

**HB 4124 HIGHER EDUCATION
REVITALIZATION STUDY**

Process Scoping and Design Assessment



MAY 2026

Oregon Consensus Assessment

HB 4124

Assessment Team

- Robin Harkless, Director, Oregon Consensus, Portland State University
- Turner Odell, Senior Project Manager, Oregon Consensus, Portland State University
- Katie Pearmine, Senior Project Manager, Oregon Consensus, Portland State University
- Erin Harms, Project Associate, Oregon Consensus, Portland State University

Acknowledgements

The Oregon Consensus team would like to sincerely thank all those who made time to participate in the interviews and focus groups for this assessment. It was evident to our team that each of these participants cares deeply about the postsecondary education system within the state. We hope this report reflects their insights, wisdom, and dedication.

About Oregon Consensus

Oregon Consensus was established by state statute as the State of Oregon's program for public policy conflict resolution and collaborative governance. The program provides mediation and other collaborative services to public bodies and interested parties who are seeking collaborative approaches to challenging public issues. Oregon Consensus conducts assessments and, where appropriate, designs and facilitates impartial and transparent collaborative processes that foster equitable participation and durable agreements. The program is housed in the National Policy Consensus Center in the Mark O. Hatfield School of Government at Portland State University.

Contact

Robin Harkless, Oregon Consensus Director
National Policy Consensus Center, Portland State University
506 SW Mill Street, Suite 720,
Portland, Oregon 97207
hrobin@pdx.edu
www.oregonconsensus.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	4
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND.....	5
KEY THEMES.....	8
PROCESS CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	15
CONCLUSION.....	21
APPENDIX A: OREGON CONSENSUS INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....	22
APPENDIX B: DRAFT GUIDING PRINCIPLES.....	27
APPENDIX C: DRAFT ADVISORY GROUP OPERATING PROTOCOLS.....	29

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Oregon Consensus conducted a scoping and process design assessment to inform the convening and organization of work to support the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Committee (HECC) and direction from HB 4124. The key findings, which are described in more detail in the full report, are as follows:

- The postsecondary educational system is experiencing an inflection moment, and there is a recognized need and opportunity to reimagine the system in Oregon. There is a sense of urgency for stabilizing the system, as well as a timely opportunity to design for transformational change. This revitalization study should focus on a longer horizon with a holistic system view, while also addressing practical and urgent needs of today. Distinguishing and then connecting these two lines of inquiry will be important.
- Political will and collaborative leadership are necessary to effect meaningful change. The HECC Commission and Legislative leadership should clearly define the charge and their support for this effort.
- The Oregon context matters, and we are not alone. We can learn a lot from other places and states that are excelling or facing similar challenges.
- There are ideas, but also healthy skepticism, about how to create successful outcomes from this project. The broad scope, short timeline, and relational and structural tensions make the pathway to success challenging. For example, there is an inherent tension between the desire to protect existing institutions and the desire to transform the system to meet the needs of the future.
- Trust gaps exist – mostly between institutions and HECC. Many suggested this is an opportunity to correct course and build back trust. One way is to acknowledge and enable sharing from institutions about where Oregon’s system is doing well, thriving, and adapting.
- Broad inclusion in the conversation is needed. The concept of “no surprises” is an important principle for the work to succeed.
- Oregon Consensus sees a potential collaborative pathway forward.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Across the United States, postsecondary education is navigating a period of notable change shaped by intersecting demographic, financial, technological, and political forces. Institutions are responding to declining enrollment associated with the long-anticipated “demographic cliff,” which is expected to reduce the number of college-age students in the coming years alongside evolving perceptions of the value of a college degree and ongoing financial pressures affecting both students and institutions.¹ At the same time, advances in artificial intelligence are influencing teaching, learning, and workforce expectations, while prompting institutions to more clearly articulate outcomes and return on investment. These dynamics are occurring within a context of increased public and political attention, contributing to a broader period of transition for the sector. Oregon’s postsecondary system reflects many of these same patterns, with institutions similarly addressing enrollment shifts, affordability considerations, and the need to align programs with changing student, workforce, and economic priorities, as outlined in statewide strategic planning efforts. At the same time, Oregon’s postsecondary institutions operate with significantly different missions, service obligations, geographic footprints, student populations, research responsibilities, and cost structures.

In 2026, the Oregon State Legislature passed a study bill, [House Bill 4124](#), directing the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) to work with partners and consultants to study:

“The condition of Oregon’s postsecondary education system and develop detailed recommendations for the design, implementation and operation of a viable and superior institutional framework that: (a) Supports access to postsecondary education institutions for students across geographic location, including rural communities and other underserved populations; (b) Fuels regional and statewide economic development and employment opportunities; and (c) Improves the financial viability of each postsecondary education institution in Oregon and the postsecondary education system as a whole, including by addressing projected enrollment, increased personnel costs, changes in federal law or priorities, sector-specific inflationary costs or other related factors.”

¹ Selingo, J. (2026, April 12). The looming college-enrollment death spiral. The Atlantic. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/2026/04/college-enrollment-demographic-cliff/686750/?gift=B88SdjnxlC | R757ZZ1gjDhN2jPGcWjl-59YWnpDFn4>

HB 4124 directs specific components that ‘must’ be studied, including distinct objectives and missions of each category of postsecondary education institution and opportunities for collaboration, restructuring or integration.

The bill also directs specific components which ‘may’ be evaluated, including:

- Development of academic programs and specialties to support current and emerging regional and state economic development and workforce needs.
- Criteria for the review of unnecessary program duplication across postsecondary education institutions and unmet program needs statewide.
- Structures and supports to connect students and graduates to employers and employment opportunities.
- Funding strategies, including strategies to foster collaboration, restructuring or integration in the postsecondary education system.
- Metrics of affordability for students and financial health for postsecondary education institutions.

The Oregon Legislature directed HECC to lead the study by contracting with third-party consulting services as well as engaging a range of voices inside and adjacent to the postsecondary system, including institutional leadership at 4-year public universities and community colleges; faculty, staff, students, and union groups; philanthropic and community-based organizations; workforce and economic development entities; and Tribal governments.

As a first step, HECC enlisted the services of Oregon Consensus (OC) to conduct a high-level scoping assessment. OC interviewed groups who interact with Oregon’s postsecondary system, including the interests described in the bill, to inform refinement of the scope, process design, and procurement of contracted services to support the effort.

Through a series of one-on-one and small group interviews, the following questions and input were addressed:

- What could “success” look like out of this process? What are your perceived aids and barriers to reaching this success?
- HECC identified foundational principles they committed to. How do these resonate with you? What is important, missing, problematic, or not clear?
- Who should we be talking with? How would your entity like to participate in the process?
- Input on third-party technical consultant selection and engagement; input on

- third-party process support.
- Other process design ideas.

OC conducted thirteen focus and discussion groups, as well as 31 individual interviews, with a total of 89 participants between March and May 2026. The interviews included a broad spectrum of interests, such as university and community college administrative leadership and Boards of Trustees, legislators, faculty, students, unions, private foundations, and community-based organizations, workforce and economic development interests, and Tribal education leaders. The following report is intended to be a reflection of their collective responses and should inform process design next steps.

KEY THEMES

This section synthesizes interviewees' inputs to help inform the design of the process. Oregon Consensus (OC) heard a great deal of advice about substantive solutions and outcomes, and chose to refrain from offering any specifics in our report so as not to preclude, presume outcomes, or otherwise bias the work going forward. Instead of using the process assessment to do so, OC advises that the project establish a forum with multiple channels for shared learning, generating ideas, and deliberative analysis, which will support the discussions around solutions and outcomes. The [Process Recommendations section](#) goes into further detail on this advice.

A note on terms: The term 'system', as used in this report, refers generally to the postsecondary landscape or ecosystem, and is not intended to reference specifically the governance structure for Oregon public higher education. The use of this term during the interview process at times caused reactions since the formerly centralized Oregon University "System" shifted to a more autonomous, individual governing board structure overseen by the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) in 2013.

1) Frame the Project: “Long-Term System Resiliency”

Framing clear project goals and topics for study was identified as important to supporting successful outcomes of this project. Interviews revealed varying and not always aligned ideas about how best to focus or prioritize the issues identified in the study. While there was not a clear aligned vision for refining or focusing the substantive scope of work in this process, many agreed there is a mismatch between the compressed timeframe allotted and the scope of issues that could be addressed in the very complex postsecondary education landscape in Oregon.

Many urged taking a big, bold view of system transformation, while others voiced the very real and, for some, urgent fiscal pressures calling for near-term action. The process should be designed to enable creative, long-term solutions to emerge, while also looking for near-term solutions that improve financial viability of each postsecondary institution and the system as a whole. Setting realistic sideboards – with guidance from the HECC Commission and legislative leadership – for the research, analysis, and group deliberations will be important, given the limited timeframe.

Interviewees' substantive ideas tended to fall into categories of 'innovation', 'funding

frameworks', 'governance' or 'aligning student vitality with cultural and economic vitality'. The following thematic threads from the interviews can offer guidance for refining the goal and issues for study:

- **Take an aspirational viewpoint.** While the impetus for the bill was responding to challenges and strains in the system, many interviewees felt the potential for this statewide study is to clarify an aspirational, systemic vision of what postsecondary education in Oregon should deliver for students, communities, and the state, and then unpack and level set shared understanding about the current Oregon system to identify gaps and opportunities for changes.
 - Similarly, multiple interviewees expressed that the framing in HECC's January 2026 report on Spending and Efficiency in Oregon Public Universities and the language in HB 4124 had established a perception that institutions are not collaborative or integrated, and some felt that this upcoming process could help reveal a more nuanced picture. They also indicated this offers an opportunity to see where positive collaborations are happening - and also where competition in the system is necessary to meet goals for meeting community needs and successful student outcomes.
- **Acknowledge the external forces impacting postsecondary institutions.** Identifying specific areas for change should recognize the many forces at play. Those forces most frequently named were student enrollment trends, perceptions of the overall value of higher education, student affordability and access disparities, public and other investments in higher education, and dynamic learning pathways, including AI and online learning trends.
- **Acknowledge the Oregon context.** Oregon has a strong labor environment, diverse geographies reflecting a variety of distinct cultural and community needs, decentralized governance, and a tax structure that relies heavily on personal income taxes for state revenues.
- **Do not apply a one-size-fits-all approach.** Regional universities, polytechnic universities, research institutions, flagship universities, and community colleges were identified as unique institution 'types' and should be viewed distinctly while considering systemic challenges and solutions more broadly. Concerns were flagged about solutions that might help one institution and harm another, and identified a need for the study to reveal and consider these tradeoffs when considering solution sets or concepts.

Process considerations and recommendations:

- Design the process to meet the primary direction from the legislature to study the “distinct objectives and missions of each category of postsecondary education institution and identify opportunities for collaboration, restructuring, or integration.”
- Ask HECC and Legislative leadership to set a clear direction and charge for this work.
- Then, throughout the process, work with an established advisory group made up of a diverse and balanced set of representative voices working alongside HECC, additional ad hoc design teams, and consultants to establish shared guiding principles, co-learn and, where possible, co-create options.
- More detailed process design ideas are offered in the [Process Recommendations](#) section of this document for consideration

2) Work with a Trusted, Visible, and Engaged Consultant

The Legislature directed HECC to secure services from a third-party consultant to conduct the study. OC asked interviewees for advice on this aspect of the project. The interviewees' feedback focused mostly on the need for competency, transparency, and trust as evidenced by:

- experience in postsecondary education (and for some, specific experience in the Oregon context);
- direct engagement and shared sense-making with identified groups; and
- drawing from sources inside and outside of the state.

Some responses indicated that an independent, objective third-party is critical to conducting an unbiased fiscal analysis. They also mentioned that having a good understanding or involvement in the Oregon context is important to avoiding ‘cookie-cutter’ or off-the-shelf solutions. It was also noted by many participants that the study should endeavor to go beyond a narrow focus on fiscal analysis and craft recommendations that take a holistic approach to the issues impacting the state and postsecondary system. Many view the postsecondary challenges facing the state as multifaceted with intersecting causes, and therefore, should have solutions that mirror this complexity.

Additional Substantive Topics:

Additional feedback, while not shared across all interviewees, could be considered in the recruitment and selection of the consultant work. OC recommends passing these ideas along to the recruitment team (HECC and others) to inform the selection of contracted support.

1) System structure and financial resilience

- De-mystify the complexity of the system, and create a broader shared understanding of Oregon’s system.
- Analyze for the “right size, type, and number” of institutions.
- Compare with other states and models to consider financial resilience and where Oregon can lead - focusing on per capita spending on students, graduation rates, and governance structures.
- Draw from Oregon examples as well as other states.
- Look at existing barriers for student/credit transfers.
- Look at the challenges that exist with the existing public funding formula(s).
- Analyze who and how we are creating efficiencies, over time. What strategic interventions are being made across the system, and who is being impacted?
- What are the labor/unionized workforce implications on financials?
- What is the impact of state-mandated employee benefits on institutions’ operating costs?

2) Alignment with needs

- Do a “workforce needs” environmental scan and compare that to existing data on what the current system supports, to show gaps.
- Study how local workforce needs tie to offerings, especially in complex areas like growing labor market needs that are not in living wage careers (e.g., hospitality).
- Verify how well institutions meet their goals across the state as a data point, including mapping degrees and certificates and the types of institutions offering them.
- Include a review of the K–12 system to identify current structural barriers that shape students’ preparation and influence the pipeline into post-secondary education.
- Study transfer pathways and general education core systems. Look at trends around students going out of state.
- Consider national trends such as enrollment cliffs, changing population demographics, virtual learning, and the proliferation and influence of AI technology.

Look at population changes and influences on younger people, including the K-12 demographic.

- Consider the private university ecosystem and how Oregonians are utilizing this system.
- Consider other public and private postsecondary educational opportunities, especially in neighboring states, with both online and in-person access.
- Use [HECC's equity lens and incorporate the Guiding Questions](#) into the work.
- Use the postsecondary attainment statutory goal of 40-40-20 to review for alignment.
- Examine system barriers for high-demand degrees; how have private universities stepped in to fill gaps?

Process considerations and recommendations:

- Be intentional and transparent in the recruitment and selection of contracted services. We recommended including a few people outside HECC (from the pool of individuals/ organizations interviewed) to engage with the recruitment and selection process to provide more perspectives and attract a broad pool of candidates.
- Keep the scope of services broad enough that further scoping direction can occur in process with input from an advisory group.
- Ensure the contractor(s) are able and willing to take an independent, objective, flexible, participatory approach to their work and orient them as a “supporting resource” to the project, rather than the “driver of solutions.”
- Combine outside and documented research with the collective knowledge of lived experiences in the Oregon system as important and combined data sources informing concept development.
- In addition to fiscal analysis, consider the exploration of deeper social and/or cultural analysis of the state, its public institutions, and regional workforce needs.
- Consider contracting with more than one firm to meet this balance and multiple needs.

3) Build Foundational Principles Together

HECC developed an initial set of guiding principles and asked for feedback and refinement. While most interviewees did not object to these, many emphasized the importance of honoring and legitimizing them if they are to be held up as foundational to success. It was through this line of inquiry that signals were sent around the need for HECC to lead with purpose and overcome trust challenges that have developed over time.

Refinements and new ideas were offered:

- A focus on student and community needs should be the primary 'north star.'
- Frame the conversation around the hypothesis that postsecondary education is valuable and necessary, focusing on how to sustain and meet the needs of the future.
- Be curious and bold in our thinking.
- Clearly uncover, understand, and articulate trade-offs.
- Broaden and be committed to inclusion. Diverse student experiences, levels of faculty and staff, and Tribes were called out specifically.
- "Good data:" a responsibility to deliver reliable, trustworthy quantitative and qualitative data -- with fidelity, accuracy, and transparency.
- Add 'clarity' as a principle. Clearly frame the problems, and define terms for shared understanding (e.g., inclusion).
- Avoid only building on what's come before, and instead look at things through a set of new lenses.
- Building on what has come before should not assume a bias that previous efforts were 'right' or 'wrong.' Consider accessing data from current efforts by individual institutions to look for strategic realignment, integration, and/or efficiencies.
- Existing data needs to be digestible and verified if it is to be used.
- Make sure principles are not in conflict.
- Explicitly excluding increased public funding as a potential recommendation is problematic – we need to be honest about this.
- "The devil is in the details."
- Look for opportunities to be self-sustaining (in light of federal unpredictability).
- Add: 'consensus seeking on common goals and metrics of success' as a principle.
- Add accuracy as a principle. HECC to speak with honesty and with one voice in all the spaces.
- Examine culture and intangibles. Interviewees noted this will be challenging if the process is narrowly scoped to a specific transactional, fiscal lens.

Process consideration and recommendations:

- Foundational principles can serve as a common framework for establishing collaborative engagement, setting directional goals, and identifying and evaluating solutions.
- Use the principles in early organizing discussions to clarify and agree on a shared purpose and north stars for the work among multiple interests in and adjacent to the postsecondary education system. The principles can be used as a reference point for ongoing deliberations, analysis, and informing policy ideas. *(An updated, 'first draft' for refinement and approval by the Advisory Group is included as Appendix B to this report.)*

PROCESS CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the legislative language in HB 4124, ideas shared during the interviews, OC's experience and expertise in designing collaborative engagement efforts, and considering the unique aspects of the postsecondary ecosystem in Oregon, OC offers the following process recommendations for organizing the project.

HECC is encouraged to lead with purpose and position itself as a collaborative partner in the process, rather than a compliance authority or passive coordinator. Participants in the process are encouraged to take a collaborative leadership stance and focus on the interdependencies (of people, institutions, and economies) that exist across the system. Participants are also encouraged to value and contribute to the collective effort it will take to work together to find durable solutions.

To do this, OC recommends multiple tiers of engagement:

1. An **HB 4124 Advisory Group** to serve as a core, collaborative deliberative forum of members representing various interests and authorities in the system. The purpose of this group would be to do joint sense-making of the realities, challenges, and opportunities of the postsecondary system; to inform and reflect on third-party research and analysis as well as design group products; and to assist HECC staff in developing recommendations for the final report.

We offer the following suggestions for establishing advisory group membership. We offer these suggestions in the spirit of establishing a balanced, right-sized, and representative table, and expect that additional refinement may be needed to confirm the makeup and purpose of the group (and that other channels for engagement, described below, will help create more inclusive spaces for engagement):

- a. Members should include the following representatives:
 - i. 1 member representing 4-year public higher education institutions in Oregon (e.g., the Executive Director of the member association)
 - ii. 1 member representing community colleges in Oregon (e.g., the Executive Director of the member association)
 - iii. 1 member representing education unions in Oregon
 - iv. 1 member representing faculty (e.g., a member of the InterInstitutional Faculty Senate)

- v. 1 member representing staff (e.g., SEIU)
- vi. 1 member representing postsecondary students (from the Student Voices Group—see below)
- vii. 1 member representing philanthropic organizations supporting the postsecondary system
- viii. 1 member representing workforce development and economic interests (e.g., Oregon Business Council)
- ix. 1 HECC board member representative
- x. 1 member representing the K-12 perspective on the continuity of learning in Oregon (e.g., Superintendent or ESD)
- xi. 1 member organization that represents underrepresented communities
- xii. A position for each of the 9 Federally-Recognized Tribes in Oregon
*Recognizing the unique government-to-government relationship and mechanisms for engagement that Tribal nations have with the State on matters of tribal interests and rights, the project will accommodate engagement at a level that is deemed useful and appropriate to the individual Tribes.

- b. Advisory Group member assignments should happen largely through a self-selecting recruitment effort initiated by HECC.
- c. The members should be willing and able to fulfill these duties:
 - i. Consistent attendance of monthly half-day meetings, with some preparation and follow-up for each meeting. Selecting an alternate and keeping them up to speed in case of any needed absences from a meeting. Timeframe: June 2026-April 2027.
 - ii. Willingness to take both a specific perspective and interdependent systems view for problem-solving.
 - iii. A commitment to a collaborative mindset that allows for interest-based, creative, and mutually beneficial opportunities to arise in the process.
 - iv. Commitment to transparent communication, iterative feedback, and a ‘no surprises’ approach throughout the study process.

2. **Ad Hoc Design Groups** to focus design work on specific components of the system.

- a. The scope and purpose of these groups will be established through HECC and legislative leadership, with further input from the HB 4124 Advisory

Group.

- b. The timeline and membership will be determined through consultation among the Advisory Group, third-party consultant, HECC staff, and process facilitators.
 - c. The design groups will be responsible for gathering ideas and coming up with options, potentially with some analytical support from the consultant team, to inform advisory group deliberations. They will not be responsible for making decisions or advancing agendas on any topics. Ideas will come back to the Advisory Group for deliberation.
 - d. Topics may form around substantive areas identified in HB 4124 and from the assessment, which include the following: *(Note: this is not an exhaustive, definitive, or ranked list.)*
 - i. Innovation and transformation: barriers, new opportunities, and leveraging existing efforts
 - ii. Funding structure(s)
 - iii. Aligning student vitality with the workforce and economic interests of the State
 - iv. Developing a common framework for establishing criteria for evaluating programming redundancies
 - v. Metrics for affordability for students and the financial health of institutions
 - vi. Sustaining regional anchor institutions
 - vii. Frameworks for shared, collaborative, and cooperative governance that incentivize collaboration, alignment, and integration
 - viii. Mechanisms to control cost drivers across institutions
 - ix. Transfer students
3. A **Student Voices Group** composed of undergraduate and graduate level representatives from the seven public universities and community colleges.
- a. We recommend that this group encapsulate representation across academic disciplines, demographic backgrounds, and student organizations.
 - i. Institutions should nominate or select student representatives through an internal process (e.g., student government, graduate councils, student centers, or interest groups).
 - ii. Student representatives should anticipate their participation through the conclusion of the study and endeavor to maintain membership through this time.

- b. The Student Voices Group will offer student perspectives to inform HECC’s research, analysis, and report writing. It will help ensure that the findings and recommendations of the study reflect the lived experiences and priorities of current students.
 - i. The advisory group may support HECC in the creation and execution of additional surveys, focus groups, and student engagement endeavors to best inform their work for the study and reporting.
- c. Members of the Student Voices Group will attend scheduled meetings and actively participate in discussions, review materials provided by HECC such as, but not limited to, draft reports, data summaries, and policy options, and offer constructive feedback grounded in their student experiences.
 - i. Attendance at ad hoc meetings may be needed during significant decision points.
 - ii. One member of the Student Voices Group will sit on the Advisory Group.
- d. These meetings should be held quarterly and over online platforms to most easily accommodate all participants.
- e. These meetings should be organized and supported by the Project Support Team and should have a strong connection to advisory group proceedings.
- f. Participation stipends should be provided.

4. Postsecondary Institution Finance and Academic Administrators Group.

- a. We recommend that a standing group hold quarterly meetings to stay connected to the study bill and HB 4124 Advisory Group in an informed, concept review capacity. This group should be available when specific topics come up for feedback on developing concepts as they relate to operationalizing or other implications for the institutions.
- b. These meetings should be organized with help from the Project Support Team.

5. Standing existing forums and channels for additional engagement opportunities.

These forums will be important connections for keeping more people apprised and updated on the ongoing work, as well as the opportunity to engage specific groups requiring a particular lens on emerging ideas and concepts. Some that we are aware of include:

- a. An ad hoc legislative forum for keeping legislators informed on the progress

of the study bill, as well as an overall education space for understanding the system dynamics.

- b. Quarterly updates at public HECC meetings.
 - c. A venue for HECC to provide quarterly updates to Tribal education directors that can provide an opportunity for progress updates or deeper consultative engagement.
 - d. A coalition of Oregon Public Universities as a means for Oregon university presidents to stay apprised and coordinate their collective perspectives as substantive work unfolds.
 - e. An Oregon Presidents' Council or Oregon Community College Association as a means for Oregon community college presidents to stay apprised and coordinate their collective perspectives as substantive work unfolds.
 - f. An interinstitutional faculty senate.
 - g. HECC Boards of Trustees meetings.
 - h. The Oregon Business and Industry as a space for sharing updates with a broad membership of businesses and chambers across the state.
 - i. Other forums that may be identified for this type of engagement.
6. **Regional community gatherings centering regional voices and needs.** A frequent topic raised by interviewees was the need for regionally-based information-gathering and sharing sessions, so as to best understand the unique characteristics, challenges, and bright spots of each regional community of postsecondary institutions and the adjacent communities. We recommend holding advisory group meetings quarterly in different regions across the state and adding a broader community event per direction from local leadership. This is intended to be an opportunity for HECC, the advisory group, and the consultant team to interface directly with different communities.
7. **Project Support Team.** We recommend the formation of a Project Support Team to help organize, facilitate, and support engagement efforts, including agenda and materials development, communications, and overall process guidance. This team could include:
- a. A convener (HECC staff leadership): An engaged partner (not compliance or oversight) to provide process leadership and support, as well as bringing different resources to the project as needed.

- b. Third-party technical consultant(s): These can provide objective research and analytic support with direct interface with the advisory group. We recommend that the consultants be both Oregon and federal-context savvy. They can be focused on fiscal analysis; they may also be responsible for leading participatory cultural/social analysis.
- c. A third-party facilitation team: A neutral, third-party to design, organize, and facilitate the process to support legitimate, clear, and collaborative engagement.
- d. A communications team: This can include a combination of HECC, consultants, and facilitation team to ensure messaging and process progress are shared accurately, consistently, and broadly throughout the life of the project.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the interview process, Oregon Consensus heard a strong desire to maintain a thriving postsecondary education system in Oregon as a backbone for economic and civic vitality, and cultural health of communities across the state. While some interviewees expressed low trust and some uncertainty about how successful outcomes might be achieved out of this study bill process,, we heard a willingness (and desire) by many to work toward a shared holistic vision and finding tangible solutions that ensure the high-value system in Oregon continues to serve students and communities. It is clear that there are complexities and challenges to doing this work. However, from our assessment, we see that there is the potential for a collaborative pathway for discovery, exploration of ideas, and building durable solutions that will serve the system into the future. We also agree that challenges will need to be acknowledged directly and overcome over time. Process design can help set the conditions for this, but ultimately, it will take the collective will and leadership of the group and decision makers to effect any change.

APPENDIX A: OREGON CONSENSUS INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction:

The Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) has requested the assistance of Oregon Consensus (OC) to help assess the collaborative approach HECC will take to implementing the requirements of House Bill 4124 (HB 4124). Additional background and information about OC and the assessment process follow.

Background - Legislative Direction through HB 4124:

1. The Higher Education Coordinating Commission shall conduct a study of the condition of Oregon's post-secondary education system and develop detailed recommendations for the design, implementation and operation of a viable and superior institutional framework that: (a) Supports access to post-secondary education institutions for students across geographic location, including rural communities and other underserved populations; (b) Fuels regional and statewide economic development and employment opportunities; and (c) Improves the financial viability of each post-secondary education institution in Oregon and the post-secondary education system as a whole, including by addressing projected enrollment, increased personnel costs, changes in federal law or priorities, sector-specific inflationary costs or other related factors.
2. The study must evaluate and make recommendations on each of the following subjects: (a) The distinct objectives and missions of each category of post-secondary education institution, including community college, public university, regional university and research university, in consideration of key variables such as research, public services, instruction, academic programming, educational model and the student population served; and (b) Opportunities for collaboration, restructuring or integration in the post-secondary education system.
3. The study may evaluate and make recommendations on each of the following subjects: (a) Development of academic programs and specialties to support current and emerging regional and state economic development and workforce needs; (b) Criteria for the review of unnecessary program duplication across post-secondary education institutions and unmet program needs statewide; (c) Structures and

supports to connect students and graduates to employers and employment opportunities; (d) Funding strategies, including strategies to foster collaboration, restructuring or integration in the post-secondary education system; and (e) Metrics of affordability for students and financial health for post-secondary education institutions.

4. In developing recommendations under this section, the commission shall engage the expertise of and consult public institutions of higher education, including faculty, staff, and students, and any other interested stakeholders identified by the commission.

HECC / Convener Stated Goal:

To deliver a report to the Legislature in early 2027 that includes recommendations for systemic changes that positively impact the ability of Oregon higher education to remain accessible, increase workforce opportunities, and fuel economic development -- even in the context of forecasted resource constraints. And, ideally, to do so with substantial “buy-in” from higher education leaders.

OC / 3rd Party Role:

Oregon Consensus was established by statute as the State of Oregon’s program for public policy conflict resolution and collaborative governance. The program provides mediation and other collaborative services to public bodies and other interested parties who are seeking agreement-seeking/collaborative approaches to challenging public issues. Oregon Consensus conducts assessments and, where appropriate, designs and facilitates impartial and transparent collaborative processes that foster equitable participation and durable agreements. The program is housed in the National Policy Consensus Center in the Mark O. Hatfield School of Government at Portland State University.

For this assessment, our team will conduct individual and focus-group interviews to understand the suite of interests, needs, and suggestions for working to meet the goals of HB 4124. The findings from our interviews and our associated process recommendations will be drafted into a report and shared with HECC, the interviewed parties, and others in May 2026. We will not attribute comments to any specific person or entity (without permission) and are hoping to create space for candor in these conversations.

OC is providing our interview questions below. These questions are intended to guide our individual and focus group interview conversations – please do not respond in writing. We do not have the capacity to receive and process written responses under the current timeframe. Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts with us.

Process Scoping and Design Assessment Questions:

1. Tell us about you, your role, and your interests in the higher education system in Oregon.
2. As you consider the legislative directive to HECC through HB 4124, what is your initial thinking on what 'success' might look like out of this process? What should HECC and the ecosystem of higher education players be aiming for over the next year? Is there anything in the following 'may' address items from the bill that you think should, or should not, be considered in this process?
 - Development of academic programs and specialties to support current and emerging regional and state economic development and workforce needs
 - Criteria for the review of unnecessary program duplication across post-secondary education institutions and unmet program needs statewide;
 - Structures and supports to connect students and graduates to employers and employment opportunities;
 - Funding strategies, including strategies to foster collaboration, restructuring, or integration in the post-secondary education system; and
 - Metrics of affordability for students and financial health for postsecondary education institutions.
3. What will aid in your stated ideas of success? What do you think are the major barriers to your ideas of success?
4. HECC identified draft foundational principles for this work (below). What resonates? What is missing? Where do you see problems?

HECC is committed to:

- **Building on what's come before.** This includes the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) study for Oregon Public Universities (OPU) / Oregon Presidents Council (OPC) and the HECC university efficiency/spending report.
- **Learning from others.** We will be informed by a broad, national perspective on the challenges faced in higher education and potential models to follow (and to avoid).
- **Inclusion.** Faculty, staff, students, governing boards, unions, institutional administrators, and legislators should have meaningful opportunities to help shape the process and the recommendations.
- **Transparency.** Interested parties should receive frequent communication about the project.

- **Focusing on student and community needs.** The primary lenses for analysis and decision-making should be the needs of students (access to impactful education) and the state and its regions (economy, workforce, civic vitality).
 - **Protecting institutional diversity.** To meet the needs of diverse students, including race/ethnicity, age, and urban/rural, one size will not fit all.
 - **Good data.** We should draw from data that is well-accepted and standardized to the greatest extent possible.
 - **Being realistic and working within the parameters that the Legislature established in HB 4124, even when it's uncomfortable.** Recommendations should promote student access, economic and workforce opportunities, and the financial viability of institutions/systems without relying on major increases in public funding.
 - **An integrative collaborative process** that attempts to develop areas of clear alignment amongst interested parties, and that also reflects that HECC will be responsible for final recommendations to the Legislature within a specified timeline and scope. (see Legislative intent – developing options to articulate opportunities for collaboration, restructuring, or integration in the post-secondary education system.)
5. The bill and HECC consider students and regional economic and civic vitality needs as central to developing recommendations. HECC assumes faculty, staff, students, governing boards, unions, institutional administrators, legislators, regional workforce development interests, foundations, community-based organizations, and Tribes should inform recommendations. Do you have suggestions about who specifically or in addition should be involved in the process to inform HECC's recommendations?
 6. What about you/your entity? How would you like to be involved, and what factors will help you determine whether and how to be involved (role/influence, time commitment, participation stipends, or other participation support needs, etc.)?
 7. The legislation directs HECC to work with outside resources/consultants to help with analysis and concept development. What is your advice on scoping, qualifications, and interaction with this consultant group in this process? Do you have suggestions for what or how to best bring additional outside resources to support this work?
 8. What ideas do you have for how the process should be designed? What will be important to consider as the process is initiated?
 9. What else should we be asking? Is there anything else you want to share?

Process Scoping and Design Assessment Questions (University Students):

1. Briefly tell us your name, what institution you attend, and your interests in the higher education system in Oregon.
2. What are some current issues that students in Oregon are facing that you feel have been impacted by the legislature and policymakers? Where do you see successes and where do you see room for improvement?
3. How best could HECC communicate Oregon higher education policy and decision-making with students?
4. How often should students be consulted during the study, and in what formats (for example, surveys, listening sessions, focus groups, student advisory boards)? How should these groups of students be selected or chosen, as well?
5. Is there anything else you want to share?

APPENDIX B: DRAFT GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The interview process invited feedback on an initial set of foundational principles developed by HECC to serve as anchors for the work. The following refined draft reflects additional thinking from interviewees, which the Advisory Group can further refine and work with to guide their deliberations over the next year.

- **We will center student success needs.** Recognizing diversity of needs and access to multiple pathways, educational quality, affordability, and connecting to careers are north stars.
- **We recognize that economic development and postsecondary education are interdependent and should be viewed together.**
- **We will care for and support the diverse and valuable contributions of existing institutions.**
- **We recognize that “one size does not fit all.”** Solutions need to account for Oregon’s unique context and diverse array of institutional offerings across the postsecondary education system.
- **We will learn from others.** We will be informed by a broad, national perspective on the challenges faced in higher education and potential models to follow (and to avoid).
- **We will be inclusive of many needs and perspectives.** Faculty, staff, students, governing boards, unions, institutional administrators, legislators and Tribes should have meaningful opportunities to learn together and help shape the recommendations.
- **We will communicate with transparency and accuracy.** Communication about the project should be consistent and shared through multiple channels to a broad audience.
- **We will be informed by usable, timely, and accurate information.** The study should rely on quantitative and qualitative data that are digestible and verifiable.
- **We will engage in shared learning through multiple sources of knowledge.** Empirical and evidence-based data can come from research as well as lived experience shared through storytelling and other forms of expression. The process should make room for multiple sources and transmittals.
- **We will look for solutions that are comprehensive and seek long-term economic and cultural vitality for Oregon and its communities.**

- **We will take an integrative, collaborative approach** that attempts to develop areas of clear alignment amongst multiple parties, while recognizing that the HECC is the lead entity responsible for final recommendations to the Legislature within a specified timeline and scope.
-

HECC's initial set of foundational principles:

- **Building on what's come before.** This includes the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) [landscape study](#) for Oregon Public Universities (OPU) / Oregon Presidents Council (OPC), the [HECC university efficiency/spending report](#), and the Oregon Legislature's Joint Task Force On Student Success for Underrepresented Students in Higher Education's Report on Findings and Recommendations for 2023 Legislative Session.
- **Learning from others.** We will be informed by a broad, national perspective on the challenges faced in higher education and potential models to follow (and to avoid).
- **Inclusion.** Faculty, staff, students, governing boards, unions, institutional administrators, and legislators should have meaningful opportunities to help shape the process and the recommendations.
- **Transparency.** Interested parties should receive frequent communication about the project.
- **Focusing on student and community needs.** The primary lenses for analysis and decision-making should be the needs of students (access to impactful education) and the state and its regions (economy, workforce, civic vitality).
- **Protecting institutional diversity.** To meet the needs of diverse students, including race/ethnicity, age, and urban/rural, one size will not fit all.
- **Good data.** We should draw from data that is well-accepted and standardized to the greatest extent possible.
- **Being realistic and working within the parameters that the Legislature established in HB 4124, even when it's uncomfortable.** Recommendations should promote student access, economic and workforce opportunities, and the financial viability of institutions/ systems without relying on major increases in public funding.
- **An integrative collaborative process** that attempts to develop areas of clear alignment amongst interested parties, and that also reflects that HECC will be responsible for final recommendations to the Legislature within a specified timeline and scope.

APPENDIX C: DRAFT ADVISORY GROUP OPERATING PROTOCOLS

This is intended to be an outline for Advisory Group Operating Protocols, to be further developed and agreed upon by the group.

1. **Background** (What led to the formation of the collaborative group?)

HB 4124

2. **Advisory Group Purpose, Membership and Commitments** (Why the group exists, who is in the group, and what they are signing up to do.)

Sample language – HECC is establishing the HB 4124 Advisory Group to serve as a core deliberative forum with members representing various interests and authorities in the postsecondary education system. The purpose of this group is to do joint sensemaking of the realities, challenges and opportunities of the postsecondary system; to help guide and reflect on 3rd party research and analysis as well as feedback on design group work; and to inform HECC staff recommendations to the Commission in the final report.

Objectives

- Steer and review research
- Share perspective and learn from others
- Develop and deliberate on options
- Work toward alignment on key issues and recommendations

Advisory Group Members

- 1 member representing 4-year public higher education institutions in Oregon.
- 1 member representing community colleges in Oregon.
- 1 member representing education unions in Oregon.
- 1 member representing faculty
- 1 member representing staff at a 4-year public institution
- 1 member representing postsecondary students
- 1 member representing philanthropic organizations supporting the postsecondary system
- 1 member representing workforce development and economic interests
- 1 member serving on the HECC Board
- 1 member organization representing K-12 perspective as it relates to the

continuity of learning in Oregon

- 1 member organization that represents underrepresented communities
- 1 position for each of the 9 Federally Recognized Tribes in Oregon. (Recognizing the unique government-to-government relationship and mechanisms for engagement that Tribal nations have with the State on matters of tribal interests and rights, the project will accommodate engagement at a level that is deemed useful and appropriate to the individual Tribes.)

3. **Advisory Group Member Responsibilities and Commitments** (level and quality of participation, commitments to each other.)

4. **Broader Engagement and Communications** (how will communications about the process outside the group be handled? Includes media, general public, decision makers and other forums.)

5. **Decision Making** (What is the authority and process for decision-making of the group?)

6. **Other Roles and Resources** (define roles for any non-Advisory Group participants who will interface regularly with the group – including):

- HECC staff
- Facilitators
- Researchers/analysts
- Other governmental staff
- Legislators

7. **Interactions With Other Forums** (acknowledging other forums and means for addressing similar or adjacent issues – articulating both the ‘right’ as well as agreed-upon commitments like ‘no surprises’ and avoiding undermining the agreement-seeking efforts of this forum.)

8. **Community Agreements** (how the Group agrees to work with each other in this established space – e.g., fostering a culture of respect, openness and transparency, encouraging dialogue and embracing multiple perspectives, holding a learning mindset, avoiding surprises.)