



SHEEO

State Higher Education
Executive Officers Association

FY 2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

We are pleased to present the annual report of the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO), highlighting the key themes and accomplishments of the past year. SHEEO's involvement in various initiatives and partnerships underscores its commitment to advancing higher education policy and practice. Projects such as the State Higher Education Finance report, Basic Needs Data Academy, Pursuing Alignment for Student Success, and Communities of Practice demonstrate SHEEO's comprehensive approach to data-driven decision-making, student success, and effective policy implementation.

As we move forward, SHEEO remains committed to promoting excellence in higher education through collaboration, research, and advocacy. We look forward to the continued support and engagement of our members and partners in our shared mission of transforming higher education to improve outcomes and opportunities for all students.

SHEEO MEMBER EVENTS

The 2024 Annual Meeting was held in Washington, D.C., July 15-18. A celebration of SHEEO's 70th Anniversary was held in conjunction with the Annual Meeting and elements of celebration were incorporated into the 2024 SHEEO Higher Education Policy Conference, held Aug. 7-10, also in Washington, D.C. SHEEO set a new Policy Conference record with over 550 participants in attendance.

During the conferences, SHEEO awarded the 7th annual SHEEO Excellence Awards. Aaron Thompson, from the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, received the Exceptional Leader Award; the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education received the Exceptional Agency Award; and Robert Haelen, from The State University of New York, received the David L. Wright Memorial Award. The 2025 Annual Meeting is being held July 14-17 in Washington, D.C. The 2025 SHEEO Higher Education Policy Conference is scheduled for Aug. 11-14, in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

SHEEO hosted 10 in-person convenings in FY25, for a total of 1,150 participants:

- Communities of Practice on Student Success
- 2024 Annual Meeting
- 2024 Higher Education Policy Conference
- Noncredit Mobility Academy 2024 Convening
- Communities of Practice: Defining and Measuring Postsecondary Value and Return on Investment
- Communities of Practice: Supporting Student Loan Borrowers
- Communities of Practice: Strengthening Data Literacy Among Higher Education Stakeholders
- Building Resilience and Success: State System-Level Mental Health Innovations
- Financial Aid Learning Community Convening
- Noncredit Mobility Academy 2025 Convening

VISION

Together with its members, SHEEO will promote an environment that values higher education and its role in ensuring the equitable education of all Americans, regardless of race/ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic factors.

62 MEMBERS

Our members represent all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Northern Mariana Islands. SHEEO is made up of 37 coordinating/policy boards and 25 governing boards.

\$30.46M IN GRANT FUNDS SINCE 2015

Using grant funds, SHEEO has been able to support states through projects and research focused on important issues in higher education, including state higher education funding, student mental health, state authorization, and state postsecondary data systems.

BASIC NEEDS DATA ACADEMY

Recognizing the urgency of addressing basic needs insecurities among college students and the need for better data to inform policies and practices, SHEEO launched the Basic Needs Data Academy with support from ECMC Foundation. In January 2025, seven state teams – Arizona, California, Georgia, Hawai'i, Kentucky, Minnesota, and New York – joined the academy.

Supported by SHEEO, team coaches and content experts from the Coleridge Initiative, the Data Integration Support Center, and the Hope Center, states are working to define basic terms across agencies, improve data collection and integration, track program effectiveness, and raise awareness. State teams met virtually in April 2025, to articulate their team basic needs data visions and landscapes. As a part of the academy, SHEEO provided each team with a \$60,000 capacity-building sub-grant to support implementation efforts, such as technology upgrades, data analytics, or pilot programs.

COMMUNICATION EFFORTS

SHEEO's communications efforts have grown and expanded over the last fiscal year. SHEEO's websites received a much-needed refresh for consistency across sites, including updated headers and footers. SHEEO updated its logo to represent and celebrate our 70th anniversary across platforms. SHEEO's presence on LinkedIn has grown significantly over the past fiscal year, with followers nearly doubling from June 2023 to June 2024. SHEEO issued 24 press releases and appeared as a resource or reference for over 100 media stories. Email communication and newsletter groups continue to increase as well.

CONSTITUENT GROUPS

During FY25, SHEEO continued to host regular virtual meetings of constituent groups among SHEEO agency staff. Convenings of agency leadership from academic affairs, communications, finance, government relations, and research and data, include guest speakers, professional development, and the opportunity for collaboration and problem-solving with colleagues from other states. A new group for general counsels was added during FY25. Many of these constituent groups convened in person during the 2024 SHEEO Higher Education Policy Conference.

CONSTELLATION OF SUPPORT

In March, SHEEO and Student-Ready Strategies launched Constellation of Support: A Capacity-Building Approach to Institutional Change, a new multiyear project to provide targeted, hands-on support to institutions working to remove barriers to retention and completion for marginalized student populations.

With support from ECMC Foundation, this project will strengthen institutional capacity in Nevada and Washington while developing a scalable model for implementing student success initiatives at the state and system levels through integrating expert coaching, structured workshops, and innovative technology.

FAFSA SIMPLIFICATION

Due to ongoing challenges associated with the FAFSA, SHEEO extended its FAFSA efforts through the summer of 2026. Although the 2025-26 FAFSA launch was smoother than the prior year, it was still delayed and faced significant technical issues. SHEEO worked with the U.S. Department of Education to ensure staff at the Office of Student Aid were aware of and responding to the challenges states faced. Through a learning community and webinar series, SHEEO developed resources and shared best practices for FAFSA completion to ensure all students receive the financial aid support for which they qualify. These efforts culminated with a convening of the 18 state teams participating in the learning community in May 2025. During this convening, state teams explored strategies to address budget shortfalls and increased administrative burden for students, and learned about the opportunities and challenges associated with focusing financial aid on high-demand fields.

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

SHEEO continued its advocacy efforts in Washington on behalf of state higher education agencies and systems, advancing its federal policy agenda in coordination with the Washington Secretariat and other partners. SHEEO built relationships with officials in the new administration and connected its members and staff to key federal policymakers. SHEEO also provided analysis of significant legislation affecting its membership, including the FY25 Budget Reconciliation Package, and shared a wide range of policy developments from the new administration. In support of its government relations work, SHEEO offers a suite of resources, including a daily policy email, a weekly federal update, a monthly Zoom call, and a quarterly state policy review.

IMPROVING FUNDING MODELS LEARNING COMMUNITY

In the fall of 2024, SHEEO launched a funding model learning community designed to help states review and assess the efficacy of current funding models. With support from the Gates Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, and Lumina Foundation, SHEEO partnered with the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Student Success Through Applied Research (SSTAR) Lab to develop an analysis framework that states can use to examine current distributions of state funding and identify opportunities for improvement to more effectively meet state goals. State teams have piloted the analysis framework, explored recent innovations in funding models, and engaged in peer learning to address common challenges. In the final phase of the current project, SHEEO is working with states in the learning community to identify adequate levels of funding to meet state goals.

JUSTICE-IMPACTED STUDENTS

With support from Ascendium Education Group and in partnership with the Vera Institute for Justice, SHEEO began a learning community in April with state teams from Arizona, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, and Virginia aimed at expanding access to quality postsecondary education for justice-impacted students. Through this initiative, states will work to evaluate relevant policies, remove barriers to access, and promote high-quality, workforce-aligned educational experiences for justice-impacted students. The effort will also work to strengthen collaboration among higher education agencies, corrections departments, and other key partners to build pathways that support successful outcomes for incarcerated learners.

MEMBER SITE VISITS

Since 2017, the SHEEO staff have engaged in a series of site visits to SHEEO member agencies. The purpose of these visits is to identify issues of greatest importance to our members, receive updates on current projects, and promote engagement among SHEEO staff and SHEEO agency staff. Site visits typically include two members of the SHEEO leadership staff meeting with the agency chief executive, and leadership in academic affairs, finance, research/policy analysis, and communications/external relations departments. In 2024, SHEEO staff visited the Arkansas Division of Higher Education, the Delaware Department of Education Higher Education Office, the Indiana Commission for Higher Education, the Maryland Higher Education Commission, the Missouri Department of Higher Education & Workforce Development, the State University of New York, the Universities of Wisconsin, and the Wyoming Community College Commission.

NONCREDIT MOBILITY ACADEMY

In FY25, SHEEO continued its work on the Noncredit Mobility Academy (NMA), funded by Ascendium and ECMC Foundation. In partnership with Education Strategy Group and Progressive Policy Institute, SHEEO supported teams from Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Montana, Texas, and Virginia in integrating noncredit data into agency data systems, policies, and communications.

The goal of the academy is to better realize the potential of noncredit education and increase economic mobility for learners entering postsecondary education through noncredit programming. Through virtual and in-person convenings, coaching and technical assistance, SHEEO and partners helped state teams develop program taxonomies, improve data collection, develop funding and sustainability recommendations, and create communication strategies for stakeholders. Two in-person convenings in FY25 gave teams the opportunity to share progress and strategies for improving noncredit data collection and pathways.

PURSUING ALIGNMENT FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

SHEEO and Sova are leading the Pursuing Alignment for Student Success Across Higher Education Institutions & State Agencies (PASS) learning community. With funding from Ascendium, the PASS project regularly convenes state and institutional chief academic officers in Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Wyoming for technical assistance to better align student success policies and practices.

PASS builds on state policy reviews, best practices in academic leadership, and a culture of evidence to strengthen engagement between state and institutional academic officers – beyond compliance and reporting. SHEEO agencies use their statewide platforms to share best practices, understand institutional challenges, and coordinate advocacy on behalf of students. PASS supports scaling student success efforts by formalizing state networks and fostering collaboration between institutional leaders and state higher education agencies, leveraging existing initiatives and capacities for greater impact.

RURAL TALENT LAB

The Rural Talent Development and Attraction Lab (Rural Talent Lab) is a new a four-year, multi-state initiative led by the Alliance for Research on Regional Colleges in partnership with SHEEO and HCM Strategists, with funding from Ascendium. The project aims to strengthen rural postsecondary opportunities by helping five states develop and implement statewide plans that expand middle-skill credential pathways aligned with local workforce needs. The project will provide technical assistance, expert advising, in-person learning academies, and evaluation of learner outcomes using state administrative data and surveys.

STATE AUTHORIZATION RESEARCH

With support from Arnold Ventures and Lumina Foundation, SHEEO's state authorization project is designed to provide states with new research and best practices to improve consumer protections. In the summer of 2025, SHEEO will be releasing a series of practitioner guides and empirical research studies. These resources include an inventory of renewal policies, a toolkit highlighting best practices for renewal, a guidebook for addressing institutional closures, and guidance on assessing the financial risk of private institutions. Additionally, through a partnership with the University of Georgia, SHEEO will publish an empirical study that highlights effective state authorization and renewal practices.

STATE HIGHER EDUCATION FINANCE

SHEEO published the 2024 State Higher Education Finance (SHEF) report in May 2025, accompanied by a website with customizable visualizations and maps, data downloads, and state profiles. The report provides insights into national and state-level trends in public higher education funding, tuition revenue, and enrollment.

Also in early 2025, SHEEO released the Grapevine report, which provides a first look at state higher education funding in the new fiscal year. The report includes sector-level Information and details on how states allocate higher education funds.

In June 2025, SHEEO published several additional datasets on the SHEF website, including capital appropriations, performance-based funding allocations and net tuition and FTE enrollment by residency. These were presented through data insight pages with interactive tables, visualizations, and downloadable data. Also in June 2025, SHEEO published the FY 2022-2023 State Effort and Capacity report.

STATE POSTSECONDARY DATA: STRONG FOUNDATIONS AND COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

SHEEO's Strong Foundations survey measures the content, linkages, and effective use of state postsecondary student unit record data systems. In FY25, SHEEO garnered support for the Strong Foundations survey from ECMC Foundation for a new area of focus on postsecondary data related to rural learners and institutions. This focus was incorporated into a special section of the 2025 iteration of the Strong Foundations survey, which was administered in May 2025. To contextualize Strong Foundations survey insights, the grant is also supporting three site visits to SHEEO agencies to interview state postsecondary data practitioners and their colleagues on the definitions, uses, collections, and policies associated with rural data.

During FY25, SHEEO conducted two Communities of Practice associated with Strong Foundations supported by the Gates Foundation. The "Defining and Measuring Postsecondary Value and Return on Investment" convening was held in October 2024. Thirteen state teams met to explore how postsecondary data systems can support measuring value, focusing on ROI metrics, state- and context-specific approaches, public perceptions, and stakeholder communication strategies. SHEEO convened the "Strengthening Data Literacy Among Higher Education Stakeholders" Community of Practice in May 2025. During this convening, 10 state teams explored strategies and tools for strengthening data literacy within SHEEO agencies and among their stakeholders, and transforming data into actionable insights.

STUDENT LOAN BORROWER SUPPORT

With support from Lumina Foundation, SHEEO held a "Supporting Student Loan Borrowers" Community of Practice in December 2024. SHEEO partnered with the Community Service Society of New York and national experts to identify opportunities for states to support borrowers navigating the loan repayment system. Teams from Alaska, Arkansas, the District of Columbia, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Wisconsin participated.

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

With support from Lumina Foundation, SHEEO and The Jed Foundation partnered with state teams in Arizona, Louisiana, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Texas to form the Advancing Whole Student Support Through Improved Mental Health and Wellness learning community. The initiative aims to enhance institutions' capabilities to support student well-being and mental health.

The project identified evidence-based strategies, research, and best practices to help states assess current conditions, prioritize student needs, and strengthen support for student mental health and wellness. The community culminated with a 15-state convening in April 2025, providing insights for additional states exploring system-level approaches to assist institutions.

SHEEO STAFF

SHEEO made two promotions and one new hire in FY25. Jessica Colorado and Kelsey Kunkle were promoted to Senior Policy Analysts in October 2024. Corey Gheesling became Associate Vice President in July 2025.

STAFF TITLES

- Robert Anderson, *President*
- Sean Baser, *Senior Policy Analyst*
- Rachel Burns, *Senior Policy Analyst*
- Adelberto Castrejon, *State Policy Intern*
- Sakshee Chawla, *Senior Policy Analyst*
- Jessica Colorado, *Senior Policy Analyst*
- Jessica Duren, *Strategic Communications Director*
- Alicia Engels, *Director of Events*
- Corey Gheesling, *Associate Vice President*
- Tom Harnisch, *Vice President for Government Relations*
- Kelsey Heckert, *Data Manager*
- Jiah Kim, *IT Systems and Database Manager*
- Carrie Klein, *Associate Vice President*
- Kelsey Kunkle, *Senior Policy Analyst*
- John Lane, *Vice President for Academic Affairs*
- Andrea Maertens, *Human Resources Consultant*
- Brenna Mathews, *Administrative Coordinator*
- Lauren McGuire, *State Policy Intern*
- David Szczesny, *Director of Finance*
- Dustin Weeden, *Associate Vice President*
- Christina Whitfield, *Senior Vice President and Chief of Staff*