



SHEEO

STATE HIGHER EDUCATION EXECUTIVE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

STATE POSTSECONDARY DATA RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS: *STRONG FOUNDATIONS 2020*

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NOVEMBER 2021



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This paper is based on research funded in part by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Thank you to staff members from the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, University System of Georgia, and the Washington Student Achievement Council for providing additional insight into their PSURSS research partnerships.

INTRODUCTION

SHEEO agencies have long relied on postsecondary data to inform policy and decision-making. Since the 1970s, these data typically have been stored and protected in postsecondary student unit record systems (PSURs) and, in the last decade, increasingly linked to statewide longitudinal data systems (SLDSs).¹ With the advent of predictive modeling and analytics technologies and amidst growing calls for postsecondary transparency and accountability, use of disaggregated student-level data for research is becoming a mission-critical imperative for SHEEO agencies.² This second paper from SHEEO's *Strong Foundations 2020* survey assesses the relationship between states, their PSURs, and external researchers.³

Research using student-level postsecondary data is central to crafting sound, evidence-based policy. SHEEO agencies often share their PSURs data with other state agencies or entities, including external researchers. When used well, insights from large, student-level datasets, like those found in PSURs, can be paired with prior theory and evidence to advance relevant and equitable policy and practice. The value of educational research lies in the ability of researchers to measure current realities, identify future opportunities, and illuminate previously unseen trends in educational processes. Among the benefits of educational research to state agencies and their stakeholders is the use of postsecondary data to support equitable student success and outcomes, develop insight into student learning and enrollment trends, track course and degree pathway and completion rates, and improve educational structures, policies, and practice.⁴

However, effective use of disaggregated student data requires organizational capacity, including time, personnel, resources, and expertise. External researchers have the capacity and expertise to help SHEEO agencies leverage the information in PSURs and SLDSs to improve data-informed policy and decision-making. Yet, variable systems, resources, and state and data privacy and security standards can limit SHEEO agencies' ability to engage in research partnerships.

Given the advantages of educational research with PSURs data and the organizational complexities of research partnerships, the purpose of this brief is to communicate the current state of SHEEO agency research partnerships, as indicated by the *Strong Foundations 2020* survey. We review the types and numbers of research requests made to SHEEO agencies by external researchers and the reported benefits and barriers to effective research data sharing. Additionally, we provide recommendations and examples for cultivating practical and effective research partnerships.

1. Postsecondary student unit records systems (PSURs) are state-level data systems in which disaggregated student and institutional data are collected, stored, and secured by a SHEEO agency for the purposes of policy development and evaluation. For more information, see SHEEO's *Strong Foundations 2016: The State of State Postsecondary Data Systems* (https://sheeo.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/SHEEO_StrongFoundations2016_FINAL.pdf).
2. Armstrong, J., & Zaback, K. (2016, May). Assessing and improving state postsecondary data systems (Executive summary). *Envisioning the National Postsecondary Data Infrastructure in the 21st Century*. Postsecondary Data Collaborative, SHEEO and Complete College America. https://sites.ihep.org/sites/default/files/uploads/postsecdata/docs/resources/state_postsecondary_data_systems-executive_summary.pdf; Leu, K. (2020, March). *Data for students: The potential of data and analytics for student success*. RTI International. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED605995.pdf>; Ekowo, M., & Palmer, I. *The promise and peril of predictive analytics in higher education: A landscape analysis*. New America. <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/policy-papers/promise-and-peril-predictive-analytics-higher-education>
3. Since 2010, the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) has periodically administered the *Strong Foundations* survey, which documents the content, structure, and effective use of state postsecondary student unit record systems. This paper highlights selected responses to the fifth administration of the survey. Information on previous iterations of the survey and previously published reports are available at <https://postsecondarydata.sheeo.org>.
4. Data Quality Campaign [DQC]. (n.d.). *Roadmap for effective data use and research partnerships between state education agencies and education researchers*. <https://dataqualitycampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/DQC-SEA-Ed-Research-Roadmap-10112017.pdf>

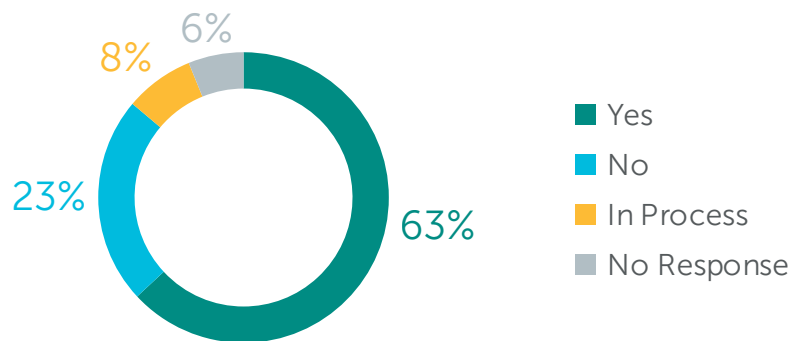
METHODS

In *Strong Foundations 2020*, SHEEO asked about states' research partnerships and data sharing agreements with educational researchers for the first time. These questions were focused specifically on SHEEO agency PSURs. Questions associated with educational research focused on whether SHEEO agencies had research agreements in place, the values and barriers associated with these partnerships, number of received and awarded research requests, and the kinds of research associated with these partnerships. In total, 65 respondents participated in *Strong Foundations 2020*.

RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS OVERVIEW

To better understand whether data sharing agreements are in place for research, in *Strong Foundations 2020*, we asked, “Do you have partnerships or data sharing agreements in place to share PSURS data with external researchers?” Sixty-one of the 65 respondents responded to this question. Forty-one respondents indicated data sharing partnerships with researchers at postsecondary institutions, other state agencies, or other entities. Fifteen respondents did not have research data sharing agreements in place, while five respondents indicated that they were in the planning processes for starting this work (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1:
PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS WITH DATA SHARING AGREEMENTS OR PARTNERSHIPS



CATEGORIES OF REQUESTS

STRONG FOUNDATIONS 2020 ASKED:



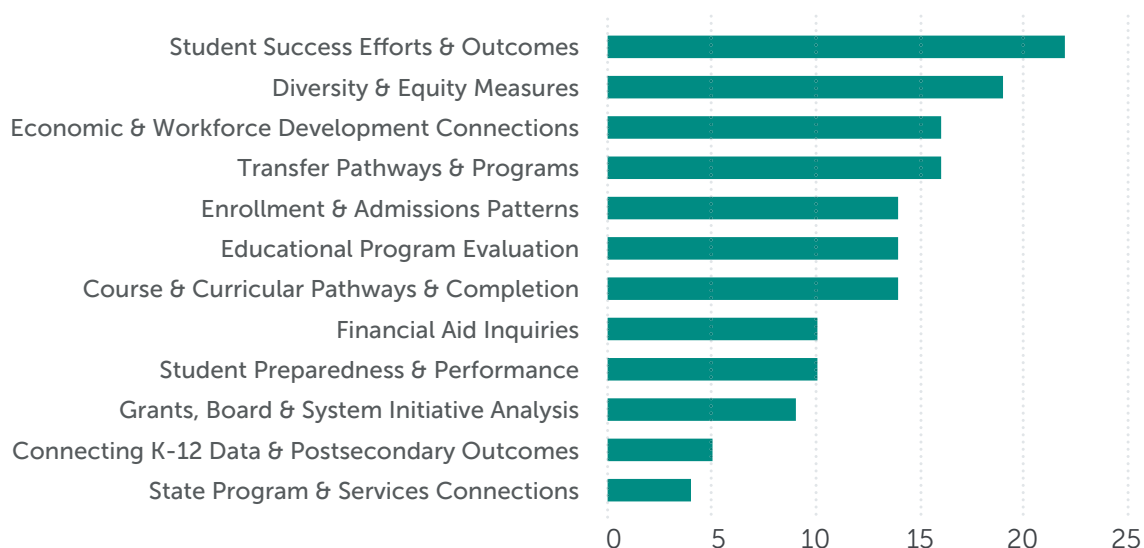
What kinds of research questions are being asked of your PSURSs?

The ability and value of student unit records-based research to inform policy decisions and improve outcomes are evident in the types of research questions that researchers ask of SHEEO agency PSURSs. SHEEO agencies that allow data sharing for research purposes receive requests to explore a variety of research questions. These topics range from course modality, completion, pathways, and registration data; to student wage, transfer, and graduation data; to institutional financial aid, enrollment, student success, and performance metrics; to employment pathways and outcomes. *Strong Foundations 2020* respondents referenced research question requests falling across twelve categories (See Figure 2).

Among the most reported areas of research questions are those associated with educational programming, employment pathways and outcomes, student success efforts and outcomes, and transfer patterns. Trends existed in each of the categories that highlight how SHEEO agencies are using or responding to PSURS data research requests. **Student Success Efforts & Outcomes** included a heavy focus on student retention, progression, and completion metrics and student success program development and evaluation; **Diversity & Equity Measures** included institutional

and student metrics for improving support and outcomes for historically underrepresented students and demographic changes. **Economic & Workforce Development Connections** included employment pathways and employment and wage outcomes. **Transfer Pathways & Programs** included both intrastate and interstate transfer to various institutional types. **Enrollment & Admission Patterns** included dual/concurrent enrollment, enrollment loads, popularity of degree programs, and admissions standards. **Educational Program Evaluation** included developmental education program, online program, and general program and curricular efficacy, and assessment of scholarship initiatives. **Course & Curricular Pathways & Completion** included math and STEM course-taking trends and professional degree course-taking and completion. **Financial Aid Inquiries** included effectiveness of state financial aid, policies, and disbursement. **Student Preparedness & Performance** included high school GPA, placement exam metrics, first-semester student experiences/mind-set measures. **Grants, Board, & System Initiative Analysis, Connecting K-12 Data & Postsecondary Outcomes,** and **State Program & Services Connections** included efforts at measuring the effectiveness of outside influences on institutional and student success.

FIGURE 2.
RESEARCH QUESTION CATEGORIES REPORTED BY SHEEO AGENCIES



DATA SHARING ALLOWANCES AND LIMITATIONS

In addition to gauging the types of research questions researchers are asking of PSURs, in *Strong Foundations 2020*, we also wanted to understand the number of student unit record requests that agencies receive and approve.⁵ Respondents noted that they receive anywhere from two to 100 requests annually and grant anywhere from none to all of them. Decisions to limit the sharing of student-level data from PSURs with external researchers is often governed by state rules and

5. Open-ended responses to these questions resulted in a variety of feedback, ranging from specific statistics, to estimated ranges, to narrative input. In future iterations of the *Strong Foundations* survey, SHEEO will ask for more specific responses related to data requests and approval, with an associated question that allows for an open-ended response to provide additional context. Despite the variety of responses, the answers provided in *Strong Foundations 2020* do provide insight into the demand for PSURs data and the ability for state agencies to provide that data.

legislation, agency capacity and priorities, or a combination of the two. One respondent indicated that they are only permitted to share disaggregated data with other state agencies: “We cannot do it, with very few exceptions - and usually only with other state agencies.” The inability to allow external researchers to access PSURS data may, in turn, become an obstacle for SHEEO agencies, limiting their capacity to use researchers’ work to inform effective policy analysis.

The capacity for SHEEO agencies to engage with researchers also informs their data sharing priorities. A respondent noted that given the time and resources associated with researcher requests, they prioritize “research that supports Board goals [with] proven research partners.” Yet, other respondents reported that their agencies approve a majority of requests for student-level data. The decision to approve or deny a researcher’s request for access to student-level data from PSURSs illustrates how SHEEO agencies must balance the value and concerns associated with disaggregated data sharing.

RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP BENEFITS

STRONG FOUNDATIONS 2020 ASKED:



What does your agency see as the greatest value of research partnerships?

Respondents indicated the multifaceted value of research partnerships in fulfilling SHEEO agencies' missions. Across the responses were mentions of the centrality of research partnerships to SHEEO agency responsibilities. Respondents also noted that research partnerships allowed their agencies to expand research capacity for improved insight.

ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Strong Foundations 2020 respondents explicitly connected research partnerships to their organizational responsibilities, indicating their mission as a driver for engaging in research partnerships. Seven respondents noted that these partnerships are tied to their organizational mission and are a means of supporting their institutional and state stakeholders. This sense of responsibility pervaded participant responses for why SHEEO agencies value and promote researcher access to and partnerships with PSURS data.

- *Supporting Institutions:* Respondents viewed research partnerships as a responsibility and benefit to institutions within their state or system. As one respondent noted: "Being a higher education agency, it is important to support our academic researchers." The importance of supporting academic researchers not only benefits that researcher but also benefits the system in its entirety. As another respondent stated: "When working with researchers at our system institutions, their research leading to presentations and publications is good for them, their institution, and the system." Another noted that researcher partnerships help make visible the good work of higher education in their state.
- *Supporting State Stakeholders:* In addition to benefiting institutions, four respondents noted that research partnerships resulted in better, more relevant, and more impactful policy and practice. Respondents believe that research partnerships are important because they allow SHEEO agencies to measure the impact of programs in their specific state contexts, ultimately improving the lives of state citizens. Two respondents indicated that the state-level findings through partnered research allow for state- and stakeholder-specific studies. Another noted that sharing data for research "allows [them] to shape policies and programs that will have an impact on students in the state." The ability of partnered research to provide findings with tangible benefits for state stakeholders was noted by another respondent as a way to "impact the lives [in their state] through data-informed decision-making at all levels of the policy process."

"When working with researchers at our system institutions, their research leading to presentations and publications is good for them, their institution, and the system."

IMPROVED RESEARCH CAPACITY

The organizational responsibility felt by SHEEO agencies to engage in research partnerships is fulfilled through the improved research capacity that comes with researcher access to PSURS data. Fourteen respondents noted that the process of engaging in research partnerships allows SHEEO agencies to expand their expert research capacity. As illustrated succinctly by a respondent, “These partnerships allow for comprehensive studies using state data that we do not have the resources (time and staff) to complete.” By engaging in research partnerships and leveraging researcher expertise and resources, SHEEO agencies are better positioned to meet their organizational responsibilities by increasing the time, resources, and expertise to create the policies and practices that support institution and state stakeholders.

- *Time & Resources:* Multiple respondents noted that researchers have the time and resources to engage with PSURS data in new or expanded ways. As a respondent explained, researchers outside of SHEEO agencies have “research capacity in terms of time, finance, resources, and skill set,” which allows them to conduct “work which would not be possible with any single agency.” Another noted that improving capacity through research partnerships allows their agency to take on more “proactive work” that can be used to “advance policy analysis that would be in the state’s best interest.” One of the ways respondents indicated this proactive work happens is through researchers’ ability to “leverage data from other agencies that [our agency] would not normally have access to. They have also provided additional research expertise and visibility to our efforts in this area.” The improved capacity via researcher time and resources also extends to improved overall research capacity in a given system. As a respondent explains, research partnerships “increase the number of people in the field with experience working in this arena and with this type of data.”
- *Expertise:* Beyond adding time and resource capacity, researchers add value with the expertise they bring to SHEEO agency partnerships. Seven respondents noted that researchers’ training, skills, and expertise helped their agencies better leverage the data in their systems through research design and efficacy. For example, a respondent noted that, “Research partnerships add needed capacity and rigorous methodological training to address complex research questions about [state]-specific programs using [state]-specific data. These partnerships help us inform our practice and policy improvement.” The expertise researchers bring to SHEEO agency partnerships can promote, as one respondent argued, “more sophisticated research methods and integrate more up-to-date theoretical and conceptual models.” And the need for modern and innovative practice is becoming an imperative for SHEEO agencies. As a respondent explained, “In addition to the evaluation of initiatives, as the agency moves into a more predictive model to plan strategies and set goals 5, 10, or 15 years out, the value of expert research partnerships cannot be understated. Research partnerships often pair up expert data miners with expert researchers - a win-win scenario. Researchers may also ask questions or see trends that are not obvious to those with preconceived views of the data.”

“Research partnerships add needed capacity and rigorous methodological training to address complex research questions about [state]-specific programs using [state]-specific data. These partnerships help us inform our practice and policy improvement.”

IN-DEPTH INSIGHT

In addition to seeing research partnerships as central to their agencies' missions, respondents noted that these partnerships helped them better evaluate policy, programs, and the data itself. Nine participants noted the value of researchers in providing deeper insight into their data for improving their understanding and evaluation of policy, programs, and outcomes.

- *Better Insight:* The deep dives of data via research partnerships help SHEEO agencies better understand their policies and initiatives. A respondent noted that the insight gained through "two-way access to data and info allows for better policy and programs." Two others specifically noted that the ability of researchers to conduct "deep dives" into the data were of value for improving programs and pointing out data quality concerns. Because of the in-depth analyses by researchers, another respondent indicated that their agency "received important information about the success of our programs through these partnerships."
- *Better Practice:* The ability of research partnerships to improve policies and practices and act as a means of benchmarking current policy and practice against national data and best practices was of particular value to respondents. As a respondent explained, the insight from these analyses can be used to "research a given priority in a comprehensive manner, factoring in national data and best practice."
- *Better Data:* The better insight and practices SHEEO agencies experience through research partnerships is due in part to the data improvements that come along with deep dives into PSURS data. Participants contend that "external researchers can address topics in-depth that can inform areas of interest in our agency. Their deep dives often unveil data quality concerns with [our] and other agency data that can hopefully be addressed in the future." Another respondent noted that research partners can often "provide external validity" of their state's PSURS data. By sharing PSURS data with researchers, the data, itself, is improved, thus improving the insights, practices, and goals of SHEEO agencies.

SHEEO agency research partnerships and effective use of PSURS data advance the mission of SHEEO agencies. Employing student-level data to inform policy and practice positively impacts the work of institutions and scholars in the state. Engaging in the sharing of student-level data, SHEEO agencies strengthen student and state outcomes. These partnerships also help SHEEO agencies advance their research agendas, by improving their capacity and expertise to engage in research questions and PSURS data analysis that can provide an enhanced approach to data-informed policy and decision-making.

"External researchers can address topics in-depth that can inform areas of interest in our agency. Their deep dives often unveil data quality concerns with [our] and other agency data that can hopefully be addressed in the future."

RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP BARRIERS

STRONG FOUNDATIONS 2020 ASKED:



What is the largest barrier to fulfilling student-level data research requests?

Despite the advantages of research partnerships to advance mission priorities and support agency responsibilities, respondents noted barriers to effective sharing of student-level data for research. The most cited barriers centered on issues of organizational capacity, data quality, and data privacy and security compliance.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Respondents referenced organizational capacity as the most prominent barrier to establishing and fostering data research partnerships. As a respondent noted, “Our agency does not have the capacity to analyze all the information we have.” As discussed above, that lack of capacity can be a reason to partner with educational researchers; however, the time and resources needed to sustain research partnerships can, paradoxically, strain organizational capacity. Twenty-one respondents noted capacity issues with, specifically, time (referenced by 12), staffing (referenced by eight), and resources (referenced by seven).

- *Time:* In research partnerships, SHEEO agencies are responsible for reviewing research proposals; preparing, validating, and securing data; providing technical assistance to researchers; managing MOUs and other agreements; and reviewing publications, among other tasks—all of which command time, personnel, and resources. A respondent explained the difficulty with providing “staff time to prepare and validate data and political sensitivities to data sharing - also follow-up on termination and data destruction.” As a result, they limit their number of external research partnerships.
- *Resources:* Similarly, another respondent noted that “resources for data extraction and technical support are limited. Thus, we prefer to engage in research that supports Board goals [with] proven research partners.” The consequences of limited capacity can result in a narrowing of research projects and partners and unintentionally limit new partnerships and varied research. Further, concerns about capacity are tied to concerns about mission fulfillment, as one respondent noted, “We are stewards of the data shared with us by the public postsecondary institutions. We have a responsibility to ensure the data is used well. This requires substantial capacity.” To ensure data are used well requires the personnel and time to support research partnerships.

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RESEARCHER SUPPORT

Tied to organizational capacity is the work involved in researcher support for effective use of student-level data for research. Eight respondents noted the challenge of having to educate researchers on what data are available to them, how to use the data, and the limits of data sharing.

- **Technical Assistance:** Respondents noted that researchers requesting access to PSURSSs are often unfamiliar with what data are available and how to use PSURSS data, necessitating substantial guidance in the proposal process. That guidance extends to data use once access is granted, especially to newer researchers or researchers new to projects reliant on large datasets, like those involving state PSURSSs. As one respondent noted, the assistance their SHEEO agency staff provide goes beyond preparing and sharing data, to shepherding new researchers who may be unprepared to work with large educational datasets through the research process. “There are hours of follow-up involved in explaining data fields, explaining how to link files, etc. When researchers get confounding results, time must be spent helping them figure out if what they are seeing is the result of data quality, poor analysis design, or a real finding.”
- **Communication:** In addition to providing technical support for how to use these datasets, SHEEO agencies also spend considerable time explaining to researchers the limits of what can be shared. A respondent noted that researchers do not always understand the time involved in transforming data for external use and “what is feasible/appropriate from a technical, legal, or time frame lens.” For example, SHEEO agencies may not have the student-level data or quality of data in their warehouses that researchers are interested or experienced in using. A respondent explained, “We don’t have enough clean enrollment data from all schools to calculate 6-year grad rates yet. Also, the smaller schools sometimes struggle with fulfilling our requests.” Again, organizational capacity, across the system, plays a role in the ability to support broad research partnership efforts of PSURSS data. Finally, research partnerships are governed by technical and legal compliance standards, which play a large role in SHEEO agencies’ research partnerships. As a result, another respondent stated that communication is a key component of the research partnership process to “ensure accurate use and interpretation of data.”

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PRIVACY, SECURITY, AND ETHICS CONCERNS

Concerns about privacy and security compliance were noted in 14 responses to *Strong Foundations 2020*. As we noted in SHEEO's recent paper *Privacy and Security in State Postsecondary Data Systems*,⁶ attention to data privacy and security compliance is an area of increasing focus for SHEEO agencies. As one respondent stated, "Data security and privacy are the most important work of a data office."

- *Legislative Limitations*: The commitment by agencies to adhere to federal and state privacy and security requirements, including recommendations from the U.S. Department of Education's Privacy Technical Assistance Center,⁷ often means limiting how, what, and with whom SHEEO agencies can share PSURS data. Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) compliance is the most cited reason by SHEEO agencies in *Strong Foundations 2020* for limiting the sharing of disaggregated, student-level data with researchers.⁸ Beyond FERPA concerns, some SHEEO agencies are prohibited by their state from sharing certain data. As a respondent explained, "We cannot [share student-level data], with very few exceptions. And usually only to other state agencies."
- *Balancing Priorities*: Adhering to privacy and security standards is also tied to organizational capacity constraints. As a respondent noted, they work to "preserve the balance between applicable privacy protection laws and ability to provide/report detailed data." This balance is not easy as it requires consistent adherence to a rapidly evolving legislative and technological landscape, to ensure, as a respondent noted, that "all state and federal requirements are met [and] ensure data is safeguarded."⁹ A respondent noted that the workload associated with aggregating and/or deidentifying student records to comply with FERPA can be a barrier to research partnerships; however, that they also "try to address as many questions as possible in a proactive manner through our public-facing dashboards and accountability report to reduce the need for record level data requests from third parties."

The organizational capacity, researcher support, and privacy and security standards associated with data sharing for research mean that SHEEO agencies continually reprioritize the types of research partnerships in which they engage and balance the benefits and challenges of those partnerships.

SHEEO agencies work to "preserve the balance between applicable privacy protection laws and ability to provide/report detailed data."

6. Ezeugo, E., Klein, C., & Whitfield, C. (2021). *Privacy and security in state postsecondary data systems: Strong Foundations 2020*. State Higher Education Executive Officers Association. https://postsecondarydata.sheeo.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/SHEEO_StrongFoundations_2020_PrivSec.pdf
7. PTAC. (n.d.). *Privacy and technical assistance center homepage*. <https://www.ed.gov/open/plan/privacy-technical-assistance-center>
8. Ezeugo, E., Klein, C., & Whitfield, C. (2021). *Privacy and security in state postsecondary data systems: Strong Foundations 2020*. State Higher Education Executive Officers Association https://postsecondarydata.sheeo.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/SHEEO_StrongFoundations_2020_PrivSec.pdf
9. For more information on the various legislative and technological standards associated with PSURS data privacy and security, see: Ezeugo, E., Klein, C., & Whitfield, C. (2021). *Privacy and security in state postsecondary data systems: Strong Foundations 2020*. Washington, DC: The State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO). https://postsecondarydata.sheeo.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/SHEEO_StrongFoundations_2020_PrivSec.pdf

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

SHEEO agencies are committed to using PSURS data to inform policy, programs, and outcomes. The potential for research partnerships to better inform policy and practice are vital to SHEEO agency missions and state and student outcomes. The challenges associated with establishing and sustaining effective research partnerships can hamper research partnership efforts yet they are not insurmountable. *Strong Foundations 2020* respondents noted numerous practices they have cultivated to develop mutually beneficial partnerships to leverage the opportunity and overcome the challenges in sharing data for research. Among these are establishing a shared vision, fostering trusted relationships, and incorporating continuous improvement through assessment and evaluation. To provide specific examples, SHEEO conducted supplemental interviews with staff from the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC), the University System of Georgia (USG), and the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC). The recommendations below are based on their insight and the data from *Strong Foundations 2020*.

ESTABLISH A SHARED VISION, GOALS, AND PROCESSES



Focus on organizational mission and state priorities to create a shared vision, anchor goals, and manage processes.

To effectively leverage the power of data for research within capacity constrained environments, a clear vision and process for research data projects is needed. Organizational mission and the state's mission for higher education can act as a lodestar for research partnerships. For example, the WSAC regularly works with research partners to share their "vision and agenda for tapping into the policy issues and produce knowledge that can inform and educate legislators and the public." By creating a shared vision anchored in mission-oriented principles and state priorities for improving equitable educational and career outcomes, the WSAC has leveraged their research partnerships. As a result, they expanded organizational capacity to use P20W data to inform state policy, improve student experiences and outcomes, and add value to research partnerships, so that "everyone can win."

A shared vision is also reliant upon clear goal setting and work processes. At the THEC, staff work to create space and opportunities for expectation-setting and process-norming related to research projects in their research partnership meetings. By intentionally creating time and conversations around the THEC research priorities, they can create collaborative approaches to mutually beneficial research inquiries. Similarly, the USG works to ensure that everyone involved in research partnerships "understands the goals, expectations, ground rules, and processes for making it clear how projects are going to be decided on, approval processes, etc." As their staff noted, "Having those things and shared understanding established on the front end can avoid contention in real time." Having shared vision paves the way for smoother and more effective research partnerships.

FOSTER TRUSTED RELATIONSHIPS



Invest time, interest, and expertise based on trust to build strong research collaborations and improved use of PSURS data.

Mutually beneficial partnerships rely on strong collaboration. While there is no one way to foster strong research partnerships, understanding the needs, interests, and perspectives of partners, and expressing the needs and interests of SHEEO agencies, are core aspects of building the trust to move effective work forward. Building connections and understanding through informal and formal interactions with research partners has been a key strategy for the WSAC. For example, the WSAC staff share their data interests and examples of how they are using data to inform their work. They inquire about similar interests and approaches of their partners over informal lunches, formal meetings, and presentations. By communicating SHEEO agency efforts and impacts and garnering an understanding of shared interests and goals, the WSAC is advancing research partnerships and producing joint projects that benefit the state and its stakeholders.

The benefits of participating in a trusted research partnership based on understanding and communication cannot be overstated. The THEC is engaged in research partnerships with trusted and experienced partners at state universities and agencies who are familiar with their priorities and data. Because they have a history of working with these partners and have established mutual trust by “getting to know local public institutions and researchers oriented toward SHEEO priorities,” they are able “to be less hands-on in the day-to-day work involved in research.” This is an advantage for the THEC, as they benefit from relevant research inquiries while reducing capacity constraints that come with cleaning and coding data or preparing conference presentations or journal articles. When partnerships are maximized in this way, the THEC can focus efforts “on direction setting for projects and in translating research findings into consumable reports and dashboards for state stakeholders and practitioners.” In this way, each partner in the research partnership can play to their strengths while advancing project goals and addressing organizational capacity issues.

ENGAGE IN ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING



Use ongoing assessment and feedback mechanisms to improve research partnerships and use PSURS data.

Part of mutually beneficial research partnerships is the creation of opportunities for organizational learning. These opportunities, which can happen through formal or informal reflections, assessments, and feedback, can inform future SHEEO agency research partnerships and improved use of PSURS data. For example, the USG uses feedback from research partnerships to tailor their assessment approach to their research projects. Based on prior experiences, the USG understands that timelines, outputs, and capacity can often vary depending upon the project and the research partner. The USG uses this knowledge and incorporates it into their project management, deliverable deadlines, and shared vision processes. Learning in these ways allows SHEEO agencies to better craft research partnerships and think through the various aspects of partnered work.

The THEC has engaged in partnership debriefs reviewing what has worked and how the partnership can evolve in mutually beneficial ways, sometimes building project postmortems into project outputs. This reflective assessment provides the THEC and its partners with something tangible to reference, and it allows them to consider any modifications or improvements. As a result, the THEC is able to learn from its research partnerships and apply that learning to future endeavors.

CONCLUSION

PSURS data have incredible potential to positively inform SHEEO agency priorities, policies, and practices. By engaging in PSURS research partnerships, SHEEO agencies can improve organizational capacity, insight, and practice. Accordingly, respondents in *Strong Foundations 2020* indicated that SHEEO agencies are taking advantage of these benefits through their research partnerships. However, accessing the full potential of these data and partnerships can be challenging given the reported constraints on time, personnel, and resources and the rapidly changing data security and privacy landscape. Establishing mutually beneficial partnerships that center on shared vision, trust, and learning is one means for SHEEO agencies to advance mission-oriented work and build research capacity, ultimately improving state and stakeholder outcomes.

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