

State of Oregon
Higher Education Coordinating Commission
Strategic Plan 2024-2029



Oregon State Capitol Building



Letter from the Chair

Oregon postsecondary education and training faces headwinds, from price tag to politics to demography to technological advancements.

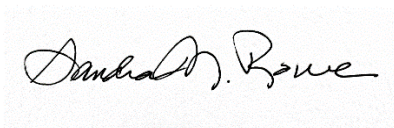
While the HECC acknowledges these challenges, we are also energized by them. I am convinced that we are ready to meet the moment.

This Strategic Plan does a few things:

- It prioritizes the expectations of students and citizens over a “business as usual approach.” It focuses on the few most important goals for students and citizens and maps a path to deliver on those expectations.
- It clarifies and underscores the scope of the HECC’s role within Oregon postsecondary education. It is the HECC’s responsibility to provide a unified strategic vision for Oregon higher education, and we need to lean into that role.
- It elevates a systemic mindset to demonstrate we are not a collection of colleges and buildings but an interdependent system that exists to serve the well-being of all Oregonians.

When we launched this planning process a year ago, we knew that this plan would be different from prior ones. It would reach beyond the generally aspirational, be compact and specific with clearly measurable outcomes, and provide a roadmap for success.

In a long career in business and nonprofit leadership, I don’t think I have ever said, “I’m excited about this strategic plan.” This is an exception. I believe it is the right plan at the right moment in our history.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sandy M. Rowe". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sandy Rowe

Chair, Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission

The Higher Education Landscape Today

Key contextual factors that are affecting Oregon postsecondary education and workforce development include:

- The falling percentage of recent Oregon high school graduates enrolling in higher education and training [\[1\]](#)
- Demographic trends, including a projected decline in the number of traditional college-age students and their increasing racial and ethnic diversity [\[2\]](#)
- Declining enrollment, which has put substantial pressure on financial sustainability at some Oregon education and training providers and may result in increased competition between them [\[3\]](#)
- The emergence and growth of national universities that compete strongly for online students [\[4\]](#)
- Effects of the coronavirus pandemic, including schooling gaps and their impact on learning, the widespread adoption of online education, and other innovations in education and training
- Rising costs of living, especially in housing, which leave many students without secure access to housing and food or crowd out Oregonians' ability to pursue postsecondary education at all
- The sharp increase in learners' mental health and wellness needs [\[5\]](#)
- The startling number of students who enroll in but don't complete postsecondary education and training due to a variety of barriers, including emotional stress, mental health needs, and cost [\[6\]](#)
- The emergence of artificial intelligence as a tool and challenge for higher education [\[7\]](#)
- Declining public perception about the value of higher education [\[8\]](#)
- The acute need of employers and the State of Oregon for trained workers in critical industry and public service sectors [\[9\]](#)
- Employers' dissatisfaction that college degrees signify workforce readiness [\[10\]](#)
- Borrowing that saddles too many students, especially Black individuals, women, and people who do not complete their programs, with unaffordable, lifelong student debt [\[11\]](#)

Strategic Planning Process

In August 2024, the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) embarked on a process to create its Strategic Plan 4.0. The plan will guide the work of the Commission and organization in carrying out the mission. To support the process, the HECC engaged Coraggio Group as its strategic planning partner.

Equity Alignment

To ensure equity remained a central focus for the Core Planning Team, the HECC and Coraggio Group employed the [Oregon HECC Equity Lens](#) during sessions. The team met for an Equity Alignment Workshop in February to ground the group in the values and equity work driving Oregon’s higher education system. At the beginning of each planning session, the team applied the Equity Lens, selecting the guiding questions most relevant to the work at hand to ensure equity was centered as decisions were made.

Interested Party Engagement

Meaningful input and engagement from those in Oregon with a vested interest in the educational system was imperative. To ensure the plan aligned with the values of the educational community, the HECC held multiple engagement opportunities prior to writing the Strategic Plan and during the draft review period.

Prior to drafting the Strategic Plan, the HECC implemented the following:

<div>408</div> <div>Survey Responses</div> <div>⌘</div> <div>to the Online Survey (open between March 1-20, 2024)</div>	<div>5</div> <div>Focus Groups</div> <div>⌘</div> <div>Sessions with 36 total participants</div>	<div>10</div> <div>Interviews</div> <div>⌘</div> <div>Individual Interviews Conducted</div>
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Interested parties were asked to evaluate the HECC's current Vision and Mission and identify top priorities and challenges facing Oregon's higher education landscape. Coraggio Group analyzed all feedback and identified key themes to inform the strategic plan. Once a draft plan was in place, interested parties were then asked to provide feedback through:

4	59
Virtual Sessions	Responses
≡	≡
Feedback Sessions	To the Feedback Survey

Situation Assessment

The input gathered through the interested party engagement and review of data provided by the HECC to the Coraggio team revealed the following key insights and themes to inform the development of the strategic plan:

1. Affordability is the top issue facing higher education in Oregon.
2. Competition among institutions points to divergent interests across the players in higher education, posing policy challenges for the HECC.
3. There is a desire to balance a focus on uplifting Oregon's most vulnerable, marginalized students with broader goals such as 40-40-20.
4. In supporting learner pathways, it is critical to understand and address points where students leave the educational system.
5. Ensuring a strong Oregon economy in the future through robust workforce linkages should be re-emphasized as a key goal for the HECC and its work.
6. There is an opportunity to better define the coordinating role of the HECC in relation to institutions and the overall higher education landscape.
7. There is a desire to define and strengthen the Commission's role in advocacy and ultimately secure more funding for higher education in Oregon.

How the Strategic Plan is Organized



VISION

What is the ideal future state we strive to create?



MISSION

What is our primary focus as an organization?



VALUES

What are the fundamental beliefs that shape how we work together and serve our mission?



GOALS

What must be accomplished over the planning horizon? What must be our areas of focus?



OUTCOMES

How will we know when we are successful? What will we measure?



STRATEGIES

What finite-duration discretionary projects or programs outside of our organization's day-to-day operational activities will we take on?

Strategic Plan 2024-2029

Vision

The Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) envisions a future where all people benefit from the economic, civic, and cultural impact of high-quality postsecondary education, training, and workforce development.

Mission

Through strategic coordination, funding, outreach, services, reporting, and leadership for systems change, the HECC:

- Drives equitable postsecondary access and success for all Oregonians;
- Anticipates and meets workforce and economic needs; and
- Strengthens Oregon's collective future by fostering research, innovation, learning, civic engagement, and cultural contributions.



Photos Courtesy of (Top to Bottom, Left to Right): Southwestern Oregon Community College; stock image; Southern Oregon University

Values

Collaboration

We believe that collaboration is essential for achieving common goals and driving positive change. When we are collaborating, we proactively share information, optimize resources, seek and give feedback, and foster inclusive participation to ensure that diverse perspectives are heard and valued.

Creativity and Innovation

We believe that creativity and innovation are catalysts for finding unique solutions and pushing boundaries. When we are creative and innovative, we are not constrained by our current ways of working. We strive for excellence to continuously improve and to leverage information to solve problems in unexpected ways.

Equity

We believe that equity is crucial in ensuring equal opportunities for all individuals. When our work is rooted in equity, we share power and leadership, engage our communities, and analyze data to remove barriers and create access and pathways to growth.

Empathy

We believe that empathy plays a key role in understanding and valuing others. When we are empathetic, we strive to recognize the real-life results of our work, are attuned to our shared humanity, and integrate the beliefs and experiences of others into our decision-making.

Integrity

We believe that integrity guides our actions and decision-making. When we are demonstrating integrity, we operate with transparency, accuracy, honesty, and humility. We trust ourselves and others to do the right thing, and we follow through on our commitments to ensure that there is a clear connection between our values, words, and actions.

Determination

We believe that higher education in Oregon and the U.S. is at an inflection point requiring significant change. A strong future demands our relentless determination to more effectively center the needs of learners and better address employers' needs. The complexity of this work does not excuse inaction. We will utilize our unique role as a statewide body to lean into this work and determine improvements needed in our approach and processes.

Goal 1, Relevance

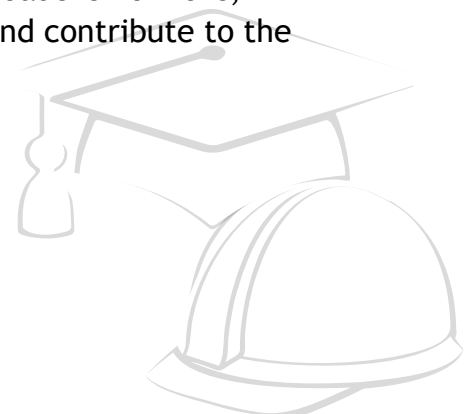
Improve the responsiveness of Oregon's education and training systems to the goals and needs of learners, employers, and communities.

Outcomes

- Increase learners' satisfaction with their educational and training experiences.
- Increase the percentage of residents who move from the lower to the higher end of the income distribution due to education and training.
- Increase employers' ability to hire qualified workers.
- Increase graduates' preparation for solving civic, economic, and social challenges.

Strategies

- **Foster Equitable Workforce Outcomes:** Prioritize programs and experiences that connect underserved learners with sustainable wages, in-demand careers, and equitable advancement opportunities.
- **Connect Postsecondary Education and Training to Workforce Needs:** Facilitate and streamline partnerships between employers and postsecondary education and training, prioritizing essential employability and in-demand technical skills.
- **Contribute to Solving Community Problems:** Increase the proportion of postsecondary learners who work to solve public problems and can collaborate across different perspectives and experiences.
- **Broaden Learners' Understanding of Their Possibilities, Opportunities, and Responsibilities:** Support postsecondary programming that broadens horizons, including by giving learners the opportunity to benefit from and contribute to the cultural, social, and economic vitality of their communities.



Goal 2, Alignment

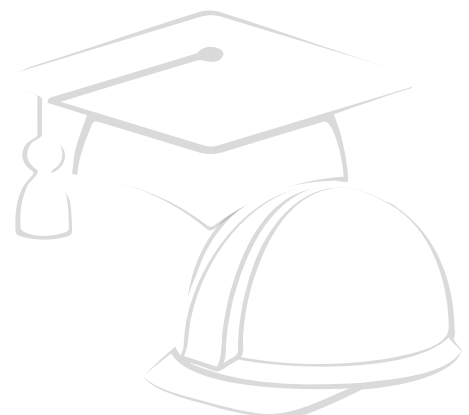
Align Oregon's education and training systems to create straightforward pathways for learners.

Outcomes

- Increase the percentage of recent high school students, people who have completed the GED®, and other adults entering postsecondary education and training.
- Increase the rate of credit transfer toward completion of degree or certification.
- Increase employment rates for individuals completing education and training.

Strategies

- **Support Transitions for High School Students, Those Completing the GED®, and Adults into Postsecondary Education and Training:** In collaboration with partners, establish a shared goal for postsecondary participation and implement practices, programs, and policies to achieve it.
- **Connect Learning Across the Education Continuum:** Partner with K-12 and postsecondary education and training providers to align standards in support of straightforward transitions, including simplified transfer pathways.
- **Strengthen Postsecondary to Employment Transitions:** Identify, encourage, and incentivize programs that support education to career transitions.



Goal 3, Affordable Access

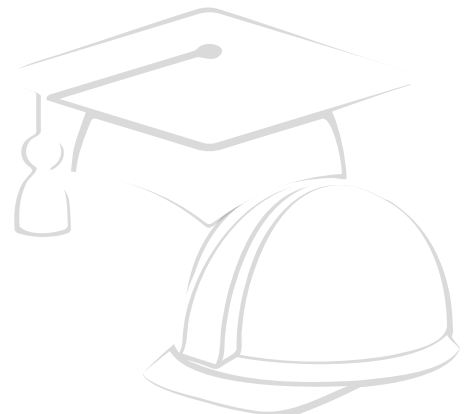
Make postsecondary education and training affordable for all Oregonians.

Outcomes

- Eliminate the unmet financial need of learners seeking postsecondary education and training.
- Close participation, retention, and completion gaps across income levels.

Strategies

- **Grow State Investment in Learners and Institutions:** By increasing financial aid for students and support for institutions, target state investments to ensure that low- and middle-income Oregon residents can afford postsecondary education and training.
- **Help Learners Meet Their Basic Needs:** Increase public investment and coordination of services such as advising, counseling, housing, dependent care, mental health, and food security.
- **Support Institutional Efficiency:** Provide incentives and support for public education and training institutions to lower costs and increase quality through innovative models such as shared services and collaborative program delivery.



Goal 4, Belonging

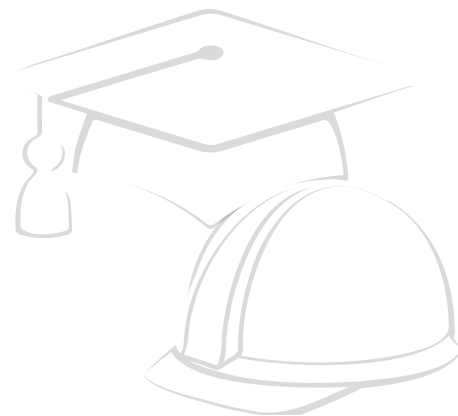
Elevate learner voices and support inclusivity and belonging in all postsecondary learning settings.

Outcomes

- Learner satisfaction is high across all demographic groups.
- Completion demographics match the state and/or region's demographics.

Strategies

- **Empower Students:** Gather and utilize student feedback at the institutional level and the HECC to understand and shape institutional and state policies and initiatives that support belonging.
- **Invest in Belonging:** Develop, promote, and fund models and programs that support student belonging and well-being, both in the classroom and throughout learning spaces.
- **Connect Learners to College and Career Pathways:** Build learners' awareness and connection through clearly communicated pathways and career opportunities that are linked to their interests.
- **Support Providers in Connecting Learners to Pathways:** Evaluate and promote best practices for postsecondary education and for training providers to design learner pathways and career opportunities that are culturally responsive.



Goal 5, Leadership

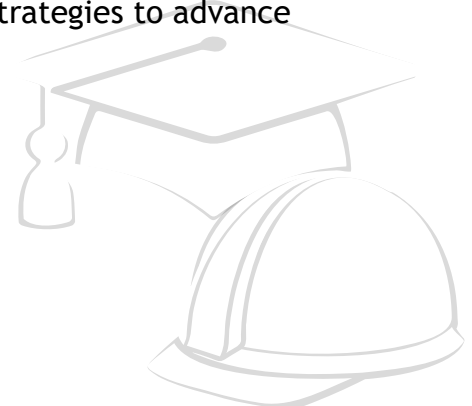
Infuse postsecondary education, workforce development, research, and innovation into Oregon's economic development strategies.

Outcomes

- Make postsecondary education and training a key driver in the State's economic development plans and strategies.
- Increase opportunities for diverse partners to share in the co-creation of workforce education and training strategies in response to statewide economic priorities.

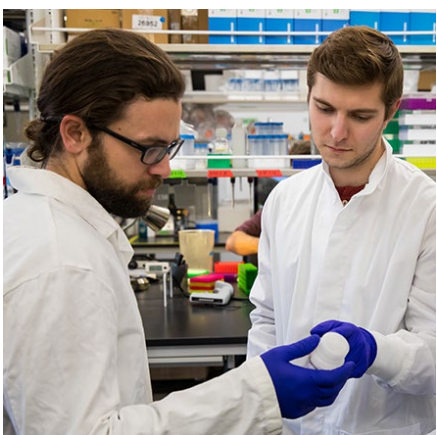
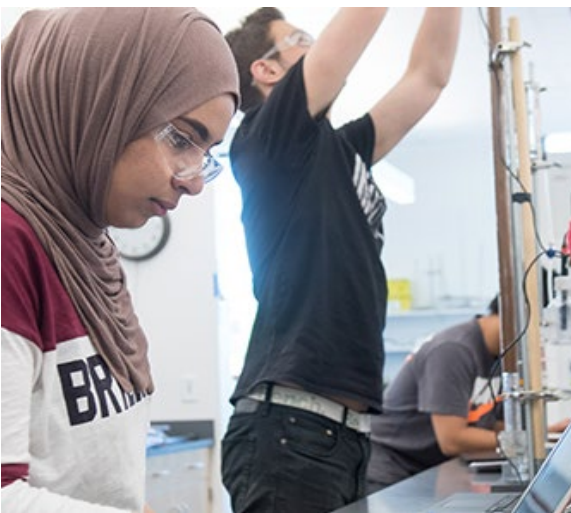
Strategies

- **Enhance Partnerships for Economic Development:** Partner with state, local, and private entities to ensure that economic development plans incorporate postsecondary education, research and innovation, and workforce development strategies.
- **Identify and Respond to Partner Needs:** Work with industry, education, labor, and community partners to identify barriers to equitable access and completion of postsecondary education and to inform recruitment, retention, and advancement strategies that are equitable and supportive of a diverse workforce.
- **Support Business Recruitment and Retention:** Collaborate with federal, state, and local economic development agencies to ensure postsecondary education and training are contributing to business recruitment and retention.
- **Quantify and Evaluate Postsecondary Education's Economic Development Impact:** Assess and influence the effectiveness of college/university strategies to advance economic development.



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