

Farm-to-Data-Table: What Strong Foundations 2025 Reveals About Postsecondary Data and Rural Success

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SHEEO

State Higher Education
Executive Officers Association



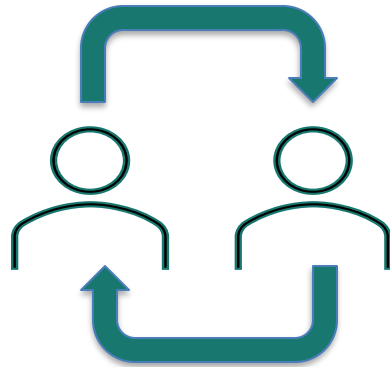
Overview of Strong Foundations

- Improves insight into the collection, value, and best practices associated with state **p**ostsecondary **s**tudent **u**nit **r**ecord **s**ystems (PSURSs)
- Surveys developed in partnership with an advisory board of state data and research practitioners and field experts
- Interactive dashboards and web content available at postsecondarydata.sheeo.org
- Strong Foundations is supported through funding from the ECMC Foundation.

Practical Uses of Strong Foundations



**Understanding
the Landscape**



**Peer
Analysis**



**Planning & Policy
Advocacy**



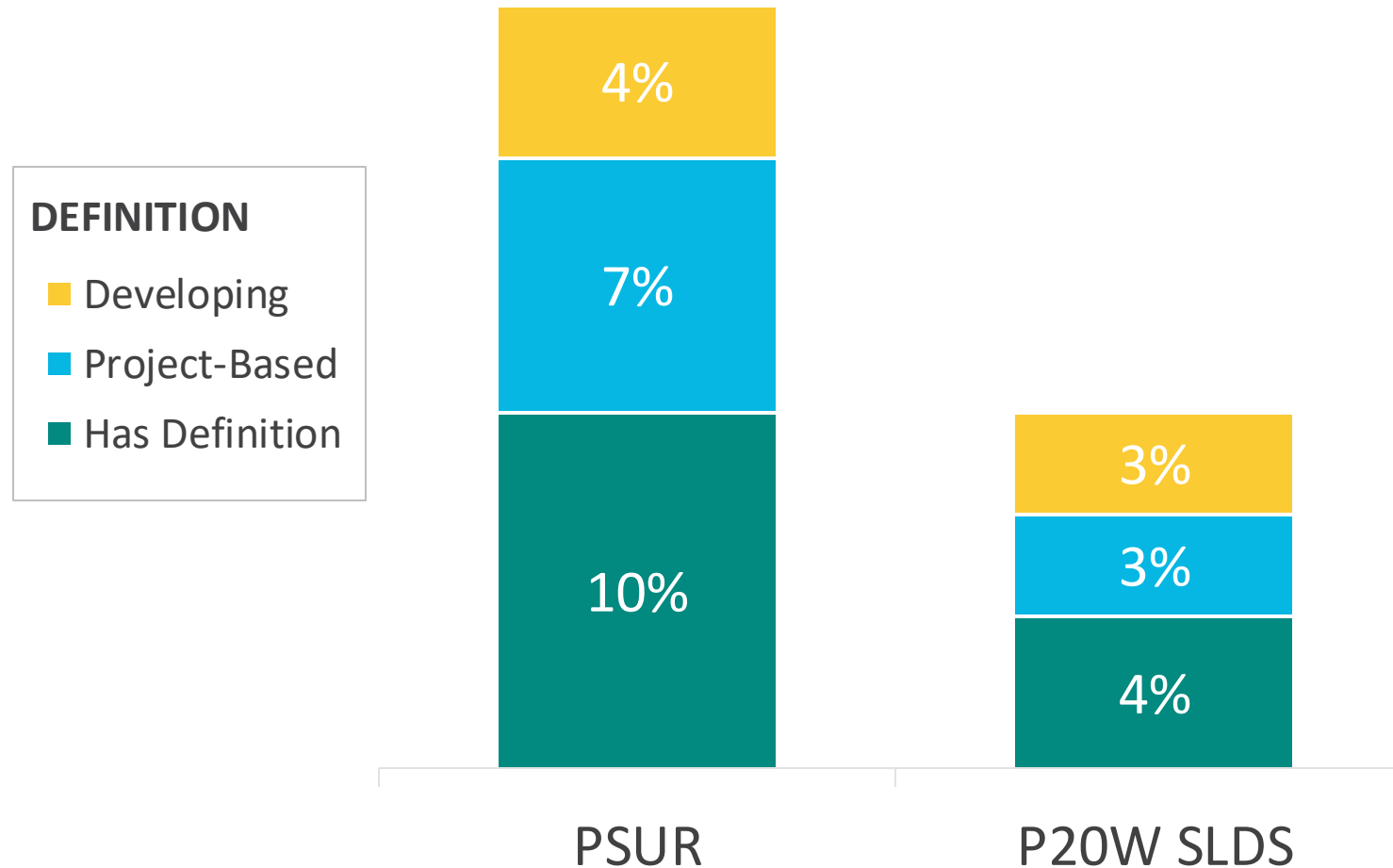
**Toolkit &
Resources**

Rurality in State Data Systems

- Strong Foundations
 - Ten questions on rural data collected and reported by state postsecondary data systems
- Agency site visits
 - Idaho
 - Iowa
 - North Carolina
- Large-group interviews
- CDO Convening



How does your agency define rural learners, institutions, or RSIs?*



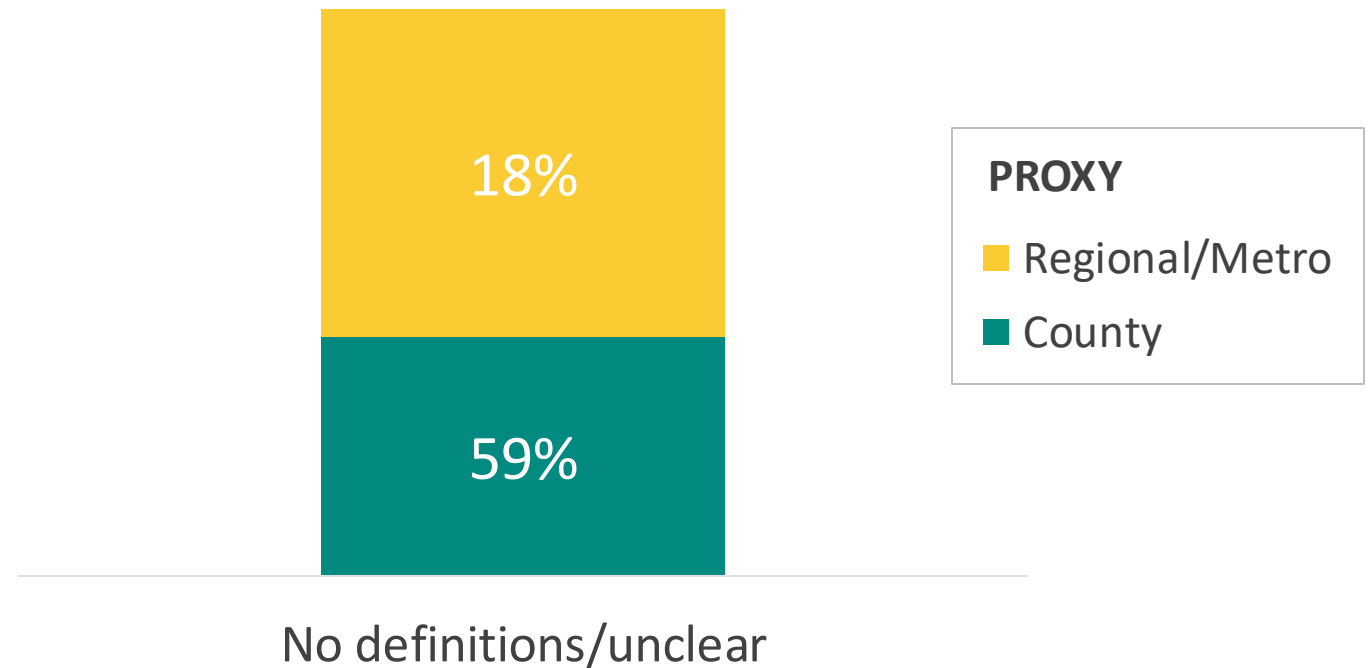
30%

Respondents who **indicated having a formal definition**, using a definition that depends on the project, or being in the process of developing one.

How does your agency define rural learners, institutions, or RSIs?*

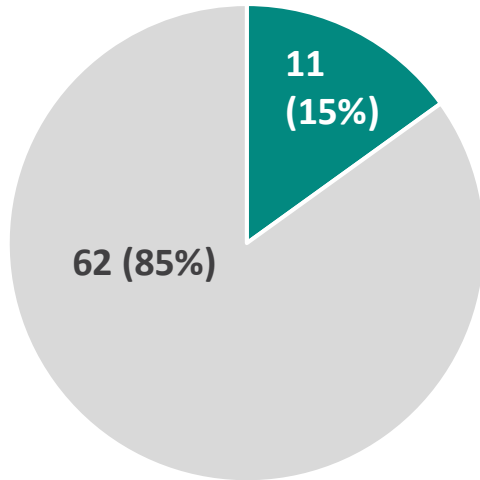
26%

Of the respondents who indicated ***not having a formal definition*** reported using a proxy like **county** or **regional/metro area** locale codes.



Does your agency have standard definitions for rural learners, institutions, or RSIs?

RURAL LEARNERS

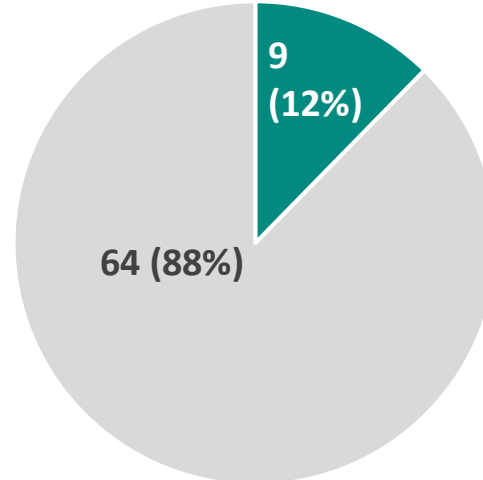


PSUR 7

P20W SLDS 3

Other: P12 SLDS 1

RURAL INSTITUTIONS

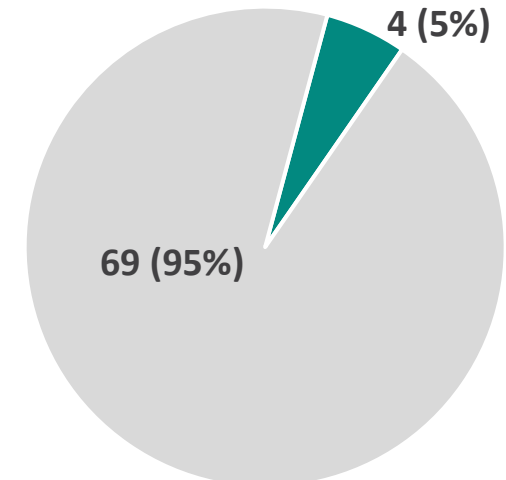


PSUR 5

P20W SLDS 3

Other: P12 SLDS 1

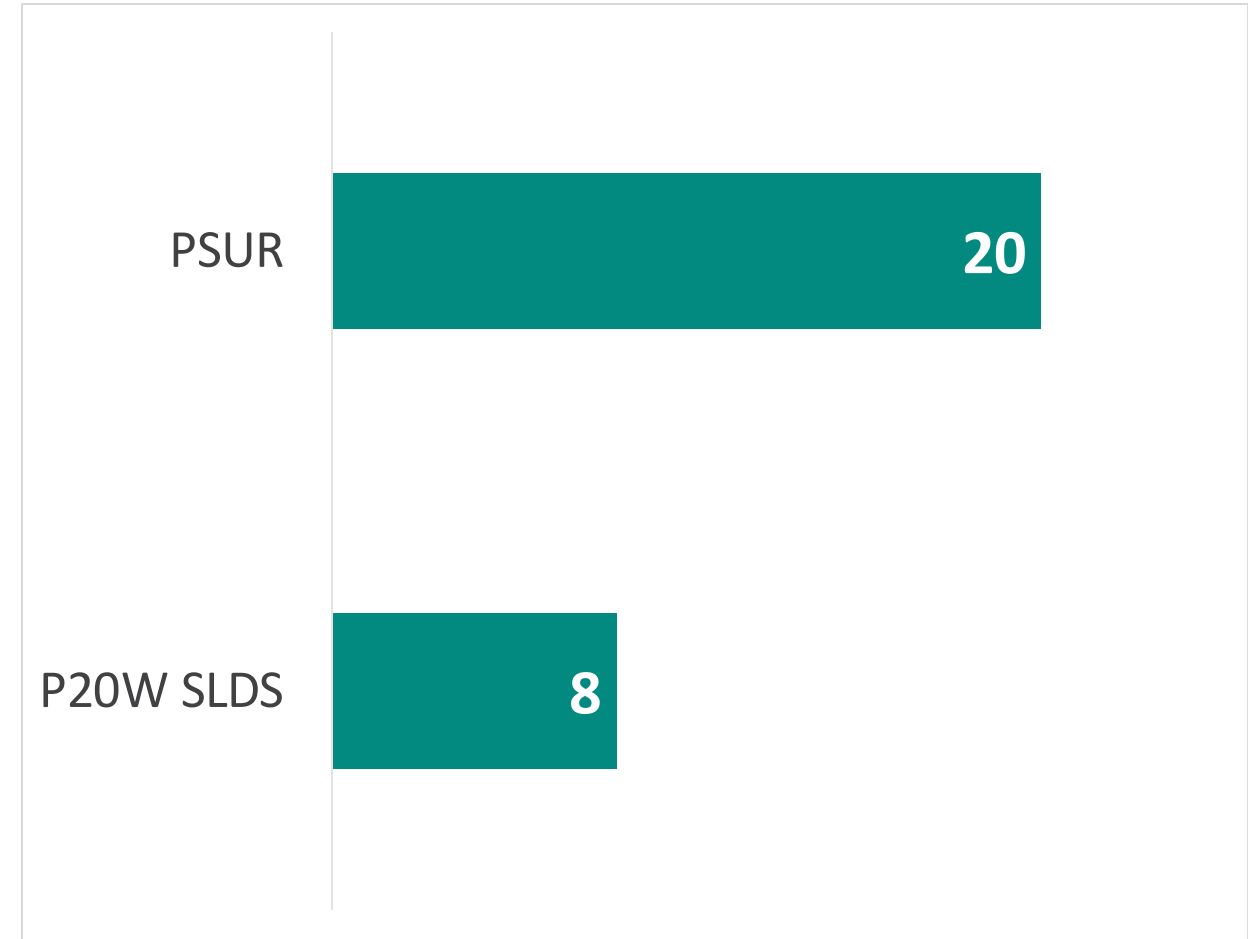
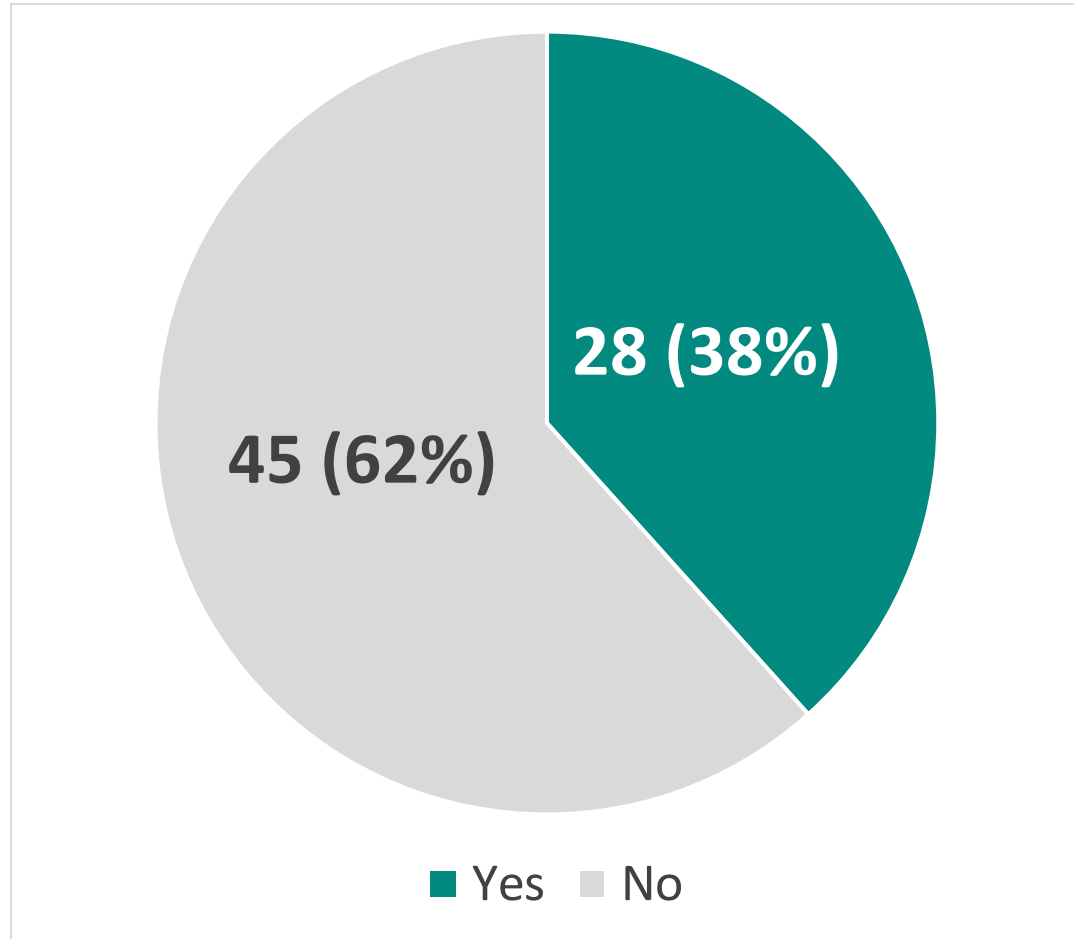
RURAL-SERVING INSTITUTIONS



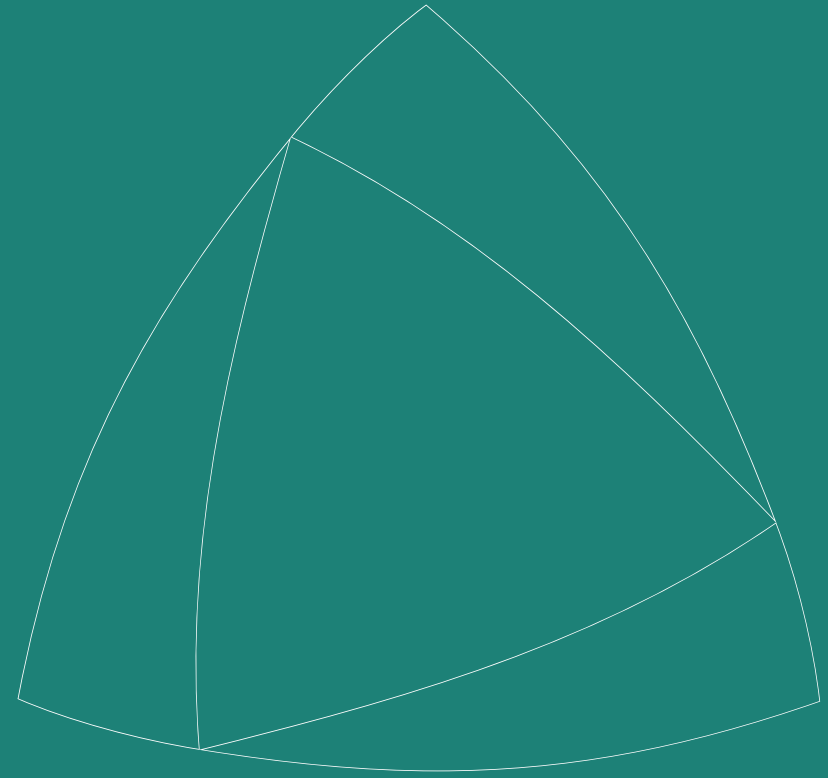
PSUR 4

■ Yes ■ No

Does your agency collect or use data related to rural learners, institutions, or RSIs?*



PANEL ON POSTSECONDARY RURALITY



PANELISTS



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Senior Policy Analyst
SHEEO



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Stephanie Sowl

Associate Dir. of Research
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Lauren McGuire

State Policy Intern
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Sean Baser

Senior Policy Analyst
SHEEO

Supports SHEEO's work on postsecondary data, state authorization and accountability, and the membership report.



Path to Rural Higher Ed

- Stillwater, OK → Political campaign on rural issues → Research GA rural colleges



What Shapes My Rural Lens

- Grew up in Oklahoma; now living north of Paris, TX (rural, distant community)



Passion

- Using data to inform decisions, uncover untold stories, and strengthen under-resourced agencies and institutions



Fun Fact

- Placed 2nd in seed-spitting contest at the Rush Springs Watermelon Festival

INSTITUTION	LOCATION	IPEDS Locale	ARRC-NCHEMS
Jenks High School	Jenks, OK	Suburban, Large	N/A
Tulsa Community College	Tulsa, OK	City, Large	Non-Rural Serving
Oklahoma State University	Stillwater, OK	Town, Distant	Rural-Serving
University of Houston	Houston, TX	City, Large	Non-Rural Serving
University of Georgia	Athens, GA	City, Midsize	Rural-Serving



Jessica Colorado
Senior Policy Analyst
SHEEO

Supports SHEEO’s work on postsecondary data through Strong Foundations, Basic Needs, and other data initiatives.



Path to Rural Higher Ed

- Started in college access with TRIO in NYC → First experience with rural life after moving to upstate NY and traveling through rural areas → Discovered that while New York is known for its cities, most of the state is rural



What Shapes My Rural Lens

- Urban background paired with lessons learned through SF; sees parallels between urban and rural student challenges, (institutional resources)



Passion

- Expanding knowledge about rurality; fascinated by learning more about rural student experiences as a city-native



Fun Fact

- Attended art school featured in the 1980 classic: “Fame”

INSTITUTION	LOCATION	IPEDS Locale	ARRC-NCHEMS
Laguardia Arts	New York City, NY	City, Large	N/A
University of Rochester (B.A)	Rochester, NY	City, Midsize	Non-Rural Serving
St. John’s University	New York City, NY	City, Large	Non-Rural Serving
University of Rochester (M.S)	Rochester, NY	City, Midsize	Non-Rural Serving



Stephanie Sowl

Associate Dir. of Research
ECMC Foundation

*Shapes the
foundation's research
agenda and analyzes
both external higher ed
data and internal
grantmaking
performance.*



Path to Rural Higher Ed

- Admissions at a work college → Registrar's Office → IPEDS data expertise
- PhD on rural college access & post-college mobility



What Shapes My Rural Lens

- From a town with high unemployment, low educational attainment, limited higher ed access



Passion

- Committed to understanding and improving outcomes for rural learners



Fun Fact

- I just finished visiting my 30th ballpark!

INSTITUTION	LOCATION	IPEDS Locale	ARRC-NCHEMS
Harlem High School	Machesney Park, IL	Suburban, Large	N/A
Blackburn College	Carlinville, IL	Town, Distant	Rural Serving
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	Urbana, IL	City, Small	Rural-Serving
Arizona State University	Tempe, AZ	City, Midsize	Non-Rural Serving
Iowa State University	Ames, IA	City, Small	Rural-Serving



Lauren McGuire
State Policy Intern
SHEEO

*Supports SHEEO’s work
on postsecondary data
and the Strong
Foundations project,
with a focus on
rurality.*



Path to Rural Higher Ed
• First-gen student → Student affairs → M.P.P. → Ph.D. in HiEd



What Shapes My Rural Lens
• Blue-collar family in rural Michigan; lived experience with limited college prep, advanced coursework, and advising; research on pathways, basic needs, access



Passion
• Belief in education as a great equalizer; driven to use research-to-practice partnerships to address gaps and resource inequities in rural higher ed



Fun Fact
• Lived at a public boarding school for five years while completing Ph.D.
• Avid reader of cozy fictional murder mysteries cozy mysteries (psychic cats!)

INSTITUTION	LOCATION	IPEDS Locale	ARRC-NCHEMS
Bullock Creek High School	Midland, MI	Rural, Fringe	N/A
Michigan State University	East Lansing, MI	City, Small	Non-Rural Serving
Vanderbilt University	Nashville, TN	City, Large	Non-Rural Serving
NC State University	Raleigh, NC	City, Large	Non-Rural Serving

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Questions?

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THANK YOU!



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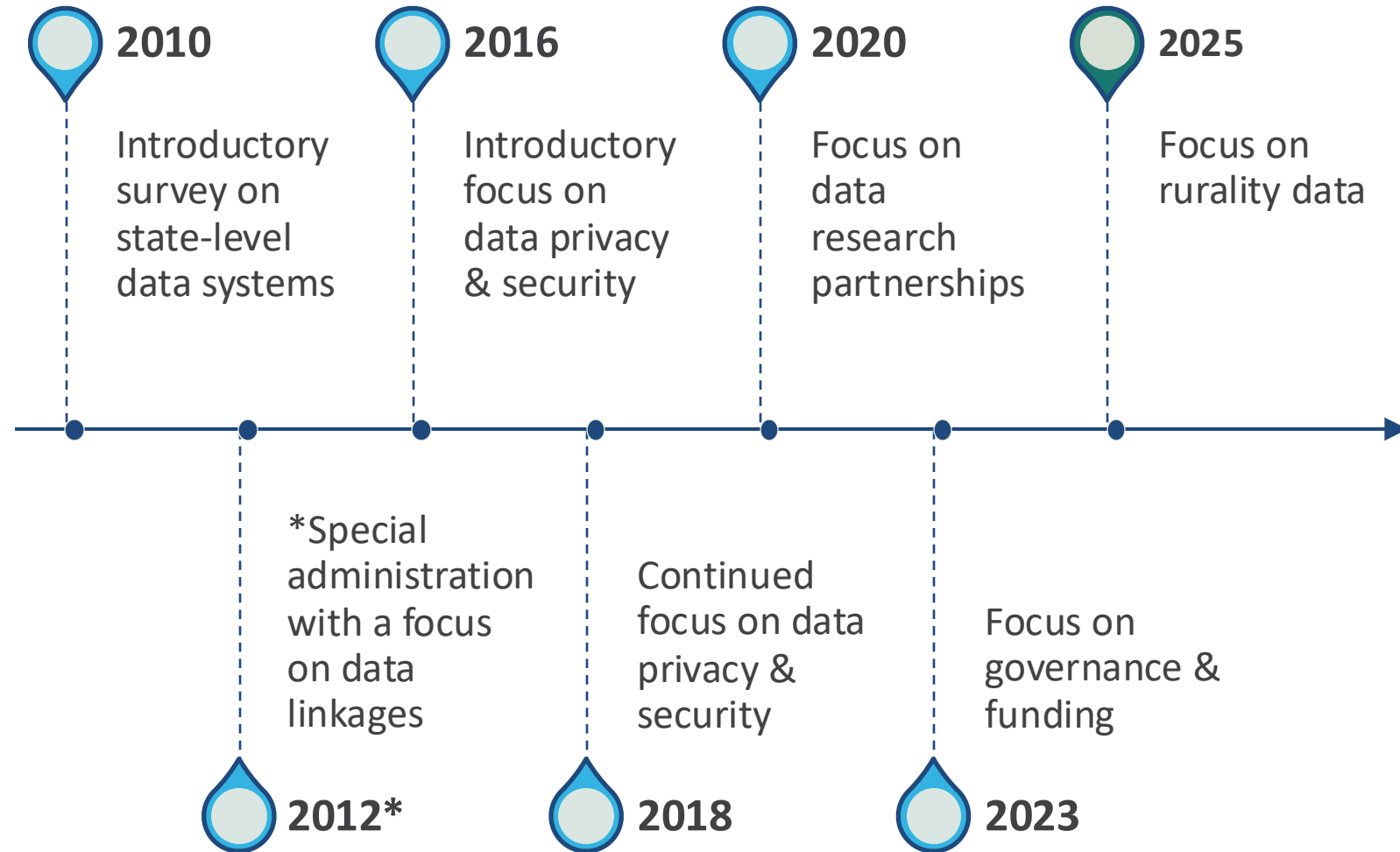
Stephanie Sowl
Associate Director of Research, ECMC



Lauren McGuire
State Policy Intern, SHEEO

History of Strong Foundations

- Since 2010, six survey administrations with growing participation
- In 2023, we collected data from 71 postsecondary agencies from 48 states and the District of Columbia
- Our respondents include:
 - 2-year and 4-year state postsecondary agencies and state longitudinal data systems (SLDS)



Strong Foundations 2025: Survey Questions

