity champions, particularly in legislatures and employers

Lumina

- **$500,000** over 2 years

- **DEDICATED** Strategy Labs and leveraged national partners' support to meet terms of MOU

- **ALIGNMENT** with other Lumina investments and partners.

RFA's Study of TIE Grant

- Between 2018-2020, RFA conducted a 3-state study of the first cohort of TIE states
- Data sources include:
  - Interviews with 11 state policymakers, 6 institutional leaders, and 7 advocacy leaders across three states between January and November 2019
  - Observation of TIE steering committee meetings and two campus visits
  - Interviews with technical assistance providers and the Foundation's state policy team

2018-2020 Evaluation Framework

- To understand state efforts to close postsecondary attainment equity gaps for students of color, RFA developed a framework that describes three drivers behind efforts to place racial equity at the center of postsecondary policymaking and practice: **awareness, inclusion, and integration.**

Figure 1. Race Equity Cycle

AWARENESS

INCLUSION

INTEGRATION

Implications for Equity

TIE initiative was leveraged to [increase awareness]() of racial equity

- State higher education agencies, institutions, and coalition members identified that the grant increased awareness of postsecondary racial equity gaps, and its causes and barriers
- TIE offered legitimacy on the importance of closing racial equity gaps in higher education attainment at the state-level
- State and institutional stakeholders highlighted the importance of data in increasing awareness

Implications for Equity

The role of TIE in advancing [inclusion](#) varied across state partners and stakeholder levels

- The presence of a race-conscious state agenda helped connect TIE efforts to other equity-focused initiatives
- The extent to which Black, Indigenous, and Hispanic/ Latinx, and student voices were including in strategic planning TIE efforts aligned to closing racial equity gaps varied across states

Implications for Equity

When awareness and inclusion are limited, stakeholders were less equipped to integrate policies and practices with racial equity goals

- TIE grant most influenced policy and practice when the TIE goals aligned to state strategic plans and priorities
- State and institution-level response was more limited when priorities were not aligned to the TIE grant
- Efforts to expand integration were hampered by inconsistent engagement in racial equity work at the state and institution levels due to changes in administrations, shifting agendas, lack of capacity, competing priorities, and lack of examples to guide efforts.

RFA's Current Research

- Currently, RFA is conducting a developmental evaluation to track and document the launch and early implementation of Virginia and Massachusetts TIE-related efforts.
- Data sources include:
  - Public document review of legislation, regulation, data systems, MOUs
  - Interviews with state and system-level leaders, institution leaders, community leaders, or equity advocates
  - Review of publicly available descriptive data
  - Convenings with voluntary student advisory boards of postsecondary students in both states

RFA's Current Research

Guiding Questions

1. How is the TIE initiative connected to closing racial equity gaps in higher education attainment?
2. How has Lumina's TIE grant influenced state focus on racial/ethnic attainment levels?
3. How do key stakeholders perceive the value of the TIE grant in shifting policy and practices to increase racial equity in postsecondary education opportunities and attainment?
4. How is the TIE grant advancing anti-racist policies & practices?
5. How have recent awareness of racial injustice shaped and/or informed progress towards racial equity?
6. How has the COVID pandemic shaped and/or informed progress towards racial equity?
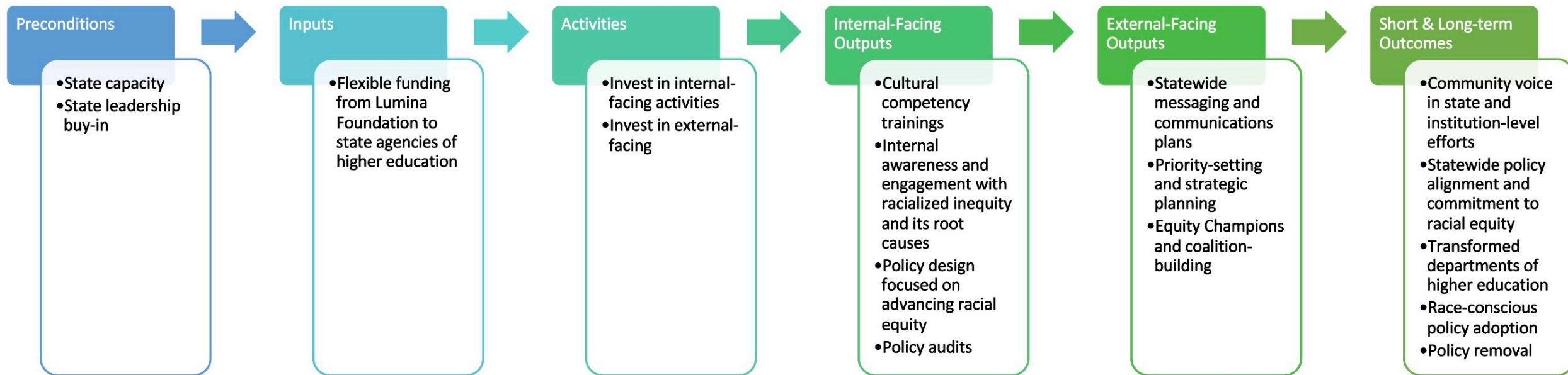
RFA's Current Research

This developmental evaluation aims to:

- Document the story of each state's TIE efforts with consideration for the historical and cultural context of the states, institutions, and the postsecondary landscape
- Identify emerging practices of promise and capture lessons learned
- Provide recommendations for other states that embark on similar efforts to increase racial and ethnic justice in the postsecondary policy arena
- Examine whether and how the Foundation's grantmaking strategy supports efforts to close racial and ethnic equity gaps for traditional-aged and adult students of color

Emerging Theory of Change

Preconditions
- State capacity
- State leadership buy-in

→

Inputs
- Flexible funding from Lumina Foundation to state agencies of higher education

→

Activities
- Invest in internal-facing activities
- Invest in external-facing

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Internal-Facing Outputs
- Cultural competency trainings
- Internal awareness and engagement with racialized inequity and its root causes
- Policy design focused on advancing racial equity
- Policy audits

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External-Facing Outputs
- Statewide messaging and communications plans
- Priority-setting and strategic planning
- Equity Champions and coalition-building

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Short & Long-term Outcomes
- Community voice in state and institution-level efforts
- Statewide policy alignment and commitment to racial equity
- Transformed departments of higher education
- Race-conscious policy adoption
- Policy removal

Equity Principles—Toward an Anti-Racist Frame

These values guide our work to fulfill the Equity Agenda

Racial equity:

- Is the **top policy and performance priority** for the Department of Higher Education
- Will be achieved **when race no longer determines one's outcomes** in the Massachusetts public higher education system
- Must be **embedded** system-wide and permeate the Department's structure, culture, and policies
- Requires the use of **asset-based language** to minimize the threat of harm, deficit, and stereotype reinforcement
  - *"Asset-based language" defines people by their aspirations and contributions, rather than the systemic barriers and challenges they face*
- Requires **acknowledgement, remedy, and repair** of policies and practices which have excluded or created barriers

Equity Principles—Toward an Antiracist frame

These values guide our work to fulfill the Equity Agenda

We must:

- Recognize that **clarity** in language, goals, and measures is vital to racially equitable practices

- Promote **culturally sustainable campus climates** in which all students can thrive and are regarded in the totality of their human dignity
  - *"Culturally sustainable" means recognizing, maintaining, and developing cultural identity and diversity, as they are assets, not weaknesses (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012)*

- Create and cultivate an **inclusive environment** to encourage the support and participation of relevant stakeholders

- Acknowledge the **experience and knowledge** of people of color, and seek to engage people of color in the pursuit of racial equity in meaningful ways

- Incentivize the development and support the implementation of **equity-minded, evidence-based solutions**

Cultural Conditions toward Racial Equity--Participatory Leadership

To achieve racial equity, DHE has developed various **formal and informal networks** to catalyze and support staff in developing knowledge, building relationships, and implementing policy changes

Networks include but are not limited to:

	Individual	Groups	Agency and System
Internal Communications & Professional Development • DHE ICPD Working Group • DHE Community Conversations • DHE Equity Book Club • DHE Equity Institutes (completed) and future professional development	✓	✓	
Policy & Program Design • DHE Policy & Program Audit Learning Community • BHE Committees & Full Board		✓	✓
New Undergraduate Experience Design • Steering Committee • Student-Ready Institutions Committee • Teaching & Learning Committee		✓	✓ ✓
Coalition Building • DHE Strategic Communications Team • Equity Coalition		✓	✓ ✓

Cultural Conditions toward Racial Equity: Shared Departmental Values

At the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education,
we share these interconnected values:

Equity

Understanding and confronting oppression in all its forms

Accountability

Answering for the outcomes of decisions and actions

Community

Showing care and respect toward others

Empowerment

Facilitating others' opportunities for growth and contribution, within teams and across DHE

Intentionality

Acting with purpose and clarity

Teamwork

Embracing the power of unity, collaboration, and collective insight

Equity Agenda Overview

The Equity Agenda outlines an action plan that covers five key areas:

Policy Audit

- Complete a Department-wide policy audit to assess all policies and initiatives
- Identify and remove policies that exacerbate racial inequity
- Redesign the Department's policy scheme to build a culturally sustainable public postsecondary system where students can thrive

Student Experience

- Reimagine the undergraduate experience in order to dismantle systemic barriers by recognizing students' cultural wealth and transforming teaching and learning *(New Undergraduate Experience)*
- Align system and institutional efforts to create student-ready campuses

Data and Evidence

- Expand data dashboards to measure progress toward the goal of racial equity and include baseline projections and benchmarks of Massachusetts public higher education enrollment through 2030
- Value students' experiences through qualitative research
- Identify and support the implementation of equity-minded, evidence-based solutions

Community of Practice

- Support the growth of a system-wide community of practice
- Elevate the work of equity leaders
- Create digital resources for campuses, which may include implementation toolkits and digital archives to allow sharing across campuses
- Develop a statewide professional development curriculum focused on culturally sustaining teaching practices

Sustained Transformation

- Convene and support a broad coalition of equity partners
- **Develop a 10-year statewide strategic plan focused on advancing racial equity**

Discussion Questions

- How might cultural conditions within in your agency/organization support or hinder a racial equity agenda?

- How might your state's goals reflect an antiracist frame?

- How is your state centering the experience and voices of people of color?

- How is your state identifying and addressing historic and ongoing systemic racism?

- How is your state integrating and sustaining racial equity into policy and practice?