RFA RESEARCH for ACTION

Driving Awareness, Inclusion, and Integration for Racial Equity in Postsecondary Education

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I. The Racial Equity Imperative

According to the most recent Census figures, rates of degree attainment vary substantially by race and ethnicity. Asian adults lead all races with 64 percent degree attainment, followed by Whites at 48 percent, and Black, American Indian and Latinx at 32 percent, 25 percent and 25 percent, respectively (Lumina, 2017).[1][2] As a result of the pressing need to close gaps in attainment linked to race and ethnicity, Lumina's Equity Imperative places racial equity at the forefront of their goal to increase the percentage of the population with a high-quality postsecondary credential to 60% by 2025 (Lumina, 2017).

Addressing racial equity in postsecondary education is important for two reasons. First, there is an economic imperative to closing racial equity gaps in attainment. Carnevale (2018) notes that the U.S. economy continues to demand college-educated adults and offers fewer jobs for those with a high school diploma. Moreover, according to US Census projections, the United States will be a majority-minority country in 2045, and non-White populations in some states, such as Texas, New Mexico, and California, already exceed the White population (Frey, 2018).[3] Yet the postsecondary attainment rates of Black, Latinx and American Indian students are stubbornly low. To address the labor market needs of the economy, states must address their racial and ethnic postsecondary attainment gaps.

At least as important is the moral imperative to closing racial equity gaps. Racial equity is achieved when race can no longer be used to predict life outcomes (Equity in the Center, 2019).[4] Structural racism has historically prevented equal access to education for students of color. This systemic social injustice has led to an increasing emphasis on explicitly addressing and overcoming the root causes of racial inequity, as distinct from socioeconomic equity (Bensimon, 2017).[5] While efforts to address equity in the postsecondary sphere typically addresses socioeconomic disparities, there is ample evidence that income-based strategies alone are insufficient to closing racial equity gaps, since students of color in the same socioeconomic group fare worse than their white counterparts (Carnevale and Strohl, 2013). In order to advance equity, states must address "different forms of inequity differently." (Bensimon, 2017).[6]

1 Lumina Foundation (2017). Lumina Foundation's Equity Imperative. Retrieved from https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/equity-imperative-2017-01-25.pdf

2 Lumina Foundation (2018) A Stronger Nation: Learning beyond high school builds American talent. Retrieved from http://strongernation.luminafoundation.org/report/2020/#nation

3 Frey, W. H. (2018). The US will become 'minority white' in 2045, Census projects. The Brookings Institution. Retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2018/03/14/the-us-will-become-minority-white-in-2045-census-projects/

4 Equity-in-the-Center (2019). Woke to Work: Building a Race Equity Culture. Retrieved from https://www.equityinthecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Equity-in-Center-Awake-Woke-Work-2019-final-1.pdf

5 Center for Urban Education, USC Rossier School of Education (2017). Improving Postsecondary Attainment: Overcoming Common Challenges To an Equity Agenda in State Policy. Retrieved from https://cue.usc.edu/files/2017/02/Overcoming-Challenges_Final_Online.pdf

6 Center for Urban Education, USC Rossier School of Education (2017). Improving Postsecondary Attainment: Overcoming Common Challenges To an Equity Agenda in State Policy. Retrieved from https://cue.usc.edu/files/2017/02/Overcoming-Challenges_Final_Online.pdf

Lessons From Talent, Innovation, and Equity (TIE) States

To support states in "eliminating disparities in educational outcomes of students from historically underserved and underrepresented populations," Lumina's Talent, Innovation, and Equity (TIE) initiative awards multi-year grants and technical assistance for states to promote awareness of racial attainment gaps in postsecondary education and work towards the reduction and elimination of those gaps (Lumina, 2017).[7]. Based on emerging lessons and best practices of the first cohort of TIE states – Colorado, Tennessee, and Oregon—RFA has created a framework and set of recommendations that can be used by other states interested in pursuing similar work. The strong and consistent commitment to racial equity from senior higher education leaders in Colorado, the innovative education policy environment in Tennessee, and the adoption of a racial equity lens to guide education policy-making in Oregon provide important insights and best practices into how states can make progress in closing racial attainment gaps.

Methodology Box.

This report is based on research examining the design and implementation of the TIE initiative in Tennessee, Colorado, and Oregon. The first in a series of reports, RFA's analysis draws from data collected at the state level. RFA completed a thorough review of public documents from state higher education agencies and conducted interviews with 19 policymakers across three states. Interviews with stakeholders in Colorado and Tennessee captured summative perceptions of their state's TIE efforts. In Oregon TIE efforts are expected to commence by January 2020. As such, interviews with policymakers in Oregon were preliminary. The remaining reports in the series will be informed by data collected at the institution level and include additional interviews with Oregon stakeholders as they begin implementation of their TIE strategies. This report was funded with generous support from the Lumina Foundation. RFA is grateful for the many Tennessee, Colorado, and Oregon stakeholders who contributed to this research.

II.   Addressing Racial Equity Gaps

As of 2017, forty-one states had established a college attainment goal, many of which align with Lumina's goal to ensure that 60% of a state's adult population has a high-quality credential by 2025 (Lumina, 2019).[8] Recent analysis by the Educational Testing Service raised concerns about the capacity of states to meet these goals. Based on the current rate of degree production, ETS found that the nation will fall short of meeting the 60% attainment goal by 2025 and is unlikely to reach it until 2056. Importantly, Black, Hispanic and Native American populations will not reach 60% attainment until 2060 – 35 years beyond Lumina's target date of 2025 goal (Nettles, 2017).[9] Two recent reports by The Education Trust further highlight the need for states to address racial equity gaps in attainment. An analysis of degree attainment by White, Black, and Latinx adults identifies a gap in every state between Black and White adults and between Latinx and White adults (Nichols and Schak, 2019).[10] In order to reach statewide attainment goals, states need to heighten their efforts to increase attainment for students of color.

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7 Lumina Foundation (2017). Lumina Foundation's Equity Imperative. Retrieved from https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/equity-imperative-2017-01-25.pdf

8 Lumina Foundation. Lumina's Goal. Retrieved from https://www.luminafoundation.org/lumina-goal

9 Nettles, M.T. (2017). Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving the National Postsecondary Degree Attainment Goals. Education Testing Service. Retrieved from https://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/37720-Challenges-and-Opp-Exec-Summary.pdf

10 The Education Trust (2020). The State of Higher Education Equity. Retrieved from https://edtrust.org/the-state-of-higher-education-equity/

State higher education agencies are beginning to recognize the need to directly address racial equity gaps. In 2013, the Indiana Commission for Higher Education was among the first state agencies to commit to closing attainment gaps for Black and Hispanic students.[11] Other states, such as the Minnesota Office of Higher Education[12] and the Colorado Commission on Higher Education[13] track degree attainment by race and ethnicity through web-based, interactive dashboards. Further, many states are revising their plans for higher education to include attainment

goals for students of color. For example, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission recently revised its strategic plan to identify attainment goals for Black and Latinx students and Oregon's Higher Education Commission's current strategic plan commits to developing attainment goals for students of color. In addition, multiple states have identified strategies for closing racial equity gaps.[14] As more states move to address racial equity gaps, lessons from the first cohort of TIE states can help inform other states interested in pursuing similar work.

A Framework to Address Racial Equity in Postsecondary State Policy and Practice

To support state efforts to close postsecondary attainment equity gaps for students of color, RFA has developed a framework that describes three drivers behind efforts to place racial equity at the center of postsecondary policymaking and practice: awareness, inclusion, and integration. The framework is adapted from Equity in the Center's *Race Equity Cycle*[15] and is informed by Research for Action's examination of the three states in the Lumina Foundation's first TIE cohort – Colorado, Tennessee, and Oregon. Figure 1 depicts the Race Equity Cycle, as adapted by RFA.

The Race Equity Cycle was originally designed as a resource for organizations focused on countering race inequities.[16] RFA adapted this tool to provide a resource for <u>state higher education agencies</u> focused on closing racial equity gaps in attainment. The Cycle includes three separate but inter-related drivers:

Figure 1. Race Equity Cycle

1. **Awareness**. The awareness driver defines the problem and focuses on understanding the problem and its causes.

2. **Inclusion.** The inclusion driver communicates the problem to a wide range of stakeholders and welcomes them into conversations about how to address the problem.

3. **Integration.** The integration driver provides concrete solutions by incorporating a focus on racial equity in policy and practice.

11 Smith, A.A. (2018). States Attempt Closing Racial Gaps to Improve Graduation. Inside Higher Ed. Retrieved from https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/08/21/states-showing-some-progress-closing-racial-equity-gaps

12 Minnesota Office of Higher Education (2017). Educational Attainment Goal 2025. Retrieved from http://www.ohe.state.mn.us/sPages/educ_attain_goal_2025.cfm

13 Colorado Department of Higher Education (2019). Strategic Goal 2: Erase Equity Gaps. Retrieved from http://masterplan.highered.colorado.gov/goal-2-erase-equity-gaps/

14 Del Pilar, W. & Schak, J.O. (2018). Racial Equity & Postsecondary Attainment: An Analysis of the States. Retrieved from https://postsecondarydata.sheeo.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/State-by-State-Degree-Attainment-and-Racial-and-Ethnic-Gaps.pdf

15 Equity-in-the-Center (2019). Woke to Work: Building a Race Equity Culture. Retrieved from https://www.equityinthecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Equity-in-Center-Awake-Woke-Work-2019-final-1.pdf

16 Equity-in-the-Center (2019). Woke to Work: Building a Race Equity Culture. Retrieved from https://www.equityinthecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Equity-in-Center-Awake-Woke-Work-2019-final-1.pdf

As states work to utilize the Race Equity Cycle, a few observations are worth noting:

The work to increase awareness, inclusion and integration of racial equity into the postsecondary policy and practice arena is ongoing. All states experience leadership turnover, shifting political stands, and the emergence of new voices. Thus, efforts to ensure a consistent focus on racial equity must be sustained over time.

Awareness, inclusion and integration are mutually reinforcing. Racial equity is best advanced when states consider all three drivers together. In other words, states can increase awareness of the need to address racial equity gaps by including diverse groups in the process to integrate racial equity goals into postsecondary policy and practice.

Efforts to deepen awareness, inclusion and integration are imperative for sustaining a racial equity agenda. As state postsecondary racial equity efforts advance, the work can become more difficult. Deepened awareness of the importance of the issue, continued expansion of those involved in these efforts, and further integration of the racial equity agenda into concrete policies and practices will sustain the agenda over time.

Factors that Affect State Capacity to Advance Racial Equity in Postsecondary Policy

Our examination of how three states worked to advance racial equity in their postsecondary policies revealed four important factors that affect how state higher education agencies approach this goal:

1. Data availability and use
2. Culture at the system or state agency
3. State leadership
4. Statewide advocacy environment

The following section provides recommendations for how state agencies can drive awareness, inclusion, and integration across each factor. Recommendations are informed by data on the best practices and lessons learned from the implementation of each state's TIE initiative. While each TIE state developed their own strategies for advancing equity and closing racial attainment gaps, the primary pillars of the work were similar – state-level awareness, coalition-building, and institutional engagement. At the state-level, Colorado's Department of Higher Education implemented a number of best practices identified in this report.

1. Using Data to Drive a Postsecondary Racial Equity Agenda

State agencies and stakeholders have access to a wide range of information that can inform their strategies to reduce racial equity gaps. Not only do they collect a wealth of institutional and student-level data; they can also utilize interviews and focus groups with students and communities of color to deepen their understanding of how race affects the state's postsecondary environment. Table 1 presents recommendations for how data can be used to advance each driver of the Race Equity Cycle. While the use of data to investigate and advance racial equity may seem elementary, state agencies often lack the support and resources--both financial and political--to disaggregate, share, disseminate, and use data to advance racial equity policy solutions.

Table 1. Recommendations for Advancing each Driver of the Race Equity Cycle through Data Use

FACTOR	AWARENESS	INCLUSION	INTEGRATION
Data Use	Collect and disaggregate data on postsecondary outcomes and experiences for students of color.	Share data and identify solutions that are data-driven	Use data as an accountability tool

To increase awareness with data:

- **Collect and disaggregate data on postsecondary outcomes and experiences for students of color.** Across TIE states, state policymakers examined an array of data. First, they collected qualitative data from students and communities of color to understand experiences and barriers for accessing and completing a postsecondary credential. Speaking directly with students and communities of color expanded policymaker understanding of how racial equity gaps are experienced differently. As described by one policymaker:

  We often talk about White versus non-White students, but not all non-White students are alike. In the Hispanic round table, we heard a lot about how students would like to have a sense of community and a family that they adopt on campus. That was not something that came up in the African American roundtable. It's just interesting to see some of those differences for the different groups of students.

Roundtables, community hearings, learning tours, or other mechanisms to gain insight into the educational experiences of communities of color can help policymakers develop a more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by these students as they work to access and progress through postsecondary education.

State agencies also disaggregated institution and student-level quantitative data by race to help identify and communicate equity gaps between student groups to institutions and other stakeholder groups. Examining attainment gaps for students of color heightened policymaker awareness of gaps between students of different races and ethnicities.

To increase inclusion with data:

- **Share data and identify solutions that are data-driven**. State agencies in TIE states communicated findings from data collection and disaggregated data analysis with statewide stakeholders – including communities of color – through public dashboards or widely disseminated reports. For example, the Colorado Department of Higher Education disseminated data on racial equity gaps with all public postsecondary institutions. The Tennessee Higher Education Commission, in collaboration with the Tennessee Board of Regents, hosted an Equity Summit where a primary goal was to support state policymakers and institutional leaders to become familiar with racial equity gap data. As one policymaker noted:

  We wanted people to become more familiar with the gaps that exist. There are people who attended that conference who had never even seen the data get disaggregated in that way before.

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> *There are people who attended that conference who had never even seen the data get disaggregated in that way before (by race).*

Other state agencies use dashboards or master plan documents to disaggregate completion rate data (See COLORADO RISES: Master Plan Dashboard). Additional disaggregated data documenting racial disparities in postsecondary preparedness, access, and progression can advance awareness of the gaps that exist for students of color.

Through expanding access to data and publishing reports that highlight gaps in racial equity and the experiences of students and communities of color, state agencies and its partners can use data to identify potential solutions for closing racial equity gaps. Across TIE states that examined attainment rates for students of color and explored perceptions of the college pipeline from individuals of color, policymakers reported that they were better positioned to identify strategies for closing racial equity gaps. In contrast, a lack of data in some states hindered state and stakeholder capacity to develop strategic approaches for closing gaps.

To increase integration with data:

- **Use data as an accountability tool.** Stakeholders engaged in TIE efforts highlighted the need for state agencies, as well as institutions, to continuously measure progress towards milestones for closing equity gaps and broadly disseminate these data. Stakeholders focused on closing racial equity gaps called upon their state higher education agency to be more transparent in measuring progress toward goals and more accountable for closing racial equity gaps. By measuring and sharing data publicly, states and higher education agencies can be accountable to advocacy groups and other partners in their efforts to increase attainment for students of color.

2. The Importance of State- and System-level Culture When Enacting a Racial Equity Agenda

The culture of a postsecondary state or system office reflects, among other conditions, a state's political context, the history of the agency in navigating issues of race and race equity, and the priorities and mission of the agency. As such, it is an integral player in state efforts to address racial equity. Table 2 provides recommendations for how these agencies can increase racial awareness, inclusion and integration to create a culture that reflects and prioritizes racial equity.

Table 2. Recommendations for Advancing each Driver of the Race Equity Cycle through Agency Culture

FACTORS	AWARENESS	INCLUSION	INTEGRATION
State or System-level Agency Culture	Define racial equity and work to increase comfort talking about race and race equity	Heighten racial/ ethnic diversity of staff at the state or system-level office Include racial equity in the state's strategic plan for higher education	Make decisions and investments that prioritize racial equity

To increase awareness in agency culture:

- **Define racial equity and work to increase comfort talking about race and race equity.** In addressing racial equity, state agencies noted the importance of increasing their aptitude for discussing race and racial equity issues such as clearly identifying the student populations states are focusing on, identifying root causes of racial inequities, and developing a shared vocabulary for race and racial equity. Further, training or other forms of professional development can create an agency culture that is informed and focused on racial equity, particularly as it pertains to the state's history of race inequities. As one State Higher Education Executive Officer remarked:

We offered diversity, equity and inclusion training for our staff. We didn't assume that people who are passionate about the work understand the scholarship of the work.

State officers across TIE states also highlighted the importance of "normalizing" the conversation around race and increasing state-level comfort to talk about race. As one policymaker noted:

In the past it's been taboo. You can't talk about the Black kids or the Latino kids. I think the TIE initiative really flipped the switch on that and led to much more intentional, much more explicit -- in the best possible way -- conversations about race and racial equity.

To increase inclusion in agency culture:

- **Heighten diversity at the state or system-level office.** Policymakers across TIE states highlighted the lack of diversity at the state office as a barrier to advancing racial equity. One policymaker candidly discussed the challenges in advancing racial equity:

  I think it was difficult for us to decide what would be most impactful for groups that we don't identify with.

State agencies stressed that recent efforts to hire and develop a more diverse team at the state or system office may position state higher education agencies to better advance racial equity across the higher education policy and practice arena.

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> *I think the TIE initiative really flipped the switch on that and led to much more intentional, much more explicit -- in the best possible way -- conversations about race and racial equity.*

- **Include racial equity in the state's strategic plan for higher education.** To close racial equity gaps, state policymakers highlighted the importance of prioritizing this work amidst a broad range of competing priorities. Many state agencies revisited their master plan for higher education to highlight the need to close racial equity gaps as their awareness of the importance of this goal increased. For example, Tennessee policymakers acknowledged that historically, race had not been an element included in its master plans. This lack of emphasis is reflected in the omission of race in the state's outcomes-based funding formula enacted in 2011. However, the TIE initiative led to an "off-cycle" update in the 2015-2020 master plan that identified credential completion goals for Black students. In another example, Colorado policymakers noted that including racial equity in their strategic planning crystalized the state's commitment to the work and communicated the office's strategies for closing racial equity gaps to guide the system office staff's efforts.

To increase integration of racial equity in agency culture:

- **Make decisions and investments that prioritize racial equity.** Some policymakers described how they have begun to more deeply integrate racial equity into their decision-making. For example, prior to Oregon's TIE investment, the state developed the [Oregon Equity Lens](#) as a guiding framework for policy- and decision-making across all levels of education. As strategies for the TIE efforts were developed, Oregon's Higher Education Coordinating Commission used the state's Equity Lens to guide the work. Similarly, in Colorado, racial equity was embedded into policy conversations, priorities, and agenda-setting. A former State Higher Education Executive Officer from Colorado described how racial equity has been integrated into their work:

> **Equity is not a project. This is at the heart of what we do.**

Equity is not a project. This is at the heart of what we do. We talked about it every week. We work on it all the time. We embedded it into our senior staff conversations. Embedded it into our team conversations.

In addition, state agencies intentionally invested in prioritizing racial equity by creating positions (i.e., Equity Officers) and implementing initiatives that focus on closing racial equity gaps and advancing racial equity (e.g. statewide racial equity training for faculty and racial equity-focused grants to institutions).

3. The Role of State Leadership in Driving a Postsecondary Racial Equity Agenda

Governors, legislators, campus Presidents, Institution and System-level Board members, and other state leaders can motivate and empower actors to focus on closing racial equity gaps. Table 3 presents recommendations for how state agencies can draw upon senior leadership across a state to advance racial equity.

Table 3. Recommendations for Advancing each Driver of the Race Equity Cycle through State Leadership

FACTORS	AWARENESS	INCLUSION	INTEGRATION
State Leadership	Garner support from relevant leaders across the state about the importance of closing racial equity gaps in postsecondary attainment	Include a diverse array of state leaders in strategic planning for closing racial equity gaps in postsecondary attainment	Improve accountability for racial equity and fund racial equity-focused initiatives.

To increase awareness through state leadership:

- **Garner support from relevant leaders across the state about the importance of closing racial equity gaps in higher education attainment.** As TIE state or system-level agencies deepened their commitment to racial equity, State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) were pivotal in capturing the attention of other state leaders. A policymaker in Colorado noted the SHEEO's role in crafting a compelling and urgent message regarding racial equity gaps and the importance of closing those gaps:

  Our SHEEO set the tone for our entire agency that this would be huge for the department. And then, very intentionally, [our SHEEO] plugged in other leaders... Now, we have a coalition of ambassadors for the work.

Supported by their SHEEO, higher education system offices highlighted efforts to inform their state's Governor, legislators, other state agencies, and institutional leaders about racial equity gaps in higher education and the need to close the gaps. Equity Days at a state Capitol as well as letters to legislators capturing the importance of closing equity gaps were recognized as activities that increased awareness of racial equity gaps amongst state leadership. In states that lacked awareness of racial equity across state leadership, stakeholders perceived state agency efforts too limited to significantly change the conversation on attainment for students of colors.

To increase inclusion through state leadership:

- **Include a diverse array of state leaders in strategic planning for closing racial equity gaps.** TIE efforts in Colorado and Oregon identified Equity Champions, or leaders across the state in higher-level government positions, as well as leaders at institutions and communities (e.g. communities of color, business and nonprofit communities) to participate in strategic planning and implementation efforts to close attainment gaps for students of color. By engaging senior leaders across multiple agencies, institutions, or positions, state policymakers highlighted a shared-commitment to closing racial equity gaps.

However, TIE states noted challenges in utilizing Equity Champions. State policymakers in Colorado noted that turnover posed a real challenge, as Equity Champions moved on to other positions and often could not continue to champion the cause. Well-defined roles and action items can help smooth transitions to new Equity Champions and can also increase buy-in from Equity Champions engaged in this work.

To increase integration through state leadership:

- **Improve accountability for racial equity and fund racial equity-focused initiatives.** State policymakers across TIE states identified a range of approaches to better integrate racial equity across state leadership. State Higher Education Executive Officers and state leaders across all TIE states pointed to the importance of being involved in the early stages of this work. In addition to state higher education office efforts, policymakers also noted the potential impacts of including race in outcomes-based funding formula, proposing legislation that commits a state to closing racial equity gaps, or establishing shared goals regarding racial equity across multiple state offices and departments.

4. How States Can Engage Advocacy Partners To Sustain a Commitment to Racial Equity Over Time

Strong and effective stakeholders that exist outside of state government are critically important in sustaining a racial equity agenda as administrations turn over and political will shifts. Table 4 provides recommendations for state agencies to consider as they attempt to support, articulate, and advance advocacy efforts that focus on racial equity and attainment for students of color.

Table 4. Recommendations for Advancing each Driver of the Race Equity Cycle through Advocacy Partners

FACTORS	AWARENESS	INCLUSION	INTEGRATION
Advocacy	Identify and hear from advocacy partners focused on racial equity and that include and represent communities of color	Include racial equity advocacy partners in strategic planning for closing racial equity gaps	Build and sustain a coalition of racial equity advocacy partners that hold leaders accountable

To increase awareness through racial equity advocacy partners:

- **Identify and hear from advocacy partners focused on racial equity and that include and represent communities of color.** State policymakers noted that prior to TIE, equity conversations typically included external stakeholders that held an existing relationship with the state agency. Through the TIE initiative, state agencies reported becoming more intentional and expansive about who to include in equity conversations, specifically identifying and seeking input from partners focused on racial equity in education and partners that include and represent students and communities of color. As one policymaker remarked:

We wanted to make sure that we identified people who were the most well respected and the most well-received across all communities.

Advocacy partners convened by TIE states include representatives of the state American Indian Commission, leaders from the Latino Chambers of Commerce, foundations awarding scholarships to students of color, NAACP, as well as Black, Latinx, and American Indian leaders and advocates in higher education, K-12, and the nonprofit sectors. By gathering input and data from advocacy partners, state agencies increased their awareness of barriers and experiences for students of color in higher education.

To increase inclusion through racial equity advocacy partners:

• **Include racial equity advocacy partners in strategic planning for closing racial equity gaps.** By including stakeholders engaged in racial equity efforts in strategic planning, policymakers were able to incorporate important insights into how to close racial equity gaps. Through racial equity convenings, some TIE state agencies engaged leaders of color and individuals advocating for racial equity in identifying the best approaches for closing racial equity gaps. For example, Tennessee and Colorado used advocacy leaders on each state's TIE Steering Committee to identify statewide approaches to advance racial equity (e.g., Equity Summits and faculty trainings on racial equity) and to select institutional interventions to best serve students of color. A policymaker in Colorado elaborated on the need to include racial equity advocacy partners in strategy planning:

Here's our challenge [closing racial equity gaps] and we want you [advocacy partners] to be part of the solution. Part of the solution is making sure more people know about the problem and part is having more people to share ideas about how to get this done.

In addition, state agency policymakers noted the impact of including K-12 advocacy partners in higher education strategy planning. State policymakers acknowledged that K-12 systems are ahead of postsecondary in terms of thinking about and responding to racial equity gaps in student success. State agencies could benefit from aligning postsecondary interventions with strategies in K-12 that strengthen the pipeline with a focus on racial equity.

To increase integration through racial equity advocacy partners:

• **Build and sustain a coalition of racial equity advocacy partners that hold leaders accountable.** Policymakers highlighted the need for advocacy partners to establish a coalition for postsecondary racial equity to ensure a sustained focus on this issue across political elections and cycles. State policymakers discussed the need to convene advocacy partners – leaders of color, Equity Champions, state and institution leaders, as well as business leaders and leaders focused on racial equity – to increase focus and sustainability of the work across the state. One community leader emphasized the importance of advocacy coalitions:

You want to put more teeth into stronger advocacy. It will keep [the work] moving so there is a smooth transition between Governors.

By identifying and including a broad and robust set of racial equity advocates, TIE state agencies sought to build a statewide equity coalition to advance efforts to close racial equity. A high-level policymaker in Oregon described the role of a racial equity coalition in higher education:

By elevating this issue [of racial equity] and connecting these leaders and helping support them at the outset so that it may take, you know, a life of its own and become a full-fledged and permanent organization or coalition that advocates for and hold leaders accountable for equity in postsecondary education.

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... (a) permanent organization or coalition (can) advocate for and hold leaders accountable for equity in postsecondary education

Sustaining State Efforts to Advance Racial Equity in Postsecondary Policy

The racial equity gaps that exist in postsecondary education are deeply rooted. Reducing and ultimately eliminating them will require significant and sustained effort. As states deepen their commitment to addressing racial equity gaps, the recommendations provided in this document can serve as guideposts for state agencies. Further, the Race Equity Cycle can help states maintain and deepen their focus on increasing awareness, inclusion and integration of racial equity in postsecondary state policy.