

2026–2030

**MARYLAND STATE PLAN
FOR HIGHER EDUCATION**

Maryland's Moment: Lighting the Way Forward

At a Glance



**MARYLAND HIGHER
EDUCATION COMMISSION**

OVERVIEW

ABOUT THE STATE PLAN

The 2026–2030 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education, **Maryland's Moment: Lighting the Way Forward**, renews the state's commitment to education as both a right and a responsibility. It reaffirms postsecondary education as Maryland's most powerful tool for prosperity, equity, and societal well-being.

The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) convened a **Steering Committee** to steward the development of the next statewide vision for postsecondary education. The process also benefited from three **Working Groups** to inform the Plan. This work reflects the broad participation of Maryland's colleges, universities, community colleges, workforce partners, and civic leaders. It represents a shared belief that postsecondary education is central to the state's future prosperity and civic well-being and lights the way for education as a path to economic and social mobility.

A lighthouse does not illuminate everything at once. It sweeps steadily across the water, returning repeatedly to the same horizon, and guides vessels through conditions that would otherwise make passage dangerous. That is the spirit of the Plan. Maryland's postsecondary ecosystem will not be transformed in a single budget cycle, a single legislative session, or a single year. But with clear goals, honest measures, bold strategies, and shared ownership across every sector of the state, it can be transformed and truly change the lives of the Marylanders it serves for the better.

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.



Guiding Principles

While the vision explains where Maryland wants to go, the following Guiding Principles explain decision rules that the Steering Committee and Working Group members used when shaping every goal, strategy and catalytic action that follows. They reflect the Steering Committee's conviction that postsecondary education in Maryland must serve both the individual learner seeking economic mobility and the broader public good that depends on an educated, civically engaged citizenry.

1

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.

2

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.

3

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.

Advancing an Aligned Vision and Principles: Lighthouse Credentials and Degrees

Maryland's success will depend on how well it prepares learners for a rapidly evolving economy. This Plan introduces **Lighthouse Credentials and Degrees** that align with the state's *Lighthouse Sectors*, identified by Maryland's Department of Commerce for economic competitiveness and innovation: biotechnology, quantum technology, cybersecurity, and aerospace.¹ Lighthouse Credentials and Degrees will also include priority areas beyond Lighthouse Sectors that demonstrate high demand, strong earnings outcomes, and/or significant societal value (e.g., early childhood education providers, home health aides, etc.).

¹ Governor's Workforce Development Board (2024), Maryland Statewide Workforce Development Plan: WIOA Combined Plan 2024–2028, <https://gwdb.maryland.gov/pub/pdf/2024-2028stateworkforceplan-wioacombined.pdf>

The Goals

The goals of this Plan represent Maryland's collective priorities for the next four years. They connect the moral purpose of postsecondary education to the pressing needs of a competitive economy and thriving democracy.



Goal 1: 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.

The 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.



Goal 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.

The Target: Maryland will lead the nation in providing affordable postsecondary credentials and degrees that offer economic and community benefit to students and the state.²



Goal 3: Mobilize Postsecondary Research and Innovation as a State Asset for Competitiveness and Public Good

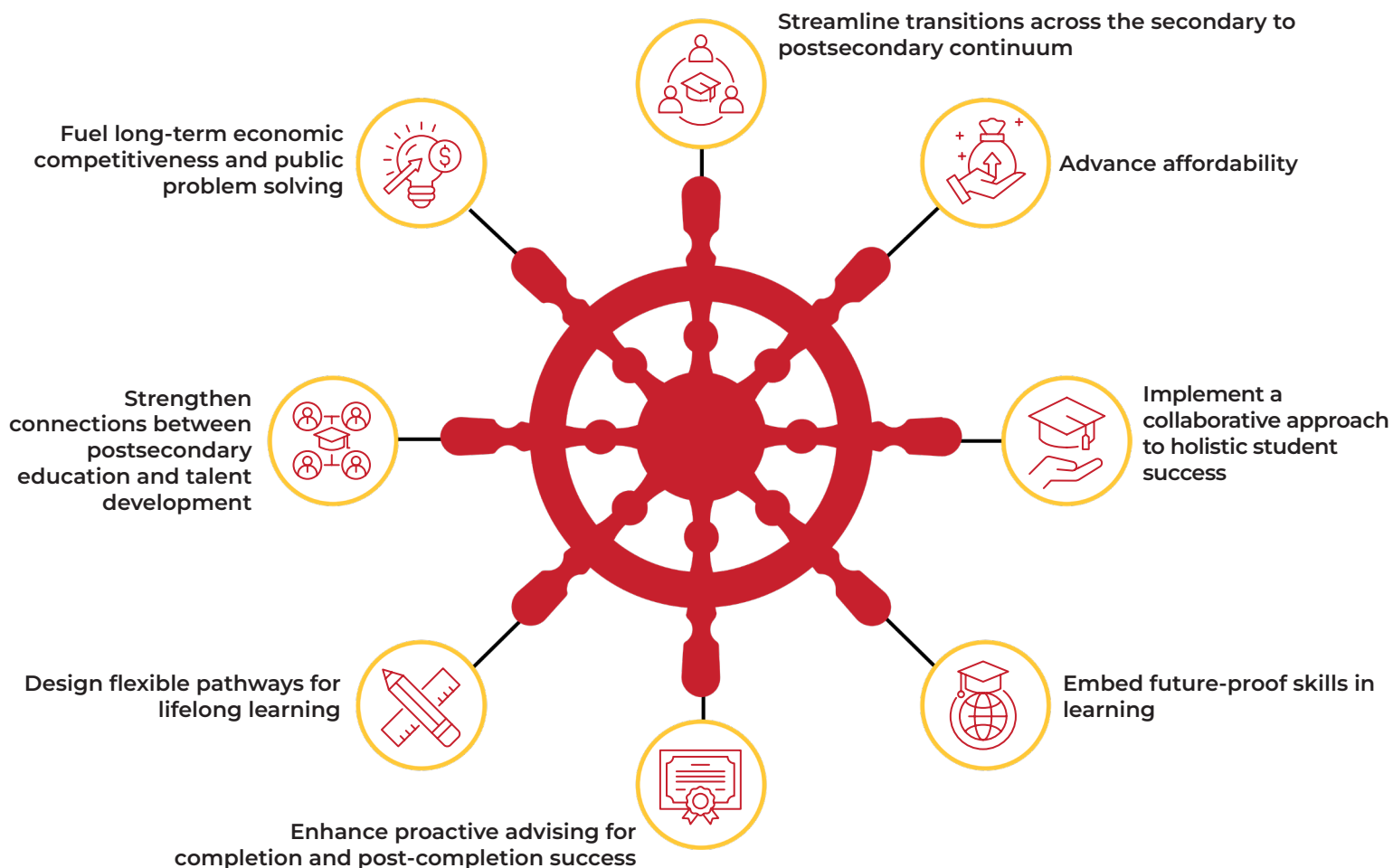
Integrate Maryland's postsecondary ecosystem into a unified, whole-of-government strategy to drive discovery and talent development in the state's lighthouse and priority sectors, while generating cross-agency solutions that enhance civic vitality and solve public challenges.

The 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.

² A credential or degree with "community benefit" is one that either targets a specific area of Maryland's labor market or provides general support to the Maryland workforce. A credential or degree with community benefit may provide an individual with a private living wage, may offer an individual with an entry level opportunity with a career ladder for economic advancement or may provide essential services to communities or the general workforce or employed in nonprofits or public employers.

The Strategies

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.



Looking Forward

As Maryland navigates a period of rapid technological change, evolving workforce demands, demographic shifts, and increasing economic complexity, this Plan must function as a living framework rather than a static document. Its success will depend upon sustained partnership, evidence-informed decision-making, and a commitment to continuous improvement. While the goals of this Plan remain constant, the pathways to achieving them must remain flexible enough to respond to emerging opportunities and challenges.

To fulfill the State Plan's goals, MHEC will also develop its own internal Strategic Plan. This Strategic Plan will strengthen the agency's operational capacity and modernize policies related to program approval, financial aid, accountability, and institutional grants. It will also ensure that MHEC's processes reflect the values of transparency, efficiency, and responsiveness.

For more information on the goals of this plan, the performance indicators used to monitor progress, and the catalytic actions that make up each strategy, please refer to the full State Plan document.



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