



# MHEC STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

## PRIORITIES 2020–2021

### VISION:

MHEC members collaborate to address the region's most pressing challenges in higher education and transform educational opportunities so that people and communities thrive.

### MISSION:

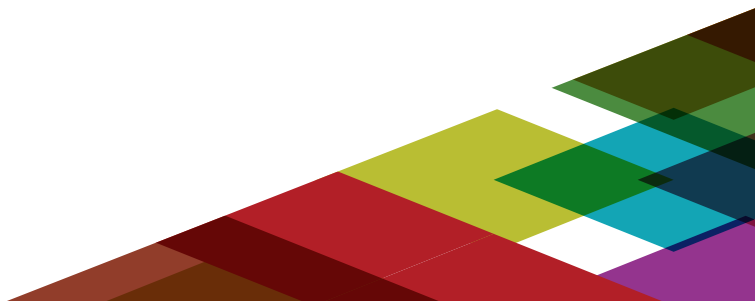
MHEC brings together midwestern states to develop and support best practices, collaborative efforts, and cost-sharing opportunities. Through these efforts it works to ensure strong, equitable postsecondary educational opportunities and outcomes.

### WHO MHEC SERVES:

MHEC is comprised of member states from the midwestern United States. MHEC works with and for a variety of stakeholders within and across member states, including higher education system leaders, state policymakers, legislators, and institutional leaders, while always maintaining a focus on students and their success.

### HOW MHEC WORKS:

MHEC's strategic approach highlights member states' strong desire for collaboration, effectiveness, and efficiency. MHEC believes that collaborative actions informed by research and best practices are the catalyst for improving quality, accessibility, relevance, and affordability of postsecondary educational opportunities. MHEC does this primarily through the following approaches: convenings, programs, research, and cost-savings contracts. Increasingly, MHEC looks to leverage these approaches in *conjunction* with each other to serve its strategic priorities.



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## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES, 2020–2021:

The current MHEC strategic plan highlights three challenges for higher education in midwestern states: 1) shifting demographics; 2) evolving modes of packaging and delivering education; and 3) declining share of public investment in higher education. MHEC will continue supporting states' responses to these pressures by shaping its focus around the following strategic priorities:

1. *Increase access, promote affordability, and improve outcomes for all of the region's learners, including the historically underserved.*
2. *Foster a culture of continuous learning through increasingly aligned educational and workforce systems.*
3. *Sustain and advance affordable, high-quality educational opportunities through cost-savings initiatives.*
4. *Understand and communicate the value of and return on investment in higher education.*

Focusing on these priorities will allow MHEC to continue serving, supporting, and adding value to states in the near future, while also paving the way for the years beyond.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1:

***Increase access, promote affordability, and improve outcomes for all of the region's learners, including the historically underserved.***

The goal of this priority is to recognize that the diversity of today's learners and the changing demographics of the Midwest necessitate new ways of thinking about engaging and supporting students in the region. It also recognizes there are groups of students, including students of color, adults, low-income, first-generation, and students from rural communities, for whom barriers to equitable access and outcomes remain. Affordability, in particular, creates access issues. MHEC provides value for member states by facilitating the sharing of best practices in policies and programs that support the success of all students, with attention to underserved populations.

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### STRATEGIES:

- Work with states to better understand the needs of and serve military-connected students. MHEC will continue to work with interested members and leaders in this field to identify

challenges, share best practices, and support the development of policies and practices that better serve military-connected students.

- Support states to better serve nontraditional students. MHEC will share research to better understand the specific challenges facing nontraditional students and share best practices on policies and programs to serve them (e.g. credit for prior learning, competency-based education).
- Further efforts to support concurrent enrollment opportunities for midwestern students, including addressing instructor qualification concerns, by collaborating with partners to gather, develop, and disseminate best practices, and leveraging research expertise to better understand challenges.
- Further develop opportunities for Open Educational Resources (OER) and access to other lower-cost learning materials via collaboration with other compacts. In addition, explore other potential strategies for increasing the usage and effectiveness of alternate learning materials within midwestern states.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2:

***Foster a culture of continuous learning through increasingly aligned educational and workforce systems.***

The goal of this priority is to support states in advancing a culture of continuous learning, recognizing that technology and other factors create continuous demand for new skills and new modes of educational delivery. Building a more adaptive, responsive system to meet learner and workforce needs requires ever-stronger relationships between education and workforce. This priority recognizes that communication and partnerships between K-12, higher education, and workforce forms the foundation for meaningful policy and programmatic changes.

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### STRATEGIES:

- Highlight effective practices in K12, higher education, and workforce alignment, and identify and support opportunities that foster such partnerships in the region.
- Support states in efforts to define and catalog high-quality nondegree credentials in their states and provide credit for learning outside of the classroom, and seek opportunities to partner with other national organizations and regional compacts to further this work.
- Develop additional support for states interested in furthering workforce-aligned educational opportunities, such as apprenticeships and partnerships with local chambers of commerce.
- In harmony with Strategic Priority 1, further the work to facilitate access to concurrent enrollment for students in the Midwest region.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3:

### ***Sustain and advance affordable, high-quality educational opportunities through cost-savings initiatives.***

This priority recognizes that the midwestern region faces ongoing challenges with the costs of higher education: institutions grappling with sustainability in the face of declining enrollment and declining public funding, state budgets with limited room to increase funding due to economic decline and tax capacity, and debt-burdened students. Approaching these challenges creatively and collaboratively can help ensure higher education remains a strong thread in the midwestern fabric and that students have access to affordable educational opportunities that provide a strong return on investment.

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#### **STRATEGIES:**

- Continue building on the success of purchasing contracts and programs, such as technology contracts and property insurance, by exploring new opportunities. MHEC will look for ways to incorporate process improvements into contracts work to continually advance effectiveness.
- Provide opportunities for states to learn about strategies for lowering costs, including:
  - Examining the overall higher education “business model”;
  - Strategies to better serve students resulting in less cost to the student and institution; and
  - New models for funding student education.
- Intentionally align MHEC cost-savings contract and program work with opportunities to improve student success, such as in student health insurance work. Explore opportunities for more contracts impacting academic and student support work at institutions.
- Continue supporting lower-cost, high-quality opportunities for students to broaden their educational options through ongoing work with the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA).
- Use social media to elevate the leadership role of MHEC and midwestern states in cost management and control.
- In harmony with Strategic Priority 1, further support opportunities to lower costs for students, including the Multi-State Collaborative on Military Credit (MCMC), concurrent enrollment, Open Educational Resources (OER) and access to other learning materials, and the Midwest Student Exchange Program (MSEP).

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4:

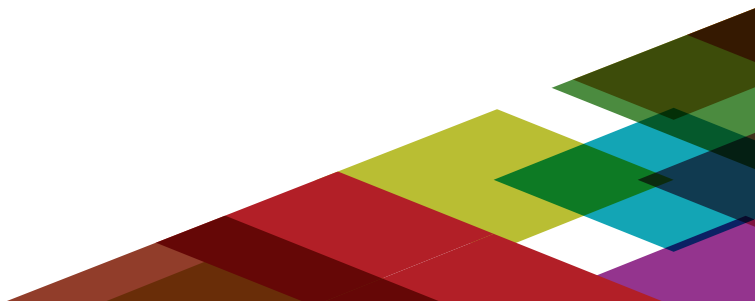
### ***Understand and communicate the value of and return on investment in higher education.***

The goal of this priority is to support students in assessing the value of postsecondary paths, to support institutions in articulating their value within their states, and to support policymakers in accessing relevant data.

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#### **STRATEGIES:**

- Host national experts and showcase practices from states on communicating and promoting the value of higher education at one or more convenings. The insights will inform policymakers and system and campus leaders.
- Assess the viability of a MHEC-led social media and communications strategy to convey a data-driven message on the clear value proposition of higher education and return on investment for states and their economies, institutions, industry, communities, and students.
- Develop, publish, and support the higher education community in using an interactive data dashboard that highlights higher education outcomes and linked quality of life outcomes across the midwestern region and nation.
- In harmony with Strategic Priority 2, explore ways to support states in gaining a better understanding of credentials of value and in communicating that information to students and families.



## **ABOUT THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS:**

The Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC) operates under a four-year strategic plan, with the current plan guiding 2017-2021. At this mid-point of the strategic plan, MHEC partnered with HCM Strategists (HCM), a public policy and advocacy consulting firm focused on reducing disparities in education and health, to support a strategic positioning process and midpoint reflection.

The work began by seeking to answer the following questions: (1) What is MHEC's purpose? (2) Where has MHEC experienced the most success? (3) What are the broad topics of interest to commissioners and in which of MHEC's offerings (convenings, research, programs, contracts) do they find most value? (4) What are some of the distinctive concerns of MHEC's member states? (5) What areas of interest will best advance MHEC's mission over the next few years?

In order to answer those questions, HCM undertook a multi-step process that drew upon the 2019 Environmental Scan performed by the Academic Search firm and additional complementary research. After the research HCM engaged with MHEC staff, officers, and commissioners to further define priorities and strategies. HCM surveyed MHEC commissioners, which then informed a discussion and planning process with MHEC staff and officers in November 2019. This resulted in a draft strategic midpoint plan shared with commissioners for feedback at the November 2019 Annual Commission Meeting. The final result was a Strategic Framework to complement the existing strategic plan.

Thank you to the many who contributed to the development of this Strategic Framework, including MHEC staff, officers, and commissioners, as well as to the leaders at national and regional organizations who provided insight and feedback as part of the environmental scan that established the groundwork for this framework.

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