



Maryland's Moment: Lighting the Way Forward

2026-2030 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education

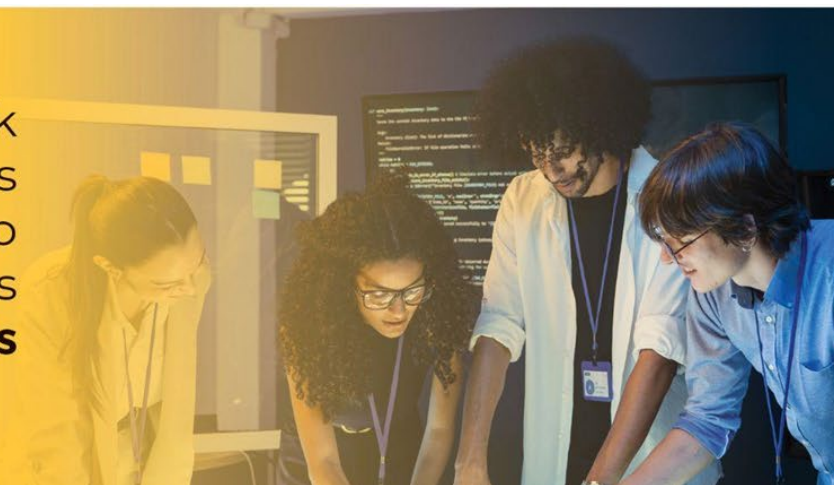
Commission Meeting| June 2026

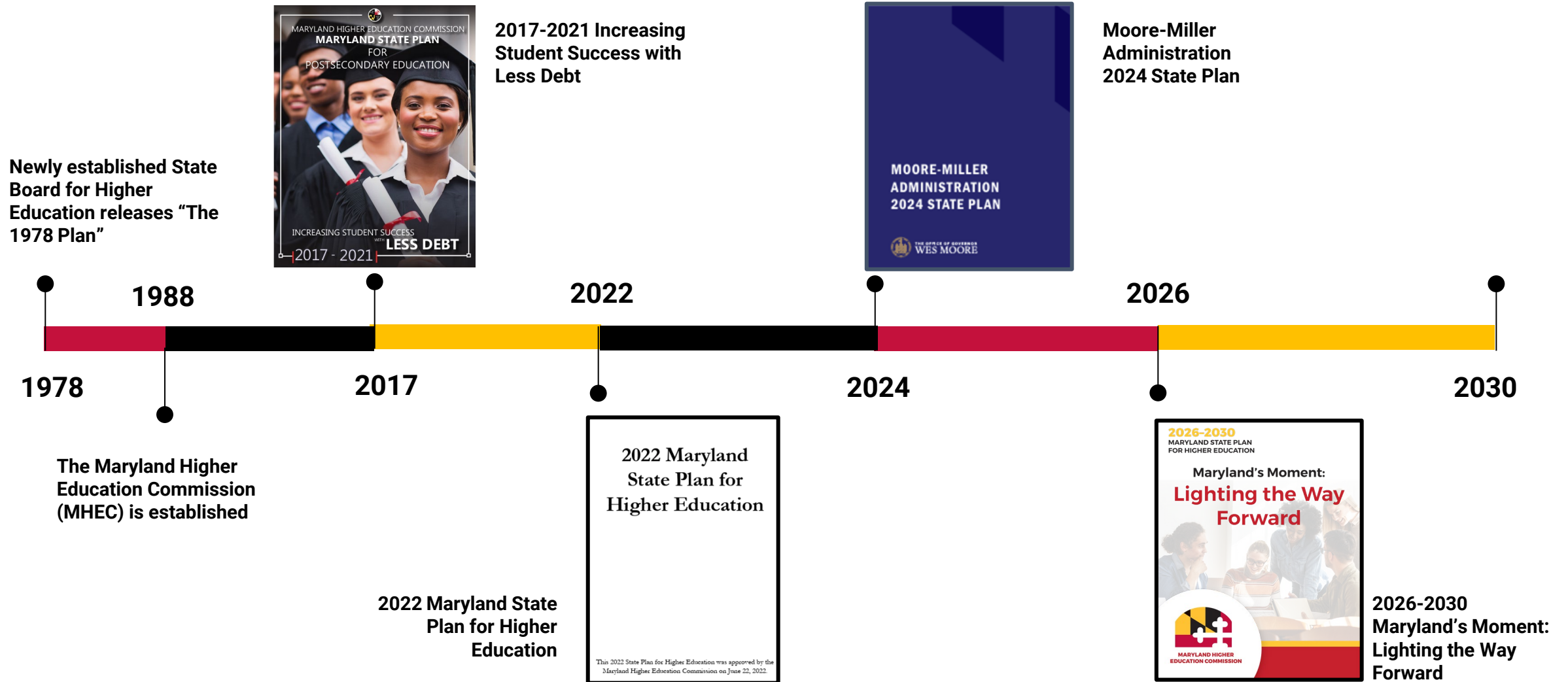
The Vision

Maryland will design an affordable, contemporary postsecondary education system that equips every Marylander to thrive in a dynamic economy and a pluralistic democratic republic, ensures the completion of meaningful credentials and degrees for all learners, and drives innovation that strengthens the state's long-term competitiveness and civic well-being.



A lighthouse does not merely mark the destination; it actively guides vessels and charts the course to reach it. This Plan can serve as that **guiding light for Maryland's postsecondary system.**





Steering Committee Composition

Higher Education Leadership

Representation from across the postsecondary education ecosystem for higher ed leadership, including students and alumni.

State Agencies

Representatives from key state agencies driving alignment between education, workforce, and public policy.

Workforce & Labor Partners

Key stakeholders like the Chamber of Commerce and MD Tech Council aligning education directly with the evolving needs of the state economy.

Civic Leaders

Voices from community based organizations working directly with our postsecondary learners and philanthropic foundations.

2026-2030 State Plan: Guiding Principles for Design

Serve Every Learner.

We believe in a student-ready system that adapts to learners' goals and circumstances. We will ensure flexibility, affordability, and transparency to expand access, foster belonging, and support completion across all pathways. We will provide pathways that respond to diverse needs and life circumstances, ensuring every learner at every stage has the opportunity to succeed.

1

Advance Public Impact and Value.

We believe every postsecondary credential and degree should be an upward catalyst for learners and the state. We will strengthen civic participation, cultural life, and economic vitality while preparing Marylanders for meaningful work and contribution to the common good.

2

Champion Collaboration and Innovation.

We believe Maryland's progress depends on partnership. We will foster collaboration across education, workforce, government, and community partners to drive innovation, align resources, and address emerging challenges. We will build an adaptive and cohesive postsecondary education system that serves Marylanders now and in the future.

3

Guiding Principles Lead to an Evolution of State Goals

2022 Plan Goals

- 1 Student Access**
Ensure equitable access to affordable and high-quality postsecondary education for all Maryland residents.
- 2 Student Success**
Promote and implement practices and policies that will ensure student success.
- 3 Innovation**
Foster innovation in all aspects of Maryland higher education to improve access and student success.

2026-2030 Plan Goals

- 1 Increase Postsecondary Attainment For Lifelong Success**
- 2 Advance Social & Economic Mobility Through Postsecondary Education**
- 3 Mobilize Innovation & Research As a State Asset for Competitiveness**

2026-2030 Plan Goals: A Closer Look

MARYLAND'S MOMENT

LIGHTING THE WAY FORWARD

A lighthouse marks a clear destination on the horizon. This Plan includes three goals to establish that destination for Maryland's system of higher education. Together, the goals articulate what the state seeks to achieve for its learners, communities, and economy, translating vision into measurable outcomes and a common direction for action.

Goals



- 1. Increase Postsecondary Attainment for Lifelong Success:** Ensure that more Marylanders earn postsecondary credentials and degrees that open doors to economic mobility, civic participation, and opportunities for continuous learning throughout life.



- 2. Advance Social and Economic Mobility through Postsecondary Education:** Create the conditions for Maryland's colleges, universities, and career schools to actively drive post-completion success, ensuring that every postsecondary credential and degree serves as a direct catalyst for upward social and economic mobility.



- 3. Mobilize Postsecondary Innovation and Research as a State Asset for Competitiveness and Public Good:** Integrate Maryland's postsecondary ecosystem into a unified, whole-of-government strategy to drive discovery and talent development in the state's lighthouse and priority sectors, while generating cross-agency solutions that enhance civic vitality and solve public challenges.

GOAL 1: Attainment and Completion

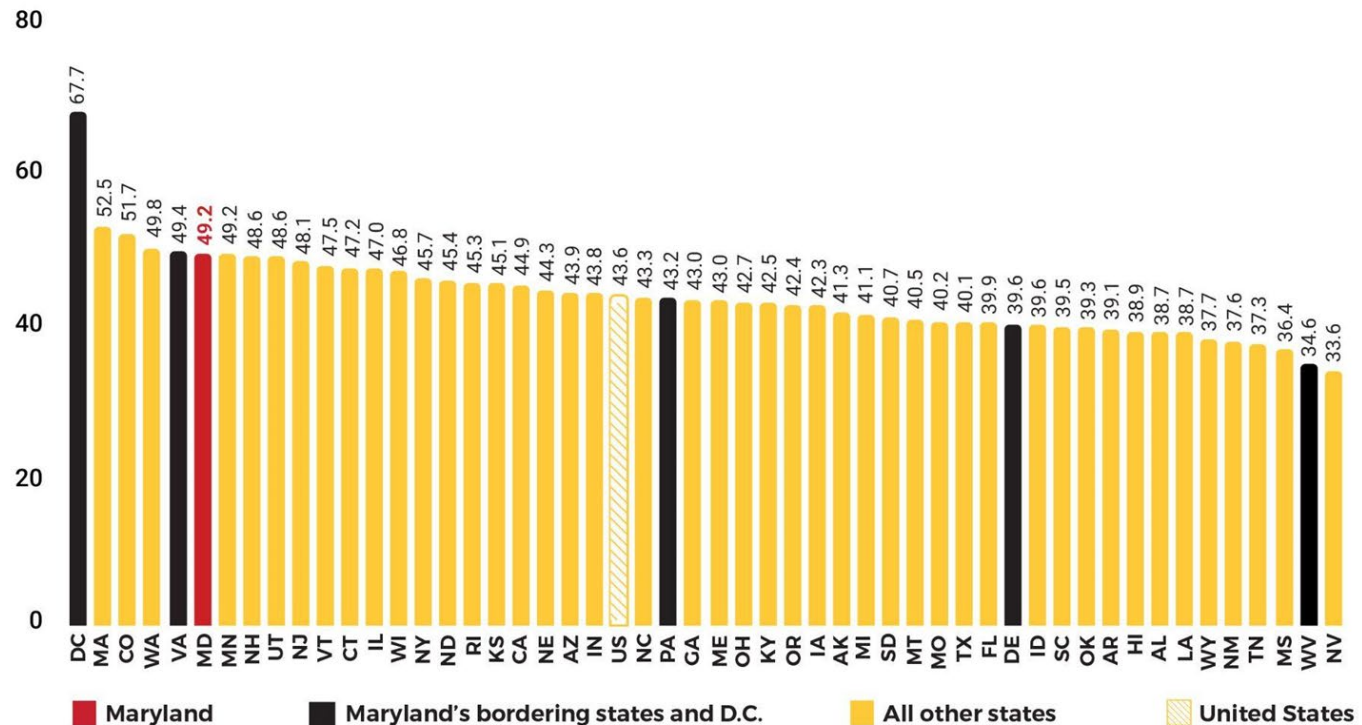
Increase Postsecondary Attainment for Lifelong Success

Ensure that more Marylanders earn affordable credentials and degrees that open doors to economic mobility, civic participation, and opportunities for continuous learning throughout life.

Maryland is a **Top Five State** for percent of adults in the labor force who hold a post-high school credential or degree **and** earn at least 15% more than the median wage for individuals with a high school diploma alone.



Figure 1: 2024 Population Ages 25-64 in Labor Force with Post-High School Credential and Earning Above 15% Benchmark



Data Note: Measured as the share of the labor force with a post-high school degree, certification, or certificate and are making at least 15% more than the national median annual salary of a high school graduate.

Source: Lumina Foundation. Stronger Nation 2024 United States Report.



TARGET: By 2040, 75 percent of Maryland adults in the labor force will hold a postsecondary credential or degree and earn at least 15 percent more than the median wage for individuals with only a high school diploma. This vision for the future can provide a foundation for meaningful partnership and progress across all goals

Potential Performance Indicators:

- ★ Access
- ★ Momentum, Retention, and Progression
- ★ Completion
- ★ Degrees Earned
- ★ Attainment
- ★ Attainment and Mobility Outcomes
- ★ In-State Graduate Attachment

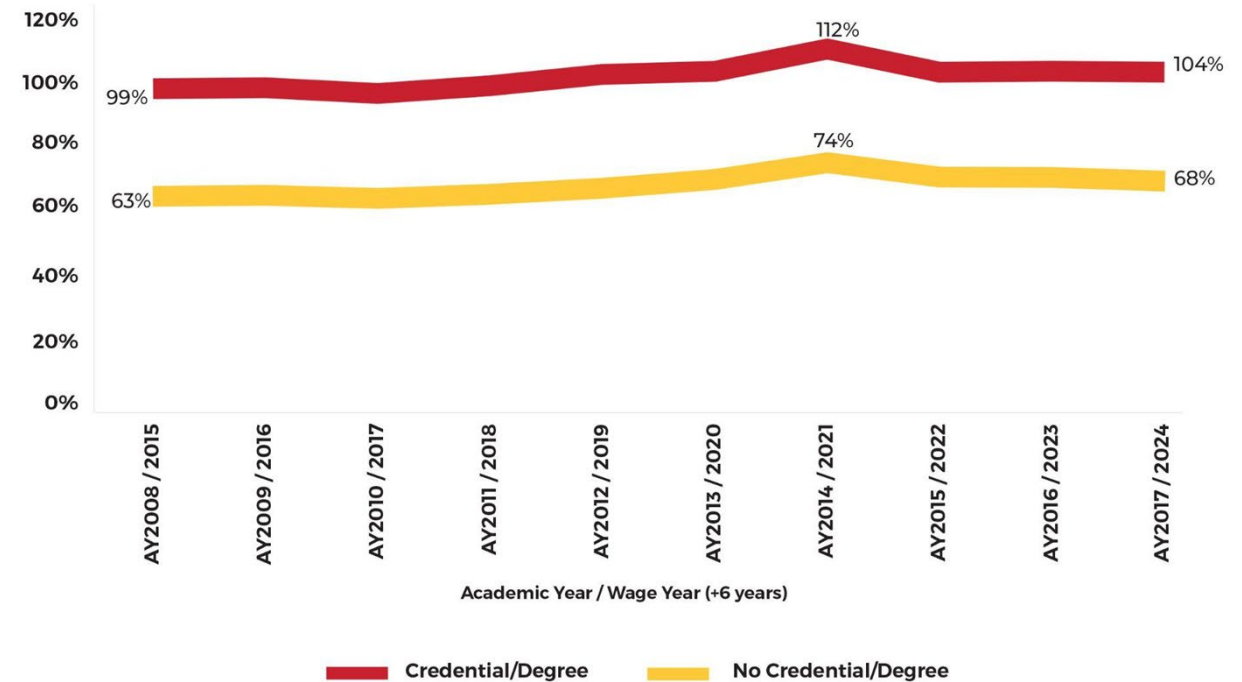
GOAL 2: Social and Economic Mobility

Advance Social and Economic Mobility through Postsecondary Education

Create the conditions for Maryland's colleges, universities, and career schools to actively drive post-completion success, ensuring that every postsecondary credential and degree serves as a direct catalyst for upward social and economic mobility.

Maryland's credential and degree holders consistently **earn at or above the living wage.**

Figure 2: Earnings of Maryland High School Graduates Six Years After Graduation as Percent of Living Wage



Data Note: Credentials and degrees in this figure are defined as a postsecondary certificate, associate, bachelor's or master's degree or higher. The first year on the x-axis refers to the academic year of graduation. The second year on the x-axis refers to the year of wage observation—six years after graduation. The y-axis denotes wages as a percent of the Maryland living wage for the observation year.

Source: MLDS Center. (December 2025). Maryland Public High School Graduates: College and Workforce Outcomes, Median Quarterly Wage Trends. Baltimore, MD: Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center.



TARGET: Maryland will lead the nation in providing affordable postsecondary credentials and degrees that offer economic and community benefit to students and the state.

Potential Performance Indicators:

- ★ Career-Connected Experiential Learning
- ★ Lighthouse Credential and Degree Awards
- ★ Labor Market Participation
- ★ Labor Market Earnings
- ★ Return on Investment
- ★ Economic and Social Mobility

GOAL 3: Innovation & Research

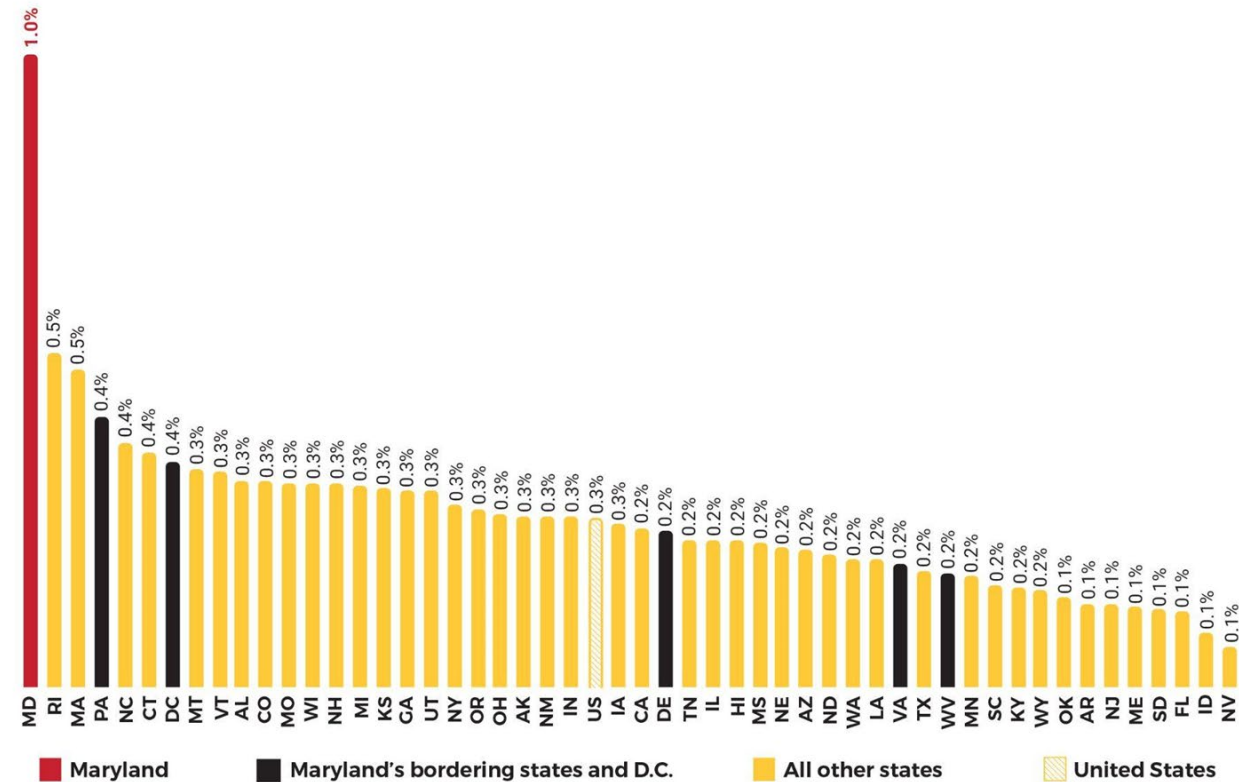
Mobilize Postsecondary Research and Innovation as a State Asset for Competitiveness and Public Good

Integrate Maryland's postsecondary ecosystem into a unified, whole-of-government strategy to drive discovery and talent development in the state's lighthouse and priority sectors, while generating cross-agency solutions that enhance civic vitality and solve public challenges.

Maryland **leads the nation** in academic research and development funding as a percent of GDP.



Figure 3: Externally Funded Academic Research and Development (R&D) as Percent of State GDP



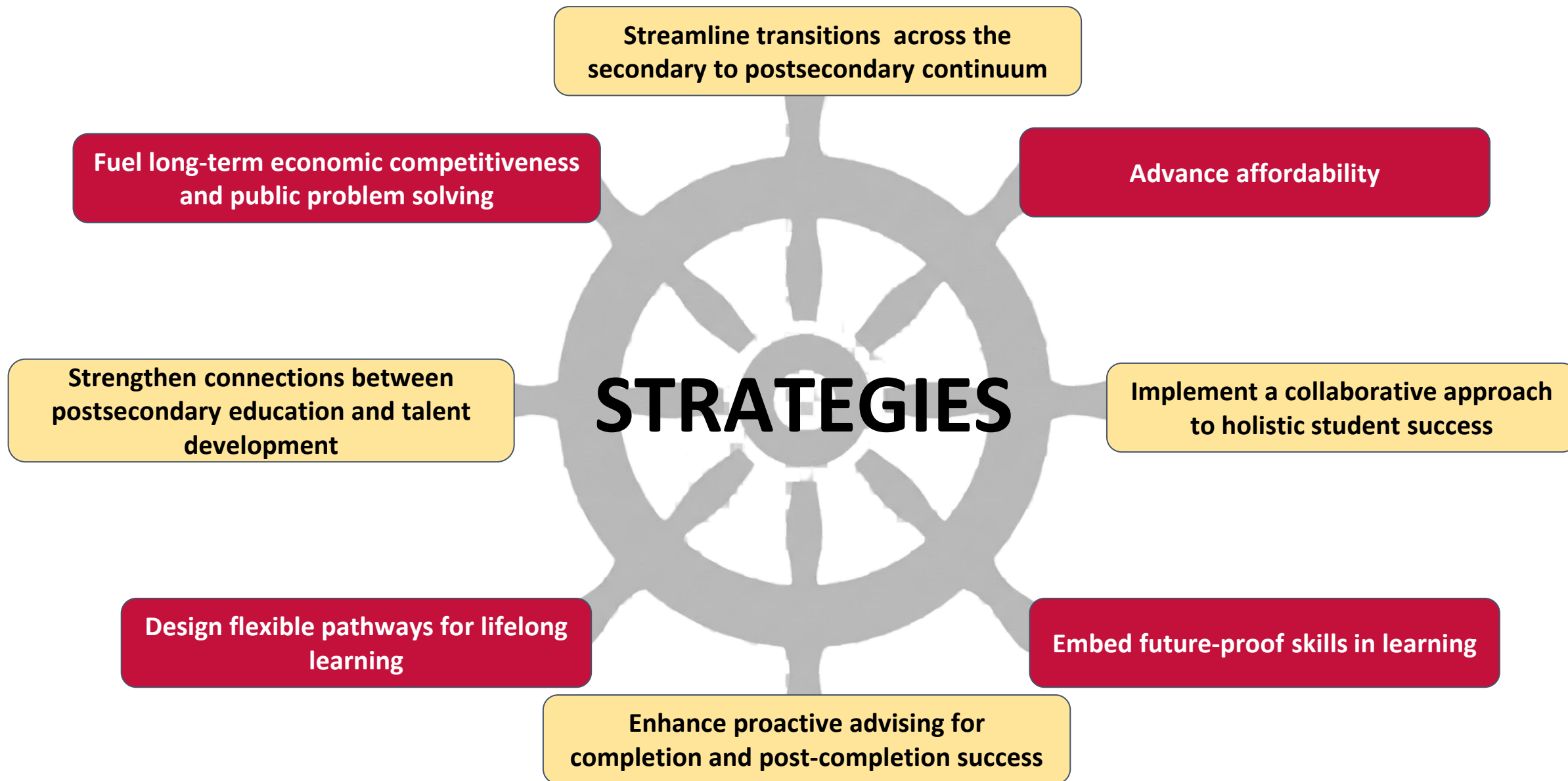
Source: 2024 Externally-funded research from NSF Higher Education Research & Development Survey, 2025 GDP by State, Bureau of Economic Analysis.



TARGET: Maryland maintains its leading position nationally in externally funded academic research and development while growing its research profile in lighthouse and priority sectors and ensuring the diversity of its research workforce.

Potential Performance Indicators:

- ★ Strategic alignment with the Moore-Miller State Plan and various related plans such as the forthcoming Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) currently under development for the state's Integrated Economic Competitiveness Plan.



This Plan outlines eight strategies that contribute to progress across multiple goals, reflecting the cohesive, interconnected nature of this State Plan and vision for postsecondary education.

Each strategy is composed of **Catalytic Actions** (high-impact efforts that can be executed in the next one to three years), and a **Long-Term Vision** (a guiding target to provide steady direction to each overall strategy), which together are expected to drive progress for Maryland’s learners, institutions, and communities.

STRATEGY	GOAL 1: Attainment & Completion	GOAL 2: Social & Economic Mobility	GOAL 3: Innovation & Research
Streamline transitions across the secondary to postsecondary continuum	•	•	
Advance affordability	•	•	
Implement a collaborative approach to holistic student success	•	•	
Embed future-proof skills in learning	•	•	•
Enhance proactive advising for completion and post-completion success	•	•	
Design flexible pathways for lifelong learning	•	•	
Strengthen connections between postsecondary education and talent development	•	•	•
Fuel long-term economic competitiveness and public problem solving			•

STRATEGY: Streamline Transitions Across the Secondary to Postsecondary Continuum

Opportunities

Catalytic Actions

Expand dual enrollment and other early college pathways across the state as a strategy to expand access and connect students to postsecondary credentials and degrees.

Establish inclusive pathways by exploring transition models, such as direct admissions, that proactively connect high school students with the full spectrum of postsecondary educational and training opportunities.

Strengthen and expand partnerships with organizations whose mission it is to assist economically marginalized students with achieving postsecondary success.



Long-Term Vision

Student transitions from birth to postsecondary are seamless and postsecondary education is an inclusive pathway for all students.

STRATEGY: Advance Affordability

Opportunities

Catalytic Actions

Launch a modernized, user-friendly financial aid platform to facilitate application and awarding process.

Simplify state and institutional aid programs to streamline access.

Prioritize need-based aid and increase the number of high-need students who receive state aid

Enhance state and institution capacity to communicate about financial offerings and ensure students and families have access to timely and accurate information.



Long-Term Vision

Affordability mechanisms are sustainable and need-driven, offering predictable costs for students and families.

STRATEGY: Implement a Collaborative Approach to Holistic Student Success

Opportunities

Catalytic Actions

Develop and implement a comprehensive student success framework that documents the various opportunities to address holistic student needs.

Strengthen cross-agency partnerships to connect learners with SNAP/WIC/SUN Bucks, housing assistance, childcare, transportation, state scholarships, and other public benefits.

Embed single points of contact, one-stop resource hubs, and benefits connections into Maryland's postsecondary processes (e.g., onboarding and financial aid) to connect Maryland students with benefits and services.



Long-Term Vision

A multi-agency, community-based wraparound ecosystem provides dynamic advising and support that seamlessly adapts to student needs and provides clear paths to completion and post-completion success.

STRATEGY: Embed Future-Proof Skills in Learning

Opportunities

Catalytic Actions

Collaborate directly with industry partners to expand career-connected experiential learning opportunities in middle school, high school, and postsecondary education.

Embed career-connected “experiential” learning in postsecondary academic programs.

Facilitate the integration of artificial intelligence fluency, competencies, and durable skills into curricula across degree and credential levels statewide through program updates and faculty, staff, and administration training.



Long-Term Vision

Postsecondary institutions and their graduates possess the lifelong adaptability required to lead within an evolving technological economy.

STRATEGY: Enhance Proactive Advising for Completion and Post-Completion Success

Opportunities

Catalytic Actions

Strengthen data-informed advising and credential and degree auditing tools to connect students with necessary support to maintain momentum toward long-term success.

Develop comprehensive academic and career pathway advising frameworks, with a focus on Lighthouse Credentials and Degrees.



Long-Term Vision

A supportive ecosystem provides dynamic advising that adapts to student needs and provides clear paths to completion and post-completion success.

STRATEGY: Design Flexible Pathways for Lifelong Learning

Opportunities

Catalytic Actions

Establish statewide and institutional policies supporting competency-based education (CBE), credit for prior learning (CPL), and re-enrollment to streamline onramps to postsecondary education.

Execute a targeted, statewide and institutional re-engagement campaign to reach Maryland's adult learners with some college, but no degree or certificate.

Establish flexible, short-term, industry-recognized academic pathways that recognize milestones of progress along a student's academic journey.



Long-Term Vision

Maryland's system of higher education seamlessly accommodates non-linear educational journeys and supports continuous reskilling and upskilling.

STRATEGY: Strengthen Connections Between Postsecondary Education and Talent Development

Opportunities

Catalytic Actions

Define and measure concrete Maryland benchmarks for monitoring social and economic mobility.

Implement program approval and review processes to ensure all credentials and degrees systematically advance lifelong economic and social mobility.

Improve transfer infrastructure from dual enrollment through community colleges to four-year institutions to ensure students have access to clear pathways and stackable credentials.



Long-Term Vision

All postsecondary credentials and degrees provide a clear, frictionless path to advance lifelong economic and social mobility.

STRATEGY: Fuel Long-Term Economic Competitiveness and Public Problem Solving

Opportunities

Catalytic Actions

Help institutions develop foundational Lighthouse credentials and degrees.

Asset map institutional strengths in research and talent, and aligns those strengths with the operational needs of state agencies.

Provide targeted talent and research support to sustain key economic sectors and advance new ones.



Long-Term Vision

Maryland is a premier global hub for innovation and specialized talent production, with postsecondary education as a state asset and public service function.

Implementation & Next Steps



Strategic Stewardship & Alignment

MHEC will act as the strategic steward, aligning policy with the Administration's broader economic agenda and balancing state coordination with institutional autonomy.



Collaboration & Shared Ownership

Sustained partnership across sister agencies, institutions, and employers through adaptive, time-bound structures to translate strategy into immediate action.



Continuous Improvement

Regularly assessing progress against indicators and remaining flexible to adapt catalytic actions to Maryland's evolving economic realities.

Recommendation

The Maryland Higher Education Commission accepts and approves the
2026-2030 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education.



mhec.maryland.gov