



Statewide Educational Attainment Goals

A CASE STUDY



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A Story of Two States

This brief tells the story of two states, Arizona and New Hampshire, and their efforts to set ambitious goals for increasing educational attainment among their residents. Based primarily on interviews with key state leaders, these stories highlight the unique path each state took to prioritize its goals for postsecondary attainment and are designed to inspire ideas for leaders in other states.

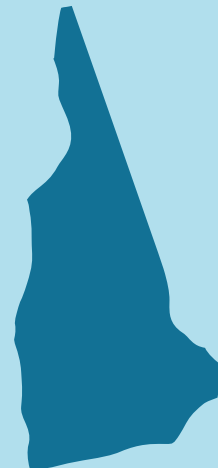


“What makes Achieve60AZ compelling and unique is its grassroots, community-based structure, built on the strengths of vested stakeholders, representing Arizona’s business, education, civic and philanthropic communities. Achieve60AZ reinforces priorities our community and our state are already committed to and will help bring about the tactics and strategies to support this crucial goal. Indeed, because of this effort to strategically advance education statewide, Arizona will be better positioned to strengthen its K-12 pipeline, increase educational attainment, promote a college-going culture, improve access and even spur innovation.”

— Dr. Eileen I. Klein,
president of the Arizona Board of Regents

“I think in New Hampshire, being a relatively small state, it was important to bring together individuals who were fairly prominent and had a statewide perspective.”

— Dr. Ed MacKay,
director of the New Hampshire
Higher Education Commission



What is an Attainment Goal?

“Attainment goal” and “completion goal” are terms that are often used interchangeably, but are in fact different.

An **attainment goal** refers to the educational levels of a state’s population; a **completion goal** speaks to the credential completion of students enrolled at an institution or group of institutions.

Improving a state’s educational attainment levels requires the collaboration of all educational institutions and other partners, such as K-12 and workforce. It also requires focusing on the completion of students already enrolled, as well as the engagement, enrollment and completion of new students to meet the broader needs of the state, its employers and its residents.

Attainment goals set the target to which completion goals for postsecondary systems and institutions are aligned. The completion goals may be described as total credentials awarded each year to reach the attainment goal.

A National Policy Agenda

Over the past several years, many factors have converged to persuade national and state leaders of the need to significantly increase residents’ attainment of educational credentials beyond high school. Those factors include:



Economic and demographic changes—such as an increasing wage premium for earning a credential and substantial shifts in age, race/ethnicity and income among the population of many states—have highlighted the challenges that states face in building a skilled workforce.



Policymakers have raised concerns about the nation’s ability to compete globally, given increasing education levels in many other countries.



Growing bipartisan agreement and increased messaging have drawn attention to the benefits of postsecondary education and the need to ensure that students not only enroll but also succeed in education and training beyond high school.



Public discussions about college affordability and rising loan debt have contributed to a feeling of urgency on this issue.

As these conversations have intensified, major initiatives funded by organizations such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Helios Education Foundation, and Kresge Foundation—as well as intermediary organizations and initiatives such as Complete College America, the Community College Research Center, and Completion by Design—have offered support to states that are trying to improve students’ access to and success in post-high school programs. These factors have helped align a diverse set of stakeholders around a national policy agenda that aims to increase educational attainment.

Lumina Foundation has played a key role in supporting this national attainment agenda. In 2009, Lumina launched an ambitious goal to encourage efforts to focus on improving educational attainment. The goal, dubbed Goal 2025, is to “increase the proportion of Americans with degrees, certificates and other high-quality credentials to 60 percent by 2025” (Lumina Foundation 2017b; Lumina Foundation 2009; Merisotis 2009). The goal’s development was informed by projections of workforce needs at the national and state levels—projections made by Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce. Since Lumina set that national goal, many states have followed suit and set their own goals, often noting that the national attainment agenda inspired their efforts.

To help states consider how to increase attainment, Lumina Foundation developed a state policy agenda (Lumina Foundation 2017a). Although there are many important elements of this agenda, three critical factors have shaped Lumina’s work: 1) the development of a national attainment goal and encouragement of statewide attainment goals; 2) the alignment of postsecondary funding with state attainment priorities, such as outcomes-based funding; and 3) an intentional focus on equity across student populations. Lumina’s Strategy Labs team works closely with states that are crafting policies to increase educational attainment.

A primary purpose of Strategy Labs is to share state policies and practices through peer learning to advance the goal of increasing attainment nationally. To that end, Lumina Foundation has commissioned three publications that share various aspects of the work. This brief focuses on several states that have adopted the first key element of the agenda: setting statewide attainment goals.

What is Strategy Labs?

Strategy Labs is a resource and network for leaders and influencers in all 50 states to share research, data and professional experiences to improve attainment and close equity gaps. It enables state and system-level policymakers and higher education leaders to connect and collaborate with one another and with experts in the field to develop strategies to increase educational attainment. Strategy Labs also aims to “encourage peer learning and provide opportunities for on-request support from Lumina Foundation and its state policy partners.” (Strategy Labs 2015).

States can apply for support for non-partisan, evidence-based policy expertise, such as:

- Experts and facilitators for meetings.
- Convening and facilitation.
- Peer learning engagements or multi-state discussions.
- Advisement of policymakers through testimony or briefings.
- Research such as data collection and analysis.



Benefits of a Statewide Attainment Goal

Most states have established statewide goals for postsecondary attainment that seek to improve educational outcomes while anticipating state workforce needs. A strong statewide goal, according to Lumina Foundation, is “challenging, quantifiable, addresses achievement gaps for underrepresented populations, includes a target date, is codified in a manner to influence postsecondary education policy and practice, and has broad stakeholder support” (Strategy Labs 2016 and 2017). Setting a strong educational attainment goal can be a catalyst for change within a state.

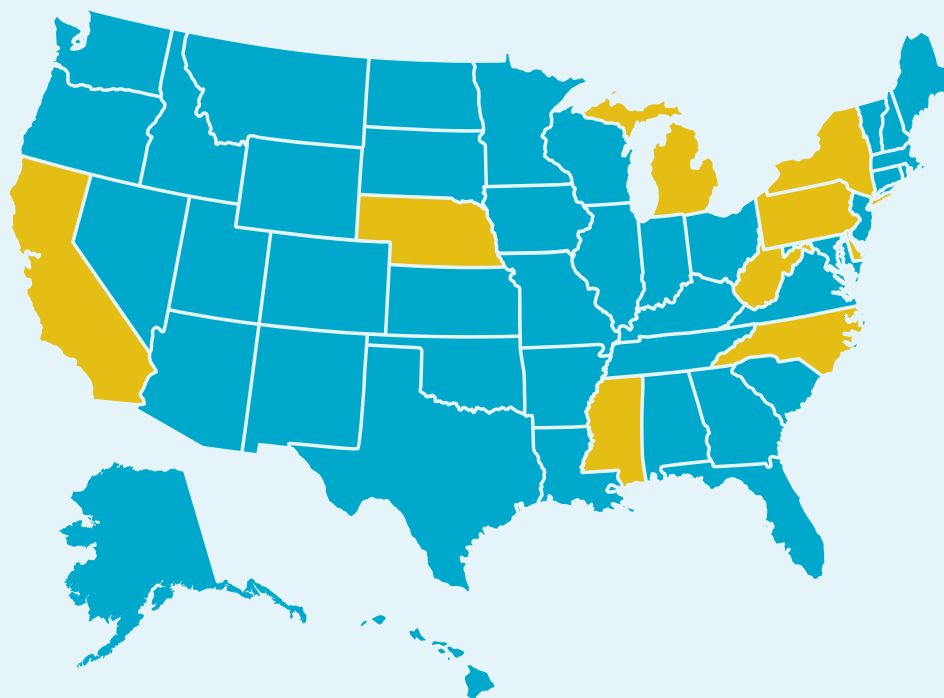
In 2009, when Lumina first published *A Stronger Nation* — an ongoing effort that annually updates the nation’s progress toward the 60 percent attainment goal — very few states had set statewide goals. By the release of the 2016 report, “26 states had set rigorous and challenging attainment goals — 15 in the previous year alone” (Lumina Foundation 2016). Today, 41 states have set attainment goals, with additional states anticipated in 2018 (Strategy Labs 2016 and 2017). Clearly, the past few years have generated momentum that may soon lead to all states adopting an attainment goal.

States set attainment goals in a variety of ways, often responding to state-specific historical, political and demographic factors. Some states have set their goals through direct conversations with governors’ offices, followed by executive orders; some have established goals through legislation; others have used task forces or alliances to develop a goal supported by a strategic plan; and still others have set goals through the leadership of state higher education coordinating boards or other governing structures.

Statewide Attainment Goals

As of 2017, 41 states had established such a goal. Here are the nine that do not have a goal:

- 1 California
- 2 Delaware
- 3 Michigan
- 4 Mississippi
- 5 Nebraska
- 6 New York
- 7 North Carolina
- 8 Pennsylvania
- 9 West Virginia



Although many states have recently set attainment goals, it can be especially instructive to focus on the goal-setting process of a few states whose goals are notably strong. The following sections describe Arizona's effort to establish an attainment goal and highlight some key decision points in another state, New Hampshire. These stories are based primarily on interviews with state leaders and others who were deeply involved in the process. It is our hope that the experience in these states can inform and enhance the goal-setting process in other states.

Arizona's Path to an Attainment Goal

As of 2015, Arizona's degree-attainment rate (share of adults with at least an associate degree) was only 36.6 percent, and it continues to lag projected workforce needs. The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce estimates that by 2020, 68 percent of all jobs in the state will require some form of postsecondary education, with the highest growth in occupations that require a degree (Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce 2013). This is particularly important in addressing equity gaps for the Latino population in Arizona; Latino students now make up more than half of public school students in grades K-8, and Latino residents are almost 17 percent of the population 25 and over, while only 11 percent hold a bachelor's degree compared with 33 percent of white residents (College Success Arizona 2015).

Given these trends, policymakers and other stakeholders in Arizona understand that educational attainment rates must increase so that all Arizonans can benefit economically and socially. However, Arizona prides itself on its independence, and that stance has affected the state's postsecondary structure and its ability to effect policy change. In particular, the higher education system is highly decentralized, especially the 10 independent community college districts overseen by locally elected boards. Because of this decentralization, Arizona had no official mandate to improve statewide educational attainment, lacked a government structure to provide top-down guidance and even lacked a statewide forum for discussing higher education issues.

Despite these barriers, leaders in Arizona have made a number of efforts to focus attention on increasing educational attainment. For example, in 2010 the

History of Strategy Labs

The concept of Strategy Labs developed gradually, beginning with Lumina Foundation's Productivity Grant program in 2009. The program emerged from Lumina's first strategic plan (2009-12). Designed to extend ongoing policy advice and facilitation to the 11 states that had applied for Lumina Productivity Grants, Strategy Labs focused on offering research, promising practices and advice aligned to Lumina's "Four Steps to Finishing First" agenda. This state policy agenda emerged from the work within the productivity states and focused on four policy areas: institutional incentives (outcomes-based funding), student incentives (financial aid and affordability), innovation and technology, and business practices to promote savings (Lumina Foundation 2011).

As the process for providing customized state support developed, Lumina wanted to continue the peer learning conversation beyond those initial 11 states. By 2014, Lumina was offering the flexible, evidence-based and nonpartisan Strategy Labs resources to all 50 states (see Page 3, "What is Strategy Labs?"). Strategy Labs' support evolved to focus on Lumina's 2013-2017 state policy agenda, which included a range of policy actions grouped under three overarching objectives each state should have for its postsecondary system: improved student outcomes, aligned investments and smarter pathways. Strategy Labs now supports states to consider and adopt any part of Lumina's 2017-2020 state policy agenda, including setting a statewide attainment goal, aligning finances (both institutional and student) to that goal and supporting multiple lower-priced pathways to credentials.

Arizona Board of Regents, which governs the state’s public universities, developed a system-level goal of increasing the percentage of adults with bachelor’s degrees to 30 percent by 2020 (College Success Arizona 2015; Arizona Board of Regents 2010; Ryman 2010). It’s important to note that the board goal does not include associate degrees and certificates.

In addition, Arizona is one of seven states that received a Productivity Grant from Lumina in 2009 (see Page 5, “The History of Strategy Labs”). The grant led to the creation of a statewide effort among the universities and community colleges called Getting AHEAD (Access to Higher Education And Degrees), which sought to strengthen Arizona’s transfer system, increase degree completion and reduce time to degree (Hezel Associates 2017; Adult College Completion Network 2017; Hezel Associates 2013). It also served to coordinate meetings among higher education leaders and other organizations to better discuss issues such as transfer and to address historical tensions between sectors (SPEC Associates 2012). These discussions helped to significantly streamline the state’s articulation agreements.

Policymakers also were able to participate in a number of Strategy Labs site visits and have conversations on a range of topics, including outcomes-based funding. In addition, as part of the grant, a state advisor—a Strategy Labs team member—was assigned to help facilitate conversations, leverage a variety of resources and make connections with other state efforts. The grant funding brought “national legitimacy” to Arizona’s efforts to improve higher education outcomes (SPEC Associates 2012).

Over time, efforts such as the Productivity Grant helped foster long-term relationships among higher education leaders and policymakers in the state. In addition, building a history of collaboration among people with credibility and a stake in the process helped set the stage for a new effort to set a high-level state attainment goal.

Setting the Stage

The effort to develop a statewide attainment goal was a highly collaborative, two-year process. Given Arizona’s political and historical context, it made sense to involve a wide range of participants. One starting point was an October 2015 convening of nearly 400 elected officials, business and community leaders, nonprofit organizations and philanthropic partners such as the Helios Education Foundation (a major funder in the state that frequently plays a role in state policy discussions), as well as Gov. Doug Ducey. The convening came out of a report, (*Vision 2025: Arizona Comes of Age*), by the Center for the Future of Arizona. The report aimed to engage state residents in a long-range plan for the future of education in the state. As one key driver of the process noted,

the aim was “to create the Arizona we want and develop the education we need” (Center for the Future of Arizona 2015a and 2015b).

Soon after the convening, a meeting was held among the top staff at the Helios Education Foundation (including the CEO), Lumina’s top staff, including the state policy director, and the Strategy Labs director and state adviser. The meeting between Helios and Lumina helped spark a “loose confederation of the willing”—a coalition that included a number of community-based organizations interested in improving the state’s educational outcomes, including College Success Arizona, the Arizona College Access Network and the Center for the Future of Arizona. During these conversations, when confronted with the fact that Arizona lacked a statewide attainment goal, some participants began to push for developing such a goal. As noted, the Arizona Board of Regents had set completion goals for four-year institutions, but no statewide attainment goal existed.

Building a Case

The original organizations started bringing other partners into an informal group whose members were passionate about improving educational outcomes. Over the next 12 months, this group worked on various aspects of the issue. One important step at this point was to develop “case-making documents” that described to a wide audience why an attainment goal was important to the state and also explained how to properly set such a goal. These case-making documents were informed by a variety of sources—from national research on educational attainment to workforce projections from the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce—and were shaped by input from Strategy Labs. There also was a rich discussion among the partners about the state’s rapidly growing Latino population, first-generation college-goers, the importance of closing equity gaps and how all of those issues fed into the attainment and workforce data.

College Success Arizona—one of the early partners—put out two influential publications: a comparative report that looked at states similar to Arizona that had an attainment goal in place, and a follow-up report that explored the potential economic and social benefits that would accrue to the state if an attainment goal were established (College Success Arizona 2015; College Success Arizona 2016). Together, the reports suggested that Arizona join other states with strong attainment goals (including Colorado, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee and Texas) and described how such a goal can be a “catalyst for increased attainment.”

Throughout this period, the state adviser provided a direct connection to outside experts and other resources,

helped arrange meetings with various stakeholders and assisted in building and re-establishing relationships with policymakers—even as governors changed. There was a continuous need to educate, reintroduce and talk through the ongoing work.

Identifying Leaders and Champions

It soon became clear that more capacity was needed to make the effort fully successful. In late 2016, the group turned to the Arizona Board of Regents to see if the board could help broaden the loose partnership. The board agreed to host a meeting to gauge interest from a cross-section of groups. Through this meeting, they found strong support for the idea of setting an aggressive attainment goal for the state. Bringing in the board, especially president Eileen I. Klein as a champion of the effort, helped accelerate the pace. Klein—who is very well known in the state, with many connections to policy in a variety of roles—proved to be a driving force. In addition, she helped ensure that the board’s strategic plan included a commitment to reach a statewide attainment goal, which helped integrate it into policy.

In addition to Klein, a core group of 12 to 15 individuals from other organizations continued to shepherd the effort. This group included Rich Nickel of College Success Arizona, Dr. Lattie Coor of the Center for the Future of Arizona and Dr. Maria Harper-Marinick, chancellor of Maricopa Community Colleges.

Engaging Stakeholders and Establishing a Goal

The Board of Regents helped build an attainment alliance of more than 60 players, including leaders in community organizations, business, education, philanthropy and government. As participants noted, this informal alliance was an “inclusive, representative group of important voices” in Arizona.

The alliance divided the work among several committees, each tasked with envisioning the goal and determining broad areas of strategic focus. Through the committee structure, members of the alliance thought about multiple tasks as they worked to set a goal, including communications (making the case to a broader audience), data (identifying the right target to use, how the goal should be set) and strategies (clarifying strategic priorities based on the goal).

They continued to draw resources from Strategy Labs and other sources such as the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, with the goal of examining data on degrees produced, the value of postsecondary certificates in the labor market, and other

important indicators. It was fairly simple to obtain some of the data, such as the number of bachelor’s degrees produced in the state. But it proved more difficult to obtain information on the

value of certificates, so the alliance talked to several other states about the definitions they used and approaches they took to collect benchmark data. In addition, they considered data on the demographic shifts in Arizona, such as increasing numbers of Latino students and the need to close achievement gaps across the educational pipeline.

The committees quickly made notable progress. Using the data and resources they had collected, they came to a benchmark of Arizona’s current attainment rate hovering around 42 percent. They then were able to “apply art and science” and set an ambitious but achievable goal: that, by 2030, 60 percent of Arizona residents ages 25-64 would have a college degree or professional certificate.

The work of the attainment alliance formed the nucleus of a still-growing coalition which is now called Achieve60AZ and has more than 60 members throughout the state.

Launching and Communicating the Effort

Achieve60AZ was officially launched in September 2016. In a press release to announce the initiative, Gov. Ducey endorsed the goal, saying: “I applaud the outstanding work of the Achieve60AZ alliance for recognizing the need for many more Arizonans to be prepared with the knowledge and skills they need to secure fulfilling jobs” (College Success Arizona 2016b). The governor also mentioned the goal in his State of the State Address in January 2017 as part of his broader plan for improving education in Arizona (Office of Governor Doug Ducey 2017a, 2017b and 2017c).

Planning to Achieve the Goal

While adopting an attainment goal was critical, the real work—formulating a sustainable plan for how to reach that goal—is just starting, and the coalition continues to plan the future of Achieve60AZ. The leadership council that oversees the initiative is finalizing a business partnership with College Success Arizona to support

Achieve60AZ was announced September 2016: 60 percent of adults ages 25-64 will have a college degree or professional certificate by 2030.

the incubation of the organization. At a minimum, Achieve60AZ is a campaign to help focus and promote the attainment goal and hold the state accountable for meeting it. To date, the coalition's committees have been the mechanism for engaging people in the work, but it is important for those committees to have a clear direction so the coalition can maintain momentum and excitement around the goal.

The coalition was recently awarded an Attainment Challenge Grant from Lumina Foundation as well as funding from Helios Education Foundation to build on their efforts. The coalition will seek to improve its communications, set clear expectations for what each stakeholder group contributes to reaching the goal, develop a statewide strategic plan for increasing attainment and develop metrics to publicly report on progress.

Perceptions of the Process: Reflections on What Mattered in Arizona

According to individuals who were members of the attainment alliance and later the Achieve60AZ coalition, many factors contributed to the successful development of a statewide attainment goal. Many participants knew each other from previous meetings and efforts, and they approached it as a community-owned, team effort. The effort was broad and inclusive, with key partners who were able to take the lead and provide guidance. At the same time, the Board of Regents was able to make the goal its own by fitting it with its strategic plan.

“There’s a lot of power in setting a goal.”

- Rich Nickel,
president and CEO,
College Success Arizona

Participants in the process also noted that, given Arizona’s local context, it was important that the work was a grassroots effort rather than being top-down. Buy-in from Gov. Ducey, the biggest political player in the state, is certainly important—

but this type of broad-based, community-owned effort is more likely to endure when an administration changes. Lumina Foundation funding and Strategy Labs support also lent credibility and visibility to the work.

Arizona’s story shows clearly that not only is the attainment goal important, but so is the way it was established. According to one participant, “there’s a lot of power in setting a goal.” The not-so-simple step of just *setting* a goal for the state was in itself a policy change.

The Experience in New Hampshire

New Hampshire historically has had relatively high educational attainment rates, with 47.5 percent of adults holding a two- or four-year degree in 2015 — well above the national rate of 40.9 percent. However, in recent years, improvement in the attainment rate has slowed. The state is facing a number of challenges related to the slower growth—for example, decreases in the number of highly educated adults moving to New Hampshire, a high percentage of high school graduates choosing to attend college out of state and a younger generation with attainment rates lower than those of older New Hampshire residents (Gittell 2015; Zanchuk 2016).

At the same time, workforce projections suggest that attainment will not increase enough to match employers’ needs. Almost 70 percent of jobs in the state will require a credential beyond high school by 2020 (Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce 2013). To meet those workforce needs, especially in STEM and other high-need fields, state policymakers, business leaders and other key stakeholders know they must do more to increase attainment.

Setting the Stage

In fact, a number of individuals and organizations in New Hampshire had separately been considering these issues. For example, the chancellor of the Community College System of New Hampshire, Ross Gittell, who has substantial expertise in the economics of the state and region, had been thinking about the role community colleges play in meeting workforce needs as the system embarked on a new planning process. Ed MacKay, a former chancellor of the university system, had become a champion for educational outcomes and was speaking out on the topic in his new role as director of the higher education commission. Dick Ober and Katie Merrow of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation saw a potential role for their organization in helping support and convene some of the work being done on education and workforce issues around the state. The foundation also had done some work on STEM attainment through a Lumina Community Partnership for Attainment grant, STEM Smarter Pathways.

At the same time, the NH Business and Industry Association, headed by Jim Roche, which functions as the state chamber of commerce, had been concerned about the development of a highly educated workforce. State government is fairly lean in New Hampshire, and the business community

has a lot of influence. The association recently had completed a strategic economic plan for the state that discussed the need to invest in the state's workforce.

Thus, there were a number of highly credible, bipartisan people who were interested in the topic, and a number of conversations already were happening in the state about the need to improve education and workforce outcomes.

Building a Case

Between 2013 and early 2014, the Strategy Labs state adviser in New Hampshire began meeting with each of these individuals and organizations to get a sense of their movement toward an attainment goal and related efforts. In advance of a winter 2014 board meeting, the chancellor of the community college system reached out to ask if Strategy Labs could help its trustees talk about guided pathways, a strategic initiative for that year. The conversation also included a segment on the importance of attainment goals as an anchor for these types of conversations. A clear agreement emerged from this meeting that setting a goal was important, and the system was prepared to move forward to recommend a goal and align the system's efforts toward it. However, they also understood that reaching a statewide goal would require partnership with other education and business leaders. The chancellor subsequently wrote a paper that described the current education and workforce context in the state and explained why an attainment goal was essential (Gittell 2015).

Identifying Leaders and Champions

As noted earlier, there were a number of groups, representing a range of sectors and interests, that already were involved in discussions and specific efforts related to educational and workforce outcomes. Over a few years, these discussions started to coalesce in a variety of forums. For example, in 2013, the New Hampshire Coalition for Business and Education—headed by Tom Raffio, chair of the State Board of Education and president of Northeast Delta Dental—was created. The coalition was formed to help conduct an inclusive, ongoing conversation about improving educational outcomes and long-term workforce development needs, especially in STEM fields and high-need industries (Zanchuk 2016). In the first few years of the coalition's existence, conversations at meetings revolved around education and workforce metrics and what they meant for the state's future. Members also learned about initiatives that existed in the state—efforts that the coalition mapped out. The process helped business leaders, educators and policymakers gain a shared understanding of the gaps in the state's workforce needs, initiatives that were underway and what was still needed.

Engaging Stakeholders and Establishing a Goal

In January 2015, Strategy Labs—along with the New England Board of Higher Education and Complete College America—hosted a meeting in Concord that brought together many of the key stakeholders in New Hampshire, including a state senator, the head of the New Hampshire College and University Council, chancellors of the public four-year and two-year systems and the president of a private college, along with representatives from Vermont and Maine. The meeting also included Tom Raffio and Ed MacKay, as well as some business leaders who were members of the coalition. The primary conversations during that meeting focused on the importance of having a vision and setting a goal for the state. Participants also learned that the community college system had recently adopted an attainment goal, 65x25, to help drive the community colleges' need to produce additional credentials.

A few months later, a number of those who had participated in the Strategy Labs meeting brought up the topic of educational attainment goals at a coalition meeting, and coalition members agreed they wanted to move in the direction of setting a statewide attainment goal and laying out the details of how to get there. The members voted to create a workgroup to delve into the details, including a series of convenings to work out the goal, the strategies and policies needed to meet the goal and the metrics for monitoring progress toward the goal.

An important first step was to analyze state labor market trends and postsecondary education output, using data from Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce, the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, the U.S. Census Bureau and the Center for Public Policy Studies. The group heard a number of presentations on different aspects of those trends. The original discussions that drove the creation of the coalition were focused on workforce needs, so coalition members found it valuable to see hard data that broke out those trends in industry- and occupation-specific terms. In addition to workforce trends, they looked at trends in postsecondary education in the state as well as generational shifts in patterns of student enrollment and degree production in STEM and other high-need fields.

The coalition was formed to help conduct an inclusive, ongoing conversation about improving educational outcomes and long-term workforce development needs.

Launching and Communicating the Effort

The effective launch of New Hampshire's statewide attainment goal came in July 2015, when the coalition adopted 65x25 as the overarching goal for the organization. Specifically, the statewide attainment goal is that 65 percent of New Hampshire adults will hold a high-quality postsecondary credential by the year 2025.

The adoption of the goal by the coalition gave then-Gov. Maggie Hassan the chance to start speaking in support of the goal. In addition:

- In 2015, the trustees of the community college system made 65x25 a central part of the system's strategic plan. As part of their commitment, the system is collaborating with other sectors—K-12, university, industry and others—to build strong pathways for students to attain “economically meaningful postsecondary credentials aligned with jobs.” The board believes they can double the number of degrees and certificates awarded by 2025, focusing on STEM degrees and certificates (Gittell 2015).
- In 2016, the state House of Representatives passed a resolution adopting 65x25, followed shortly by the state Senate (New Hampshire General Court 2016).
- In 2016, the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation adopted the goal, making it a pillar of its New Hampshire Tomorrow initiative and including it in its strategic plan as one of the foundation's metrics (New Hampshire Charitable Foundation 2016).

Thus, there was buy-in to the goal from all sectors in New Hampshire, and the message has resonated. This has continued as coalition leaders and other groups have written op-eds and made presentations around the state.

Planning to Achieve the Goal

After the coalition formally adopted the goal, it created the 65x25 Work Group and made that group responsible for developing strategies to reach the goal. The work group met until the summer of 2016. In June, the coalition approved the work group's recommendations, which included strategies for achieving the coalition's overall goal and the creation of two permanent committees, the K12 Pathways and Higher Education Committees (MacKay 2017; HCM Strategists 2016).

The recommendations focused on three actions needed to reach the goal: engaging adults who lack credentials, improving completion for enrolled students and retaining more high school graduates in the transition to college

within the state. Within these target populations, the group developed specific strategies. For example, to increase the number of adults with high-quality credentials, the work group recommended adoption of prior learning assessments and outreach to non-completers who need only a few credits to earn a degree. To retain more students within the state, the group suggested linking students to internships, practicums and apprenticeships (HCM Strategists 2016). This process was supported by a consultant that the coalition retained to help plan and facilitate meetings, as well as to draft reports for the work group. Strategy Labs helped by providing access to policy and data experts in the development of the goal and metrics.

To help sustain and operationalize the effort, they also created a partnership (called Workforce Accelerator 2025, or WA2025) between the Charitable Foundation and the NH Business and Industry Association to provide funds, drive the process and continue the momentum (MacKay 2017). Work group representatives saw the business community as the right group to be the “goal-focuser” and take into account the impact on economic development. In addition, with a relatively lean state government, it made sense for the business and philanthropic sectors to step in. The two organizations, plus some private companies, pledged to pool funds over the next three years to hire staff to focus on 65x25, including coordinating among organizations, identifying strategies to increase educational attainment and monitoring progress toward the goal. This signaled a commitment to making the effort sustainable over multiple years.

These staff members have been meeting with people across the state and are now developing 1) detailed baseline metrics based on the target populations and degree production goals, 2) action plans with proposed activities within the local communities, and 3) a mechanism to publicly disseminate their progress (HCM Strategists 2016). The WA2025 is convening a lead group of chancellors and state commissioners (Education, Labor, Employment Security, and Business and Economic Development) to identify and focus on implementation of key attainment strategies. The status of activities is regularly reported back to the coalition and other stakeholders through the WA2025 and the two permanent committees (K12 Pathways and Higher Education). The hope is that these reporting mechanisms will facilitate broader communication and specific actions that will move toward the goal (MacKay 2017). Staff members also plan to develop a full communications and marketing plan and intend to request support from various funders.

Perceptions of the Process: Reflections on What Mattered in New Hampshire

Individuals and organizations that participated in the process leading up to New Hampshire’s statewide attainment goal noted a number of aspects that contributed to its success. For example, they emphasized the importance of the business community and other private sector organizations within the context of a small state government and the fact that the efforts began with concerns about workforce issues. In addition, it was important to bring together prominent, nonpartisan leaders from a range of sectors that could then facilitate the adoption of a statewide goal in their own organizations. They also mentioned the importance of hard data that described trends in terms that were understandable and relevant and how those data could be translated into actionable strategies.

The story of New Hampshire’s attainment goal makes clear that the road to such a goal can take a number of paths that intersect with leaders from a range of public and private enterprises. It also shows how individual efforts can build on each other when leaders come together to discuss education and workforce issues.

Conclusions

These two state experiences have helped reveal some key factors that can contribute to a successful process— factors that often extend to other state experiences as well.

- **Setting the stage:** Many states have initiatives that can serve as blocks in the foundation when building a statewide attainment goal. Individuals and organizations who participated in previous efforts are often the people who come together to set the goal.
- **Building a case:** “Case-making” is critical to building consensus about the need to increase attainment statewide, including providing evidence of current educational outcomes and workforce projections and comparisons with peer states. Part of this case-making involves using national and state data on the state’s demographics, equity gaps and workforce needs and being intentional about addressing them.
- **Identifying leaders and champions:** Once momentum builds toward a statewide attainment goal within a state, a lot can be accomplished. However, it may take a state champion or a leadership group to make decisions, drive the effort and sustain the momentum.

- **Engaging stakeholders and establishing a goal:** It is important to bring in key stakeholders from all sectors, through larger meetings as well as smaller subgroups working on specific aspects of defining the goal and the metrics to measure progress.
- **Launching and communicating the effort:** Once a goal is identified, it is critical to communicate about it clearly and consistently. Many states organize an official launch designed to communicate about the importance of a goal, its formal adoption and plans for next steps toward achieving it. Launches take many forms, ranging from press conferences to symposia to executive order signings.
- **Planning to achieve the goal:** After a goal is set, the next challenge is to create and support specific strategies to reach that goal. Developing a goal can galvanize policies and practices that better target educational attainment in the state, but to maintain that momentum, concrete plans must be laid. These plans must include ways to sustain the effort to reach the goal, metrics that allow the group to measure progress toward the goal and effective means for communicating that progress to the public.

Once an attainment goal is set, it is critical to consider policies that complement and support the goal. Other briefs describe other states’ use of creative finance strategies to help increase attainment and the adoption of an equity lens as a specific approach to statewide goal setting.

Individual efforts can build on each other when leaders come together to discuss education and workforce issues.

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