SHEEO
State Higher Education Executive Officers Association

Strong Foundations 2025: Survey Toolkit

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Introduction

For more than 50 years, state agencies have used postsecondary student unit record systems (PSURSs) data to inform policy and decision-making. Since 2010 and as a part of SHEEO's State Postsecondary Data initiative, SHEEO has conducted Strong Foundations surveys and reporting of PSURSs to understand the content, capacity, and use of these systems to inform policy, support state goals, and improve student outcomes. This toolkit facilitates users' interactions with the 2025 Strong Foundations survey administration, providing insights on how to interpret and use the survey data, exploring state contexts and common challenges, sharing resources on data collection and usage, highlighting case studies from the survey results, and providing access to tangible tools for advancing data insights.

How States Use Strong Foundations

The Strong Foundations survey serves as a powerful tool for state higher education agencies to benchmark their data collection infrastructure and strategy against peer states and to convey the value and importance of postsecondary data. In 2025, forty-eight percent of respondents indicated that they use Strong Foundations survey data for peer analysis and comparison with other states and agencies, while 30% use the data to inform strategic planning and decision-making. One respondent noted that the survey is "an invaluable resource for…benchmarking the development and use of PSUR data."

Thirty-five percent of 2025 respondents reported that they use the Strong Foundations survey data to demonstrate the value of postsecondary education and its connections to workforce outcomes, while 32% use the data to communicate the importance of data linkages and governance to stakeholders. Less common, though still valuable uses of the survey data include advocating for clarification of data and definitions from the U.S. Department of Education, arguing for additional funding and support from state or federal agencies, and providing evidence and examples when working with attorneys or general counsel on policy matters.

Survey Data & Resources

Strong Foundations users can find in-depth analysis on aspects of the 2025 Strong Foundations survey and past survey analyses at the Strong Foundations page on the State Postsecondary Data website, which includes the following resources:

- Strong Foundations 2025 Dashboards allow users to explore results of the 2025 survey data, including the number of PSURSs in each state, the data elements states collect, how data are linked to other state agencies, the K-12 and workforce data elements states collect and/or link to PSURSs, and rural data definitions and collection. Users can also download the Strong Foundations state elements data set through the dashboards.
- Strong Foundations 2025 Reporting:
  - The *Insights into State Postsecondary Rural Data* report highlights the main findings among respondents on the newly implemented rural data section of the 2025 Strong Foundations survey, including the current state of postsecondary rural data, rural data

application and use, challenges and barriers to rural data collection, and policy recommendations for state agencies.

- The *Data Linkages and Access Across State Agencies* brief provides an overview of responses to the linkages and data access sections of the survey.
- The *Data Systems, Management, and Evolution in State Postsecondary Agencies* brief highlights how postsecondary agencies overseeing PSURs manage those systems, the governance and privacy structures that support them, and the investments that will shape these systems in the future.
- Two blog posts report on the North Carolina Community College System's strategic and rural innovation initiatives and an overview of the SHEEO Chief Data and Research Officers Convening in February 2026.

The Strong Foundations team is available to assist with any additional data or assessment requests for individual states. Please contact us at data@sheeo.org.

Survey Development & Administration

SHEEO staff developed the Strong Foundations 2025 survey in the spring of 2025. The instrument was constructed in partnership with an advisory board that provided state agency insight and recommendations on the most salient issues related to postsecondary data collection and use. Members of the advisory board include SHEEO staff, survey respondents from SHEEO member agencies, and postsecondary data experts.

SHEEO administered the Strong Foundations 2025 survey between April and October 2025 to state agencies responsible for collecting, storing, and managing the state's postsecondary data elements. Responding agencies completed the 45-question survey across eight sections, including a new section highlighting the availability and use of data on rural learners and institutions. In fall 2025, SHEEO validated, cleaned, and analyzed the survey results to produce the Strong Foundations reports and dashboards.

Data Privacy and Security

Since 2018, SHEEO has included a section on data privacy and security in the Strong Foundations survey. To learn more about state data privacy and security from past survey iterations, refer to SHEEO's Privacy and Security in State Postsecondary Data Systems: Strong Foundations 2020 and Privacy, Confidentiality and Security in Arkansas reports.

Data Linkages

Since its inception, Strong Foundations has focused on data access and linkages. Strong Foundations 2025 survey results are explored in the *Data Linkages and Access Across State Agencies brief*. To learn more about the data elements and linkages that are collected across states, reference SHEEO's Evolving Systems, Improving Insights, and Enduring Value: Strong Foundations 2023 report. The Strong Foundations 2010-2025 Linkages interactive dashboard allows users to view changes in linkages over time.

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