



Education
Strategy
Group

THE GREAT VALUE SHIFT

**A Roadmap
for Delivering
Value in
Postsecondary
Education**

APRIL 2025

ABOUT THE GREAT VALUE SHIFT

WE ARE EXPERIENCING A GREAT SHIFT IN HOW AMERICAN SOCIETY THINKS ABOUT THE VALUE OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

During the 20th century, Americans largely regarded postsecondary education as economically valuable, with a college degree seen as the ticket to the middle class. Twenty-five years into the new millennium, there are clear signals from multiple sectors that the status quo must change. Value in postsecondary education can no longer be assumed; it must be proved and actively pursued.

We believe embracing this shift can help address higher education's most significant challenges. Clarifying what postsecondary value is, and how to measure and improve it, will capture the attention of new audiences of learners, better preparing institutions for the anticipated demographic cliff that is straining their ability to grow enrollment. It will create space to more honestly probe and address the causes of escalating student debt and underemployment among graduates, turning the tide of public trust back toward high regard for higher education. And it will more closely align higher education to the demands of today's labor market, closing employer talent gaps while providing greater opportunities for graduates.

This future state is achievable, but minor adjustments are insufficient to realize it. What is needed now is a more comprehensive shift towards value: a Great Value Shift. This starts with **coalescing the goals** of multiple stakeholder groups into one coherent strategy and transparently monitoring progress toward that vision using **relevant, contextualized and action-oriented measures** of postsecondary value. But it does

not end there. Leaders at the state-level—governors, legislatures, coordinating and governing boards—and the institutional-level—both highly-selective and open-access—all have an opportunity to not only embrace this shift, but also **use the unique levers at their disposal** to deliver real value.

As this Great Value Shift gains momentum across the nation, leaders must recognize the level of transformation required to realize this vision. There are some promising current examples of strategies and actions already aligned with the Great Value Shift, but it will take combining proven practices with new ideas to reach the new dimension of outcomes that students desire.

The Great Value Shift requires time and capacity to reflect, design, and build goals that are unique to postsecondary education, understanding that models and examples will emerge, as they did during the higher education attainment agenda. In doing so, policymakers, leaders in postsecondary education, and students will benefit from metrics of value most salient to the unique nature of the regions and communities within each state. This mosaic of innovation, once established, will create the environment to bring forward a new dimension of excellence in higher education.

By committing to the Great Value Shift, state and institutional leaders can forge a new path forward for higher education—one that delivers on the promise of value.

AT EDUCATION STRATEGY GROUP, WE WANT TO SUPPORT LEADERS IN MAKING THIS SHIFT.

Building on our years of experience in the attainment and career pathways arenas, we have identified three key points of transformation that must occur in order for the field to improve postsecondary value. ESG has piloted or is actively piloting this approach in nearly 10 states to drive a more comprehensive strategy in which postsecondary value is at the center. We believe when done right, this approach can be a win-win-win for institutions, taxpayers, and students, positioning postsecondary education as a central driver of both economic mobility and economic growth. **We call on leaders in every state, regardless of their starting point, to commit to making these shifts, ultimately delivering on higher education's promise to improve lives and strengthen economies.**



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THE OPPORTUNITY

COMPOUNDING CHALLENGES CREATE URGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

The challenges facing higher education today are deeply interconnected, marked by changing demographics, declining consumer confidence, and evolving workforce demands. Each of these elements highlights the urgent need for higher education to reassess its value and adaptability in a rapidly shifting landscape.

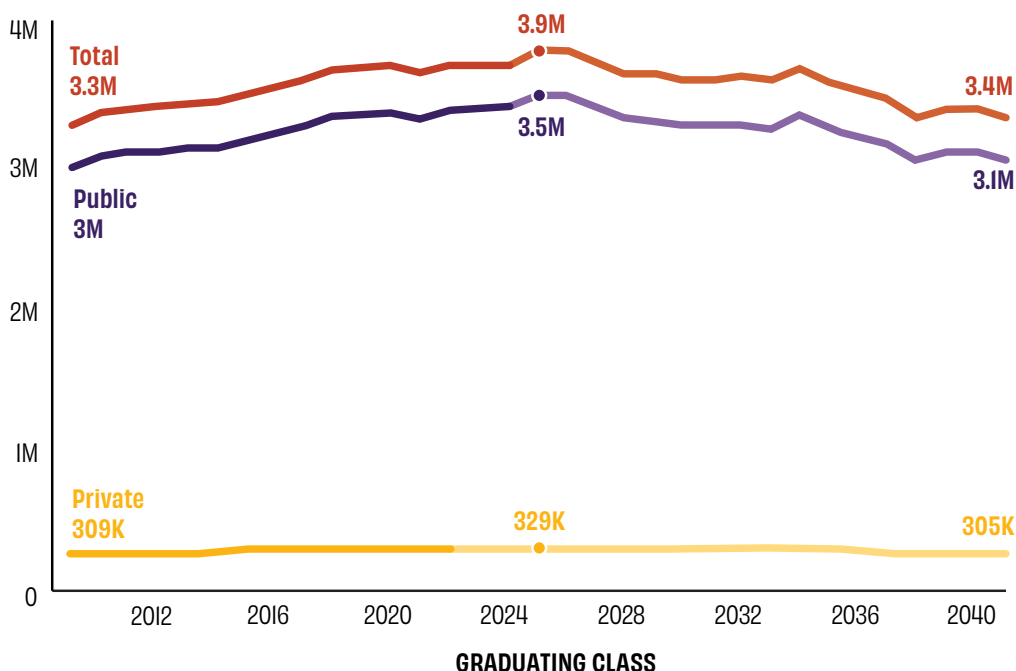
Fewer Students to Serve

The demographic profile of potential college students is undergoing significant changes, not only in terms of decreasing numbers but also in diversity. Often referred to as the “demographic cliff,” the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

projects the nation to experience a 13 percent decline in the total number of high school graduates between 2025 and 2041, attributable to fewer births 18 years prior. This trend has already led to the closure of numerous institutions; 14 nonprofit colleges closed in 2023, followed by at least 16 more in 2024. These closures underscore the vulnerability of the higher education sector to demographic shifts, emphasizing the need for institutions to broaden their appeal and adapt their offerings to attract and retain a new generation of learners, including adults, part-time students, and those requiring flexible learning options.

A Demographic Cliff

High School Graduates, Reported (2009 to 2023) and Projected (2024 to 2041)



Source: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

Waning Consumer Confidence

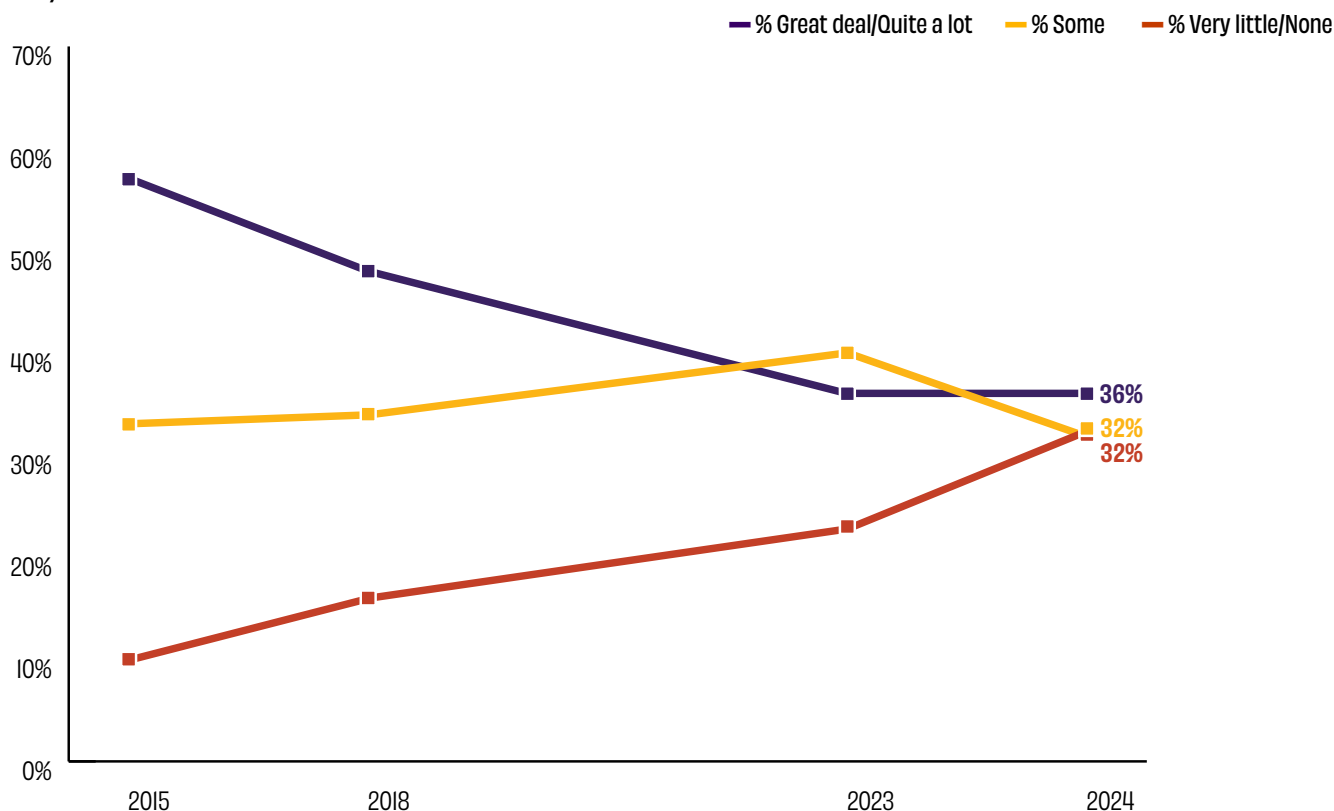
The value of higher education has been pushed into the spotlight as consumer confidence has waned, driven by a combination of escalating student debt and significant underemployment among graduates. The decline in public trust toward higher education is a critical barrier to increasing postsecondary attainment in the United States.

Over the past decade, the percentage of Americans expressing “little or no confidence” in higher education institutions has significantly increased. Concurrently, college enrollment has dropped by over 2.5 million students since its peak in 2010. These figures highlight a growing disillusionment that extends across diverse demographic and political lines, suggesting a pervasive issue that transcends economic fluctuations. As student loan debt

surpasses \$1.7 trillion, with the average borrower carrying over \$38,000, many question the economic return on their educational investments. This financial burden is compounded by the fact that nearly half of recent graduates are underemployed, working in jobs that do not require a degree. Such underemployment not only raises questions about the alignment between educational outcomes and labor market needs but also fuels skepticism about the efficacy of higher education in providing economic stability and growth for graduates. Moreover, while it is true that the average bachelor’s degree holder can expect to earn significantly more over a lifetime than a high school graduate, these statistics fail to resonate with a public that is increasingly skeptical about the immediate value and relevance of a college degree in the current economic landscape.

Confidence in U.S. Higher Education

Please tell me how much confidence you, yourself, have in higher education—a great deal, quite a lot, some or very little?



Source: Gallup

A Lack of Prepared Talent

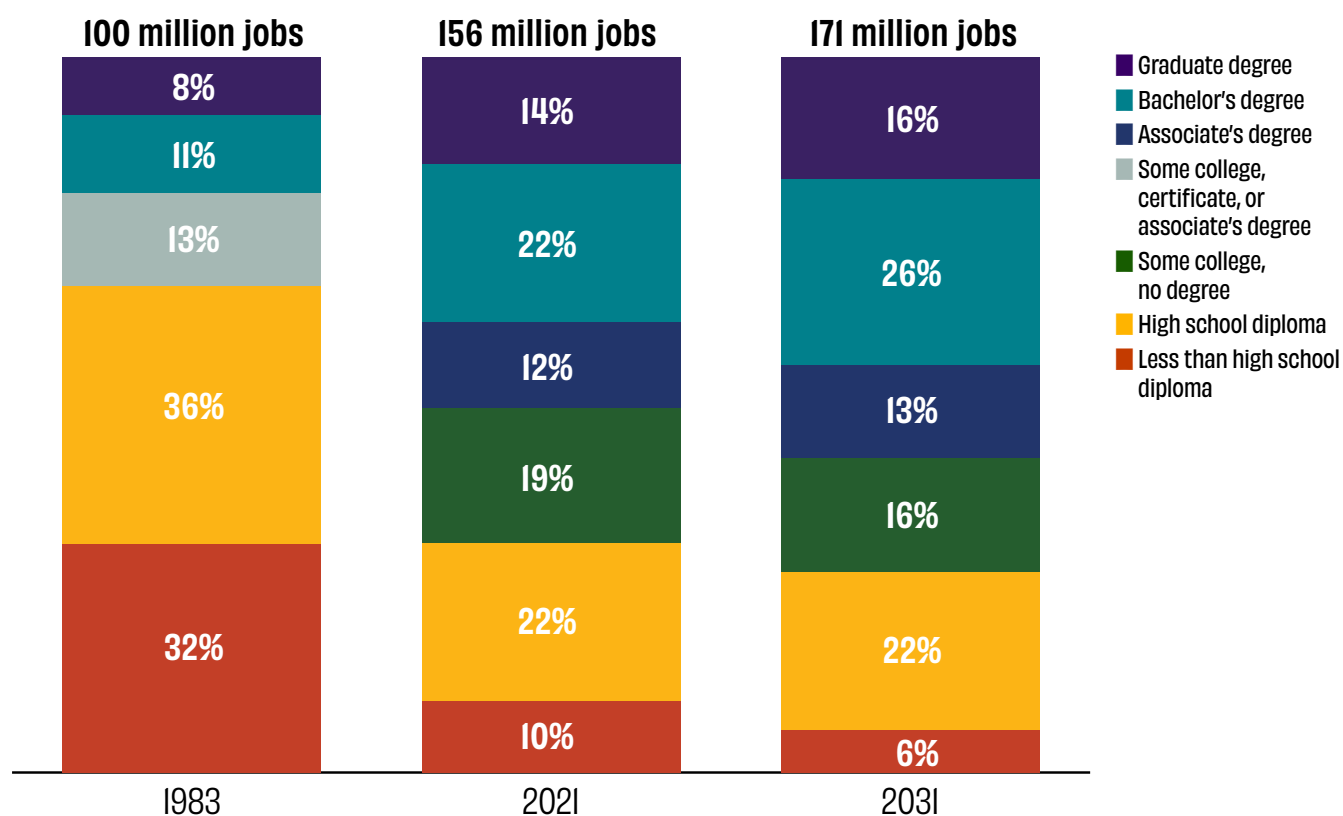
Success in today's workforce largely requires higher education, with projections from the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce estimating that 72 percent of jobs will need some form of postsecondary education by 2031. This underscores the essential role higher education plays in developing a capable workforce equipped to tackle the complexities of a global, technology-driven economy. However, the persistent concerns about the alignment of educational programs with real-world

job requirements highlight the necessity for curricular reforms to ensure that graduates possess the skills demanded by modern employers.

This critical juncture for higher education calls for a candid evaluation of how institutions and systems can respond effectively to these pressing challenges. While the problems are significant, they also offer a chance for higher education to reinvent itself, ensuring that it remains a vital pathway to personal and economic advancement in a changing world.

The Growing Importance of Higher Education

Forty-Two Percent of Jobs in 2031 Will Require at Least a Bachelor's Degree, While Only 28 Percent Will Go to Workers with a High School Diploma or Less



Source: [Georgetown University Center for Education and Workforce](#)

THE SOLUTION

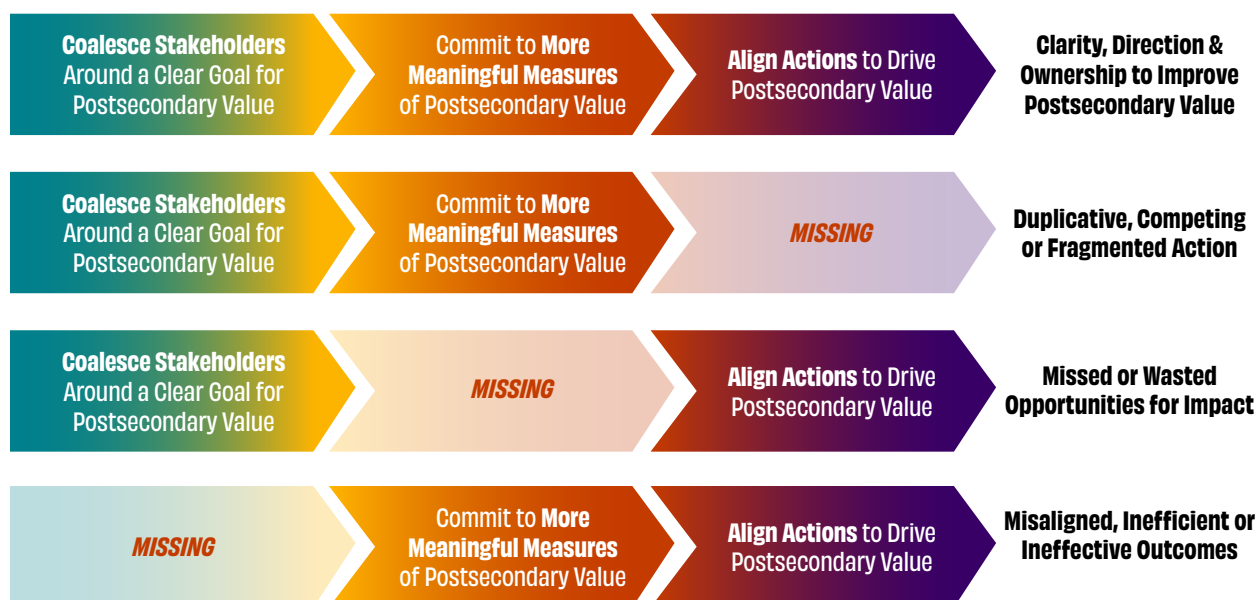
THREE SHIFTS TO MOVE TOWARD GREATER POSTSECONDARY VALUE

We can no longer assume that postsecondary education is inherently valuable. The field must come to grips with the need for a new approach—one that aligns strategy, measurement, and action—with the evolving needs of students, institutions, and states. **We must take a more comprehensive approach to measuring and delivering on postsecondary value to rebuild trust and confidence in American higher education.**

This more comprehensive approach can be broken down into three key shifts: **Coalesce stakeholders around a clear goal** for postsecondary value; commit to **more meaningful measures** of postsecondary value; and **align actions** to drive postsecondary value. Importantly, these shifts—while they do not have to be pursued at once—must all come together in order to achieve the desired future state for postsecondary value.

That is because, like any complex change, a missing element will lead to setbacks in progress. In ESG's work across the country, we've observed that states and communities without a clear vision for postsecondary value will inevitably result in misalignment or ineffectiveness in efforts to drive action. A failure to define ambitious measurements that are meaningfully contextualized will result in missed opportunities for impact. Finally, if that vision and those measures are not backed up with the right capacities, incentives, and resources, postsecondary leaders' actions will inevitably be duplicative, competing, or fragmented.

We believe that when put together, stakeholders will have the needed **clarity, direction, and ownership** to achieve a system of postsecondary education and training that delivers true value.



SHIFT #1: COALESCE STAKEHOLDERS

Around a Clear Goal for Postsecondary Value

The challenges higher education faces today are multifaceted and driven by multiple stakeholder groups. By the same token, “value” means different things to different groups. Making meaningful progress toward value requires coalescing around a clear, shared vision. Leaders need to ask themselves **what changes they are trying to make and for whom.**

To effectively address these challenges, leaders must understand, respond to, and create coherence across the needs of different stakeholders in crafting their goals for postsecondary value. In particular, they must incorporate the perspectives and priorities of three main audiences: **policymakers, institutions, and learners.** All three have an important stake—and should have a say—in how value is measured, interpreted, and acted upon.



For policymakers the primary concern is whether their investments of public funds in higher education are yielding tangible returns to increase tax revenue from increased wage gains, while also reducing the tax expenditures on social supports. They need to know if higher education is effectively fostering economic and social prosperity, including developing the talent necessary to build strong economies and communities.



For institutions the focus is on enrollment, outcomes for learners, and long-term success for the communities they serve. Colleges and universities are increasingly grappling with how to adapt to the realities of today’s learners: who they are, what they need, and how they engage with postsecondary education.



For learners the question is more personal: *Will this investment in education pay off for me?* Students need access to clear, reliable information about postsecondary value so they can make informed decisions about where to enroll, what to study, and how to navigate their paths to a thriving future.

While there are common drivers, the precise context, needs, and value-related objectives for each of

these groups can differ within and across different circumstances and will have implications for how value is measured and improved. For example, if the goal is to demonstrate value to policymakers, a postsecondary return on investment metric would be constructed to include some measurement of cost to taxpayers to operate postsecondary programs minus their contributions to the state economy in terms of jobs filled, increased tax base, etc. This metric construction is entirely different from a return on investment metric calculated to demonstrate value to an individual learner, which may instead include some estimate of tuition and fees minus wage earnings or other labor market return.

Likewise, objectives affect the types of actions taken and levers pulled by different stakeholders. If the goal for value improvement is to ensure value for the learner, the aligned action may actually be focused on transparently reporting value so that learners and those advising them can be empowered to make sound decisions. Separately, if the vision is to promote postsecondary value for the purposes of increasing enrollment in high-demand pathways, aligned action may instead leverage grant aid targeted at specific postsecondary programs.

The art of achieving this first fundamental shift is in identifying the goals for impact that address the unique concerns for each stakeholder group within a given state and packaging them into a clear and concise value goal or impact statement to drive measurement and action.

To get started on this work, postsecondary leaders can leverage the resources available to them to convene these relevant stakeholders to coalesce ideas and goals. The Texas example, explained further on the following page, was born out of a new commission established by the legislature with a specific purpose for action that the state then leveraged to establish a vision for postsecondary value across the state’s 50 public community colleges. However in the absence of legislative action, state postsecondary and institution leaders can leverage their own strategic planning cycles, cabinet meetings, or grant-based initiatives to align stakeholders toward a common goal for value.

Texas Coalesces Multiple Stakeholders to Set Goals and Drive Value

Texas' recent development of a new community college funding model illustrates how effective engagement of a range of stakeholders can result in a clear vision for value with buy-in from those who need to take action to achieve it. In 2021, Texas set the stage for transformative reform by establishing the Commission on Community College Finance, which was charged by the legislature to make recommendations to reimagine the nearly 50-year-old state funding formula. The desired outcomes for the final set of recommendations included establishing funding levels sufficient for sustaining viable community college education and training offerings throughout the state regardless of the institution's size, location, or mission. The Commission—made up of community college leaders, lawmakers, and nonprofit and business leaders—met over the interim of the biennial legislative session to review data, learn from national experts about best practices, and assess regional workforce needs. The final report from the Commission to the legislature informed the creation of House Bill 8 to overhaul community college finance in the state.

In partnership to create and support the legislation, the Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC), Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and other key stakeholders and policy coalitions ensured that the perspectives of the diverse mix of small and large community colleges were involved throughout the process. The resulting funding model moved from a static pool of money to a dynamic outcomes-based formula that put a premium on the completion of a credential of value. Importantly, this formula was designed such that institutions compete with their own student outcomes from the prior year, rather than with their peers' outcomes. This design, combined with a base tier of funding that supports colleges with smaller tax bases and lower enrollment, ensures all colleges have the resources and incentives to meaningfully deliver on value.

Learners are benefitting, too. By incorporating “credentials of value” through a minimum value threshold and high-demand field lists, the new formula incentivizes programs that lead to value for learners. Further, funding from House Bill 8 has been leveraged to support student success programming, financial aid programs, and increased transparency around degree paths and credentials of value.



SHIFT #2: Commit to MORE MEANINGFUL MEASURES of Postsecondary Value

After building consensus on a clear vision for postsecondary value, the first step toward realizing that vision is **committing to more meaningful measures**. Though there is a growing acknowledgment of the need to measure postsecondary value, the challenges and realities of measurement have slowed or complicated widespread progress in doing so. In the past decade, leading actors have created a variety of tools and frameworks to define and measure postsecondary value in an attempt to solve this puzzle.

Influential Developments in Postsecondary Value Measurements

- In 2015, College Scorecard was released, which was a significant national effort meant to help **students and parents** identify which schools provide the biggest bang for their buck. The Scorecard offers reliable data on factors important to prospective students, such as how much graduates earn, and how much debt they have when they graduate.
- In 2017, Opportunity Insights, led by Raj Chetty and researchers at Harvard University released their Mobility Report Cards. While the report cards were **institution-specific**, their recommendations focus on **states** and policymakers.
- In 2019, Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce launched an analysis on its website, ranking **4,500 colleges and universities** by their return on investment using expanded data from the College Scorecard, revealing long-term financial outcomes for different types of postsecondary institutions.
- In 2021, the Postsecondary Value Commission, led by the Institute for Higher Education Policy, released their framework for postsecondary value. They spoke to both **individual** and **societal** value, using a variety of economic and non-economic measures. Their measurement framework includes six different metrics, each of which is defined by a distinct value threshold, that measure how and how much students are better off because of their education.
- In 2022, Third Way released their Economic Mobility Index, which used a price to earnings premium calculation to rank **institutions** of higher education. This index was preceded by a 2020 report on measuring return on investment in higher education.
- In 2024, Strada Education Foundation released their State Opportunity Index, which, among other things, focused on the share of public college graduates achieving a positive return on investment, assessed at the **state level**. Uniquely, their return on investment metric analyzes individual, rather than median earnings, to capture *how many* graduates achieve a positive ROI instead of whether the median student does.
- In 2025, Lumina Foundation announced a new goal: By 2040, 75 percent of adults in the U.S. labor force will have college degrees or other credentials of value leading to economic prosperity. Their goal for the nation, which, historically, has been adopted by **state** leaders, defines a credential of value as college degrees, certificates, or industry certifications that lead to at least 15 percent more than the national average for adults with only high school diplomas.
- (Forthcoming) In 2025, the American Council on Education and the Carnegie Foundation on the Advancement of Teaching partnered to develop a new Student Access and Earnings Classification for institutions. The new classifications are driven by the extent to which institutions deliver economic mobility to students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Though each of these efforts features different metrics and methodologies aimed at a range of purposes and stakeholder perspectives, there is a clear convergence around value among national leaders. Each approach has strengths and leaves key decisions to states. **What's missing is a coherent**

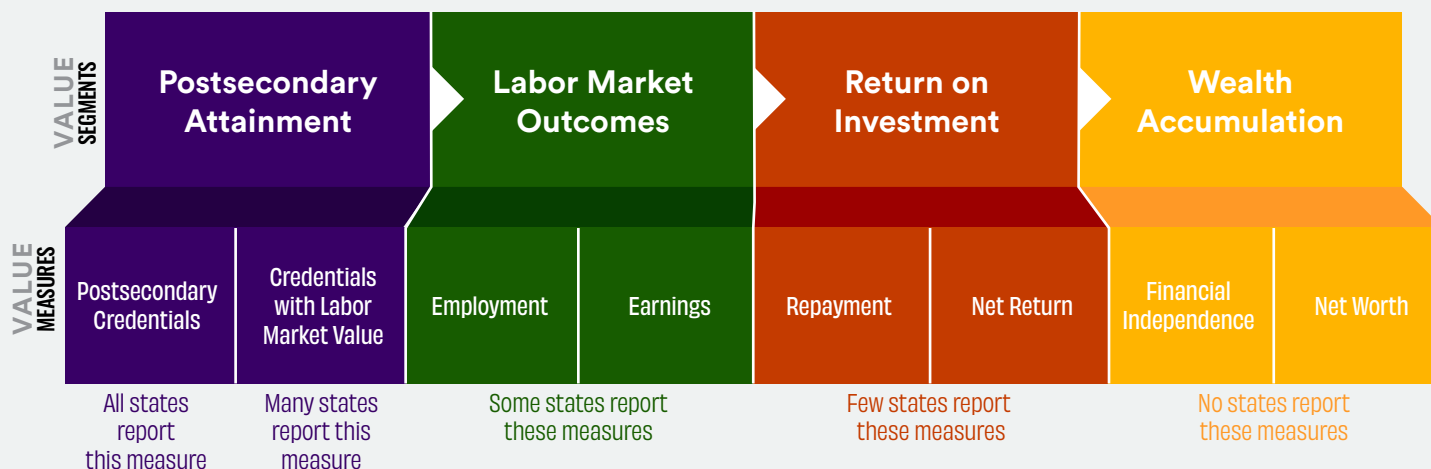
overarching frame to compare these conceptions to one another and help all stakeholders visualize where they are now—and where they want to be—in delivering economic value and driving economic mobility through postsecondary education.

ESG developed the Postsecondary Value Continuum to build on the value-focused work of the past decade and bring it together into a coherent framework to guide state decision making and action.

States and systems can use this tool to align on common language, assess current practices, and augment value measurement systems to meet the needs and advance the interests of students, policymakers and institutions themselves.

The Continuum has four main segments: **postsecondary attainment, labor market outcomes, return on investment, and wealth accumulation.** These segments are sequential, tracking a student's journey from college to long-term economic security and mobility. Within each segment, "value" can be quantified using different high-level measures.

POSTSECONDARY VALUE CONTINUUM



Postsecondary Attainment

Labor Market Outcomes

Return on Investment

Wealth Accumulation

Most state measurement systems currently focus on the first segment of the Continuum. All states measure credential attainment, which captures the number of students who earn any kind of college degree or credential. Some states go further, using labor market data to track and prioritize the specific credentials that are most in demand among employers. *Any* measure in this segment of the Continuum is more ambitious than “full-time equivalency,” e.g., college enrollment, which in prior decades formed the foundation of most higher education measurement systems. The shift from focusing on enrollment to focusing on attainment was

an important one in that it changed the conception of success from merely getting students in the door to helping them complete or graduate.

However, the field needs to go further than measures of attainment, which reflect assumptions about how credentials *should* provide economic value, to capture the extent to which they actually *do* provide such value after students graduate. Attainment matters; but a singular focus on attainment reveals nothing about whether the credentials that students obtain actually help them secure good jobs and achieve economic mobility.

HAWAII’S PUBLIC CLASSIFICATIONS OF CREDENTIALS

Through a process of intensive labor market analysis and outreach to local Hawai‘i businesses, Promising Credentials in Hawai‘i, a collaboration between Chamber of Commerce Hawai‘i, Harold K.L. Castle Foundation, Hawai‘i P-20 Partnerships for Education, and Kamehameha Schools, identified a tiered list of 137 credentials that are needed for high-demand, living wage occupations in the state. Credentials are listed in four categories (foundational, springboard, door opener, and advanced) based on the education level commonly associated with the occupations requesting or requiring that credential. The intent behind Hawai‘i’s list is to provide consumers with direction about which specific credentials are needed to land specific jobs that are in demand in the state, along with the salary range that they can expect to earn in those positions.

Hawaii’s Tiered Credential List: Promising Credentials, Total Occupations, and Job Postings

FOUNDATIONAL CREDENTIALS

Cross-cutting knowledge and skills: These credentials prepare learners with essential knowledge and skills for a range of priority occupations across industries and are often coupled with other credentials.

SPRINGBOARD CREDENTIALS

Jobs requiring a high school diploma: These credentials signal proficiency in industry-specific skills for priority occupations that do not require a postsecondary certificate or degree.

DOOR OPENER CREDENTIALS

Jobs requiring certificates or associate degrees: These credentials signal proficiency in industry-specific skills for priority occupations that require some post-secondary education, including certificates and associate degrees.

ADVANCED CREDENTIALS

Jobs requiring a bachelor’s degree: These credentials signal proficiency in industry-specific skills for priority occupations that may also require a bachelor’s degree

While postsecondary attainment data is important, understanding value requires understanding how students fare in the labor market once they have earned those credentials. Labor market outcomes—which primarily include measures of employment and earnings—capture students’ actual economic returns after they leave postsecondary education. This is one way that states, institutions, and students can begin to understand the potential impact that postsecondary education is having on students’ economic status. It can provide policymakers with a window into how well particular institutions are serving their students and institutions as well as a

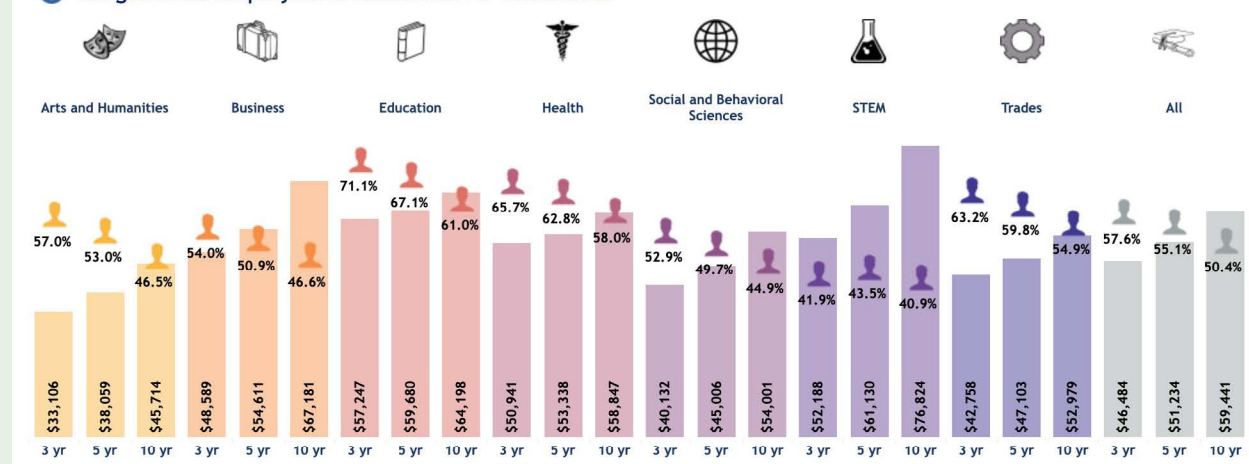
sense of their programs’ alignment with local labor market demand. When labor market information is tied to particular programs, majors, or credentials, it can empower students to make more informed choices about where to enroll and what to pursue. Over half of states have leveraged improvements in longitudinal data systems to capture and evaluate labor market outcomes of college graduates. However, these data are less commonly used to guide state policy decisions on how incentives and resources are used to improve outcomes or inform campus-level decisions on curriculum or advising reform.

KENTUCKY’S INVESTMENT IN DATA INFRASTRUCTURE AND AGENCY COLLABORATION



In an effort to build broader public understanding of the labor market outcomes associated with particular fields of study, Kentucky’s KYSTATS Postsecondary Feedback Report reports on the median wages (bars) and percent employed in Kentucky (people) three, five, and ten years after graduation for each major.

Longitudinal Employment Outcomes for Graduates



Postsecondary Attainment

Labor Market Outcomes

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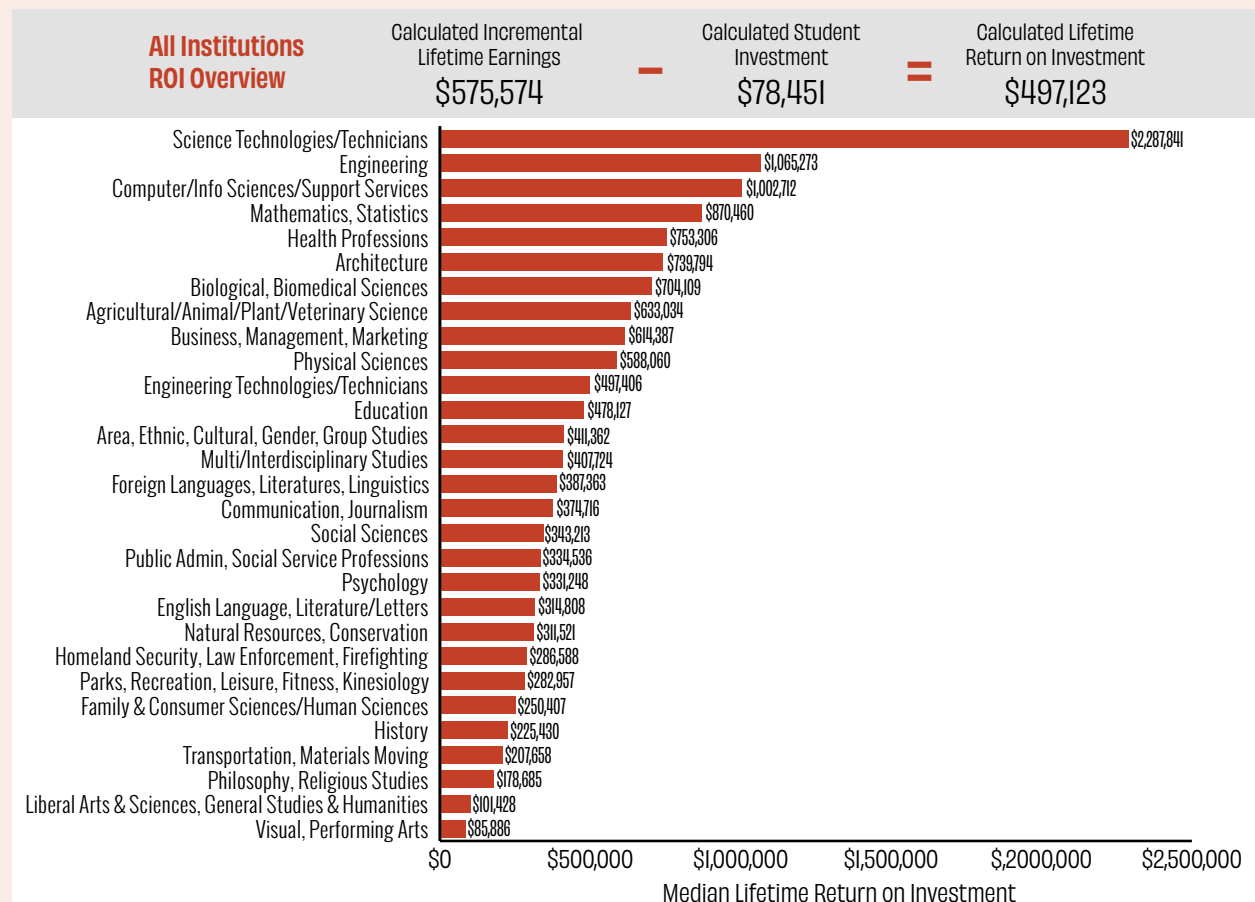
Good information about employment status and wages is useful, but paints an incomplete picture of a student's economic status following their engagement with higher education. Like Labor Market Outcomes, the next segment on the continuum incorporates students' actual economic returns following postsecondary education, but includes a critical additional element: cost. Measures of Return on Investment (ROI) incorporate data on both wages and the cost of earning the credentials needed to produce those wages. There are two main types of ROI measures. Repayment-based measures capture *how long* it takes for wage gains to "pay off" a student's educational investment. Net return-based measures capture *by how much* long-term wage gains exceed that investment.

These measures provide a more nuanced view of the costs and benefits of higher education. For students, ROI information can be helpful in presenting a more complete picture of their enrollment choices in terms of time, cost, *and* return. Importantly, it also creates space for more informed policy discussion about how to balance investments and outcomes. That is, by factoring in both cost and return, a vision centered on ROI encourages a more expansive set of policy and practice actions, ranging from incentivizing education and training that leads to high returns to lowering costs in programs that struggle to meet a certain return threshold. Each can serve to balance the ROI of postsecondary education and training.

SYSTEM AND INSTITUTIONAL TRANSPARENCY IN NORTH CAROLINA



The University of North Carolina System developed a comprehensive analysis of return on investment through three key lenses: undergraduate student ROI by program, graduate student ROI by program, and state ROI. The figure below is taken from their Undergraduate Student ROI Dashboard.



Postsecondary Attainment

Labor Market Outcomes

Return on Investment

Wealth Accumulation

In some ways, this final segment of the Continuum represents the ultimate “economic mobility” benchmark for public education. Wealth—not just income—influences long-term physical health and life satisfaction, and college plays a pivotal role in the creation of wealth across generations. Of all continuum segments, it is also least within colleges’ locus of control. Measures of wealth accumulation incorporate an individual’s overall assets and liabilities, including but not limited to assets generated through individual earnings and debts incurred through educational investment.

Major types of measures in this segment include net worth and financial independence. These measures, while more difficult to quantify than others on the continuum, capture the longest-term and biggest-picture potential impact of higher education on both individuals and broader society. Given limitations of our current measurement systems and the complexities involved, it remains an aspirational goal that few states will likely be able to comprehensively address in the period ahead.

Economic Measures of Value: One Part of a Larger Whole

Higher education, and why people pursue it, has never just been about economic outcomes; it is also about fostering critical thinking, becoming informed and contributing members of society, expanding minds and social networks, and preparing individuals to navigate an ever-changing world. While economic outcomes more readily lend themselves to quantification, we acknowledge that focusing on these measures alone tells just one part of postsecondary education’s value story.

Perhaps more importantly, in advocating for a stronger focus on economic measures, we do not suggest the future of postsecondary learning be reduced to technical skills training or direct job placement. A one-size-fits-all pipeline from degree to job is neither realistic nor desirable, and it would ignore the enduring value the liberal arts and interdisciplinary learning have in a fast-paced, dynamic economy. Rather, at the heart of the Great Value Shift is a notion everyone should agree to: every student should leave higher education better off than when they entered. Whether in intellectual, personal, or financial terms, education should be an investment that enriches lives, not a burden that diminishes opportunities.

SHIFT #3: ALIGN ACTIONS TO DRIVE POSTSECONDARY VALUE

Everyone has a role to play in achieving the Great Value Shift. Whether by reinvesting or investing new resources, creating more incentives to drive actions that work, or supporting strategy and capacity-building at the institutional level, there is much to be learned from the field about how postsecondary value is achieved.

While promising practices are still emerging, it is clear that all stakeholders will have to contribute to

create the conditions necessary for the flexibility and innovation needed from the postsecondary education and training ecosystem at this moment. To successfully transition toward a more value-focused approach in postsecondary education, key leaders—including governors, state legislatures, state higher education systems, and institutions of all kinds—must align and use the tools at their disposal to drive change.

STATE LEADERS <i>Including Governors, Legislators, Coordinating Boards, and Governing Boards</i> State leaders have significant power to prioritize value and to establish the conditions necessary for effective measurement, reporting, and action.	
Transparency & Public Reporting	State leaders can establish a new set of value metrics and publicly report on outcomes across all higher education institutions in the state. By prioritizing measurement and defining success in terms of value delivery, states can set the conditions for greater transparency, trust, and empowered consumer decision making.
Funding Formulas	One of the primary means through which state leaders can influence value is the development of funding formulas that incentivize it. This could include the use of weights for successful student completions of credentials that help close talent gaps and are proven to yield strong economic returns.
Program Approval Processes	Program approval is an important but often underutilized lever to drive postsecondary value. State leaders can strategically leverage academic planning processes to align academic offerings with state and regional workforce demands, emphasizing both the development of new programs <i>and</i> the growth of existing programs aligned with workforce needs. Importantly, it is possible to orient these processes around improvement rather than program closure.
Special Purpose Funding and Grant Aid	States, but especially governors and legislators, are uniquely positioned to expand postsecondary value by making special funding (including grant aid) available to drive attainment in critical fields and for key populations. For instance, in recent years, several states have provided free or reduced tuition for “reconnect” programs that encourage people over the age of 25 to reskill or upskill to meet critical talent needs.

INSTITUTIONAL LEADERS

Including Selective, Comprehensive, and Open Access Institutions

Through their direct engagement with students and their integral role within communities, institutions have a distinct and highly impactful set of levers at their disposal to influence and prioritize value.

Strategic Planning	Institutional strategic plans are a primary vehicle for delivering on state goals. Most institutional strategic plans address the need to deliver value to students and the communities they serve, but fall short of articulating the metrics that define value. As states begin to establish metrics and goals centered on value, institutions can in turn respond by developing new strategic plans to align the resources, policies, and actions necessary to achieve greater outcomes for students.
Academic Planning	Institutions can directly influence value by setting clear academic goals to drive stronger post-completion outcomes through their programmatic offerings. This may include better leveraging labor market information to inform program planning decisions, academic restructuring to ensure early exposure to foundational skill-building courses or certificates within a major, or revamping institution-wide learning outcomes and competencies to align with the skills employers demand. Ultimately, institutions can leverage academic planning to ensure that their programs deliver the knowledge and skills students will need to succeed in a high-value career.
Career Advising	In addition to academics, the advising that institutions provide their students plays a critical role in the delivery of value. Value-driven advising strategies could include the development of comprehensive student success plans tied to post-graduation outcomes, including career assessments, individualized academic roadmaps, personalized support services, and financial plans to facilitate credential completion.
Work-Based Learning	Institutions can also deliver value by prioritizing work-based learning opportunities, such as internships, apprenticeships, micro-internships, and experiential/project-based learning, as a core component of what they offer to students. By directly bridging the learning and working worlds, students can get a jump start on their careers, build their networks and social capital, and make smoother transitions into the workforce.

A CALL TO ACTION

OUR VALUE-FOCUSED FUTURE

Imagine a system where every investment in higher education delivers clear, measurable returns. A modern measurement system can transform higher education by addressing the distinct priorities for key stakeholders. By tailoring how value is defined and measured, we can ensure that every investment delivers tangible benefits across the board.

We call upon leaders in every state to commit to making the Great Value Shift, turning higher education's promise to improve lives and strengthen economies into a reality. The benefits of this shift are sweeping and widespread:



For Policymakers: Responsible Investment and Economic Growth

When state leaders and taxpayers invest in higher education that delivers measurable returns, public funds are used more efficiently. This approach cultivates a well-prepared workforce, strengthens the employer talent pipeline and fosters economic growth through a more skilled, civically engaged citizenry.



For Institutions: Enrollment, Funding, and Community Impact

A value-focused system enables institutions to attract more students and secure increased funding while enhancing their community impact. By clearly demonstrating program effectiveness, colleges and universities reinforce their role as leaders in delivering accessible, high-value education.



For Learners and Employers: Clarity, Confidence, and Return on Investment

Transparent, reliable data empowers students to select programs that offer the best career fit and economic return. In turn, employers benefit from a workforce whose skills align with market demands, resulting in higher satisfaction, improved economic outcomes, and a stronger return on investment for all.