



MOVING BEYOND THE PILOT:

Sustaining the Success of the Transforming Lead Teacher Preparation Programs Through Multi-Partner Innovation Grant

SEPTEMBER 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Grantees

Grantees included the following institutions of higher education (IHEs) as principal investigators (PIs), along with several state and local partners:

California State University, Sacramento, Dr. Pia Wong;
College of Menominee Nation, Dr. Kelli Chellburg;
Georgia State University, Dr. Tonia Durden and Dr. Stacey French-Lee;
North Seattle College, Dr. Samantha Dolan;
Salish Kootenai College, Dr. Amy Burland and Leigh Ann Courville;
University of Colorado Denver, Dr. Kristie Kauerz and Dr. Diana Schaak;
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Dr. Theresa Lock; and
University of Nebraska, Dr. Julia Torquati and Lisa Knoche

About School Readiness

The Beyond the Pilot report was prepared by School Readiness Consulting (SRC). As a consulting firm focused exclusively on children from birth through third grade, SRC partners to develop and implement strategies that improve outcomes for children in school and life. SRC believes that improving early childhood and affirming the right for all children to thrive represents the greatest opportunity to create a just society.

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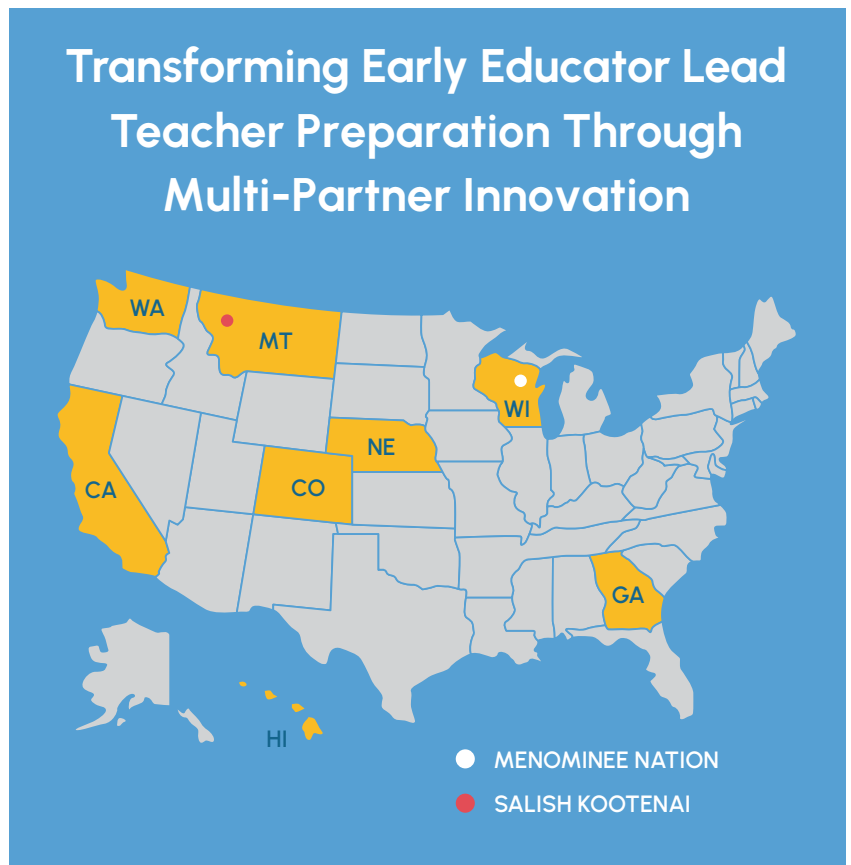
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



In 2021, the Early Educator Investment Collaborative (The Collaborative) awarded eight partnership teams the Transforming Early Educator Lead Teacher Preparation Programs Through Multi-Partner Innovation grants. Grantees led innovation pilots focused on partnerships and activities that enable recipients to overcome systemic barriers in creating and strengthening opportunities for students in their early care and education (ECE) educator preparation programs. The Collaborative subsequently partnered with School Readiness Consulting (SRC) to lead a learning and technical support community for grantees. The grantees have achieved significant milestones in their innovation pilots during the three years since this opportunity began. Now, The Collaborative, SRC, and the grantee partners reflect on the lessons learned and their implications for the broader field.



With growing national concern regarding the shortage of high-quality early educators, it is crucial to recognize the role of teacher preparation programs. Early childhood education preparation programs not only address the immediate needs of the ECE field but also have the ability to lay the foundation for a more inclusive and diverse ECE workforce. By examining the key accomplishments, innovations, and lessons learned in the pilot innovations, we can elevate strategies that remove barriers to degree completion, enhance the preparation and support of our future educators, and ultimately ensure a well-equipped workforce ready to implement high-quality and culturally sustaining experiences across the country.

Teacher preparation programs are part of the solution to the shortage of high-quality early educators. The nation’s teacher shortage is real and growing. The early childhood field faces big challenges in changing the factors that impact the ability to attract and retain excellent teachers, such as low wages, limited ongoing professional development opportunities, and inadequate resources in classroom settings.¹ Although it will take a collective effort to solve these complex issues, institutions of higher education (IHEs) are at the nexus of educational advancement, preparing future teachers to provide high-quality, culturally relevant instruction. Grantees and their partners have developed and refined strategies tailored to the diverse cultural populations of their students. IHEs are uniquely positioned to strategically advance a future teacher workforce that represents the diversity of classrooms across the country. By prioritizing culturally responsive and sustaining education in teacher preparation programs, IHEs can ensure that future teachers are supported and equipped to meet the needs of the students, families, and communities they serve.²

1. Alban, C., Belyakov, C., Decker, C., Lawrence, N., & Snyder-Fickler, E. (2024). *The Seeds of Success: Investing in Early Childhood Workforce* [Research brief]. Duke Sanford Center for Child & Family Policy. <https://childandfamilypolicy.duke.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/01/Seeds-of-Success-Research-Brief.pdf>

2. D’Andrea Martinez, P. (n.d.). *Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education*. NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. <https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/ejroc/culturally-responsive-sustaining-education>

Teacher preparation programs face unique challenges and opportunities in dismantling barriers for students seeking ECE degrees. Traditional structures inside of higher education—such as tenure, shared governance, financial models, and oversight mechanisms—while fundamental, can inadvertently perpetuate systemic inequalities.³ Entrenched processes in shared governance and resistance to change can impede quick and effective changes to the evolving needs of students, especially those with marginalized identities. Grantees have built their innovation pilots despite these challenges, leveraging multi-partner collaboration and systems change levers to advance new initiatives and strategies directly impacting current and future students. Teacher preparation programs are proactively paving the way for more inclusive and equitable academic landscapes where all students, including students of color and students for whom English is not a first language, can thrive and succeed.



There are powerful learnings from those successfully implementing systems change efforts in teacher preparation programs. Those implementing change efforts are often exclusively focused on their specific roles and lack opportunities to share lessons learned with the broader early childhood field. This report aims to provide practical lessons for leaders and implementers in teacher preparation programs by gathering insights from these diverse innovation pilots. This collective wisdom can help the field navigate complexities surrounding transforming teacher preparation programs and transition from pilot innovations to long-lasting changes—ultimately improving teacher preparation programs and creating real, enduring progress, particularly for students of color.

Grantees are in a unique position to identify the challenges and opportunities in preparing early childhood educators. As grantees have become deeply entrenched in the implementation of their work to transform teacher preparation programs, this report explores the lessons learned and considerations for sustainability by answering the following discovery questions:

What has this grant accomplished over the past three years?

Over the past three years, the Transforming Early Educator Lead Teacher Preparation Programs grant has achieved significant milestones in reimagining early childhood educator preparation. Through innovative pilots led by diverse grantee partnerships, the grant has fostered the development of culturally responsive curricula, and expanded accessible pathways to higher education. These accomplishments have improved teacher preparation and laid the groundwork for a more inclusive and diverse early childhood education workforce. By addressing systemic barriers and leveraging multi-partner collaboration, the grant has created lasting, positive impacts for students pursuing ECE degrees, ultimately ensuring that the next generation of educators is better prepared to serve the diverse needs of children and communities. This work is crucial for the future of early childhood education, as it builds a more equitable foundation for educational success and societal justice.

3. Johnson Bowles, K. (2022). Why Can't Higher Education Change? *Inside Higher Ed*. [https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/just-explain-it-me/why-can%E2%80%99t-higher-education-change#:~:text=Because%20the%20systems%2C%20traditions%20and,%2C%20and%20oversight%20\(accountability\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/just-explain-it-me/why-can%E2%80%99t-higher-education-change#:~:text=Because%20the%20systems%2C%20traditions%20and,%2C%20and%20oversight%20(accountability))

1 Comprehensive and flexible student supports are crucial to helping students attain degrees.

Several strategies were leveraged across innovation pilots to create or increase the types of support that met students where they were. Students experience a variety of challenges to entering and completing degree programs, including working full-time jobs and caring for family. This is especially true for students from underrepresented and marginalized backgrounds, whose cultural, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds are not always centered in higher education spaces and for whom lack of access to resources and rigid institutional policies make degree attainment challenging.¹ Tailoring supports helps IHEs create more inclusive and equitable environments, which enhance a student's ability to succeed personally and academically.

- Grantees removed barriers for students, starting with recruitment and admission, and redefined what is mandatory to enter higher education and demonstrate success along the way.
- Grantees employed wraparound services, acknowledging that students lead multifaceted lives and, therefore, require comprehensive, holistic solutions throughout their higher education journey.
- Grantees focused on competency-based frameworks and alignment across university systems to more effectively serve students at various stages of their careers, support the facilitation of transfer credit across institutions, and make it easier to award credit for prior learning.

2 Students and the education leaders who serve them benefit from culturally responsive and sustaining learning experiences.

Educators across the country are continually striving to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population despite the structural inequities embedded in society and within educational institutions. How these inequities show up on campuses and classrooms must be clearly understood and specifically addressed. When IHEs implement culturally responsive and sustaining education, learning environments become more inclusive and supportive, respecting students' diverse cultural and racial backgrounds. For educators and administrators, ongoing professional development focused on culturally responsive and sustaining education fosters better teaching practices, reduces biases, and promotes equity. This dual approach better provides equitable opportunities for students and builds the capacity of staff to succeed in supporting students' multiple expressions of diversity as assets for teaching and learning.

- Grantees built capacity among educators and education leaders to be effective with increasingly diverse student populations.
- Grantees supported students with comprehensive resources and teaching that keep culture at the center.
- Grantees moved beyond language access toward language justice so that students can participate equitably across IHEs.

3 Innovation can be fostered when IHEs and their partners shift to collaborative, interdisciplinary approaches.

Silos are common in IHEs, where departments often operate independently, limiting cross-disciplinary interaction and collaboration. However, by shifting mental models related to collaboration and fostering partnerships within the institution and with external interest holders,² IHEs can break down these barriers. Internal collaboration allows for the pooling of resources and expertise, while external partnerships with policymakers, the community, and state organizations bring diverse perspectives, complementary strategies, and additional resources.

- Grantees brought together diverse interest holders in effective and action-oriented spaces.
- Grantees fostered meaningful collaboration toward greater alignment and shared resources between IHEs.
- Grantees aligned their efforts with larger state and national organization expectations and standards to create greater consistency across the field.

4 IHEs can address systemic inequities in teacher preparation by centering student voices and embracing power redistribution.

Those most impacted by a system's challenges are the ones closest to the most effective and equitable solutions. When students, especially those from underrepresented groups, have a say in the decisions that affect their education, programs become more responsive and equitable. Redistribution of power ensures the inclusion of diverse perspectives, which is crucial for identifying and addressing systemic barriers that might otherwise be overlooked. To create truly inclusive and effective teacher preparation programs, IHEs should prioritize the voices and needs of students, especially those from marginalized communities. This effort involves not only listening to students' feedback but also creating spaces where their input directly influences policy and program development. By actively listening to and making space in decision-making forums for students, IHEs can foster a more collaborative and equitable environment. Ultimately, when power is shared and diverse voices are heard, teacher preparation programs can better serve all students and contribute to a more just and inclusive educational system.

- Grantees centered student and community voices in collaborative processes with educators and decision-makers to continuously improve teacher preparation programs.
- Grantees responded to top-down mandates with bottom-up reform, fostering a mindset of opportunity and abundance.





How do partnership teams move from a robust and comprehensive pilot effort to a longer-term sustainable implementation approach?

This report encapsulates valuable insights gleaned from the innovation pilots of various grantees, but it's important to acknowledge that not all lessons learned can be fully captured within these pages. Learning is a continual process that extends beyond this document. As we move forward to discuss sustainability, it's vital for grantees and others involved in transformative change to consider what comes next.

Transformative change in organizations and institutions requires dedicated capacity and resources because it involves complex and sustained efforts that go beyond routine operations. IHEs have learned the importance of having dedicated staff who are essential for conducting effective project management, addressing challenges, and ensuring the completion of tasks. Adequate resources enable ongoing communication and collaboration among IHE staff and their partners, fostering a collaborative approach to change. Furthermore, there is an opportunity for funders and other partners to provide support for learning and peer collaboration, creating environments where innovative ideas can flourish and long-term relationships are built. Such environments amplify the impact of transformational efforts. Without these dedicated resources, initiatives are likely to falter under the weight of logistical and operational demands on top of existing role requirements for IHE staff.

In order to move from a robust and comprehensive pilot effort to a longer-term sustainable implementation approach to support IHEs, efforts must do more than simply replicate the lessons learned from grantees in this report and across the country; more deliberate and intentional work is required. When the focus is on simply reproducing strategies that others found successful in a different context, deep systematic issues may never be addressed, and social problems may persist for those the initiative was intended to help and support.

INTRODUCTION



In 2021, the Early Educator Investment Collaborative (The Collaborative) awarded eight teams Transforming Teacher Preparation Programs Through Multi-Partner Innovation grants. These grantees spearheaded innovation pilots that tackled systemic barriers, enhancing opportunities for students in early care and education (ECE) educator preparation programs. The Collaborative, in partnership with School Readiness Consulting (SRC), provided ongoing learning and technical support. Over three years, the grantees reached significant milestones in their innovation pilots. The Collaborative, SRC, and their partners are now evaluating the lessons learned and their broader implications. These initiatives have significantly advanced a more inclusive and effective early education workforce.



How to Read This Report

This report is intended for a broad audience interested in innovations related to transforming early childhood teacher preparation programs. In order to support your reading, please consider the following:

Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs)

If you are a professor, researcher, or administrator who works at a college, university, or other postsecondary institution, you might be most interested in the **Lessons Learned**, **Sustainability**, and **Innovation Pilot Spotlight** sections.

AS YOU READ, CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- *What lessons learned are applicable to my IHE?*
- *What would it take to implement some of these strategies?*
- *What conditions for success does my IHE demonstrate?*



Funding Organizations

If you represent a philanthropic organization, government agency, or other entity that provides financial support for teacher preparation programs, you might be most interested in the [Process and Timeline](#), [Lessons Learned](#), and [Sustainability](#) sections.

AS YOU READ, CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- *How do these innovations and strategies demonstrate potential impact in the broader early childhood field, and how can we ensure that successful strategies are sustainable?*
- *What role do diverse partnerships, including those with higher education institutions, play in driving systemic change within early childhood education, and how can these partnerships be leveraged to amplify impact?*
- *How critical is the involvement of higher education and other systems-level actors in shaping and sustaining changes in teacher preparation, and what specific contributions can they make?*

Other Early Childhood Organizations

If you serve young children and families, support early childhood systems and capacity building, or have a connection to or interest in early childhood workforce development issues, you might be most interested in learning about the grant partnerships highlighted in the [Innovation Pilot Spotlights](#) and the [Lessons Learned](#).

AS YOU READ, CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- *How does this information challenge or affirm my understanding of early childhood teacher preparation programs?*
- *Where is there room for partnership with IHEs to support students working toward ECE degrees?*

THE OPPORTUNITY



With growing national concern regarding the shortage of high-quality early educators, it is crucial to recognize the role of teacher preparation programs. Early childhood education preparation programs not only address the immediate needs of the ECE field but also have the ability to lay the foundation for a more inclusive and diverse ECE workforce. By examining the key accomplishments, innovations, and lessons learned in the pilot innovations, we can elevate strategies that remove barriers to degree completion, enhance the preparation and support of our future educators, and ultimately ensure a well-equipped workforce ready to implement high-quality and culturally sustaining experiences across the country.

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- *What has this grant accomplished over the past three years?*
- *What lessons can be learned from the success of grantees and their partnership teams?*
- *How do partnership teams move from a robust and comprehensive pilot effort to a longer-term sustainable implementation approach?*

THE PROCESS AND TIMELINE



The following process illustrates how the grantee partnerships approached the implementation of strategies. Grantee partnerships have focused on creating lasting impacts for students pursuing ECE degrees by navigating from burgeoning ideas and solutions toward making sustainable changes. This section highlights their journey and the steps taken to achieve meaningful, enduring improvements in education, emphasizing that continuous effort is required to maintain these successes over time. Grantee partnerships have now entered the Learn and Sustain phases of this process, signaling a period of significant learning that will inform future steps. To learn more about sustainability using a tool for reflection, please see [Appendix C](#).

1. Discover

Leaders understand the challenges communities face, so they solve the right problem.

In the **DISCOVER** phase, leaders engage in active listening with communities that are intimately familiar with the challenges and solutions in the early childhood field. By prioritizing community voices, leaders gain a deep understanding of the nuanced issues at play, which allows for a more targeted approach to problem-solving.



2. Define
Leaders interpret the findings to define insights and frame opportunities.

The **DEFINE** phase involves interpreting the insights gathered from the community to identify root causes and fundamental issues in the early childhood field. Through this process, leaders assess available resources and capabilities, aligning community perspectives with practical considerations to inform strategic decision-making.

3. Co-Crete
Leaders design solutions with those most impacted by the solutions to create impactful strategies.

During the **CO-CREATE** phase, leaders collaborate closely with partners and community members to design solutions that directly address the needs of those most impacted. By fostering a participatory approach, leaders empower interest holders to co-design innovative strategies tailored to the community's unique challenges and aspirations.

4. Learn
Strategies are prototyped and tested so leaders and decision-makers learn from the process.

In the **LEARN** phase, leaders iterate selected strategies through prototyping and testing to evaluate their viability, desirability, and feasibility. This data-driven approach allows for informed decision-making as leaders measure outcomes, document successes and failures, and leverage insights to refine and improve strategies moving forward.

5. Sustain

Leaders take learnings and evolve strategies to increase effectiveness and plan for the next steps.

While sustainability is a consideration throughout every step of this process, the **SUSTAIN** phase is a distinct stage where grantee partnerships focus specifically on assessing and reinforcing the resilience of their visions, ideas, and strategies. Through this phase, implementers leverage key learnings to evolve existing strategies, ensuring long-term effectiveness and planning for continuous improvement. By embedding successful strategies, scaling impactful interventions, and transforming where necessary, leaders drive sustainable change and foster lasting positive outcomes in the early childhood field.

Transforming Early Educator Lead Teacher Preparation Programs Through Multi-Partner Innovation Grants

2020



Received **51 letters of intent** across **35 total** different states, territories, and tribal nations.



Engaged an external review committee to review applications—prioritizing applications that meaningfully serve racially, ethnically, linguistically, or socioeconomically diverse students and prepare educators for similarly diverse populations, with a special focus on lead IHEs that are minority-serving institutions (MSIs) and those partnering with two-year community colleges.

2021



Awarded innovation grants to six recipients: California State University, Sacramento; College of Menominee Nation; Georgia State University; North Seattle College; University of Colorado Denver; University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

Innovation grants went to partnerships that included IHEs (four-year and two-year), state/tribal policy agencies, and community partners.

2022



Announced two additional award recipients: Salish Kootenai College and University of Nebraska.



Partnered with School Readiness Consulting to develop a learning community to foster peer learning and collective problem-solving.

2022–2024

The learning community engaged in a number of learning and connection opportunities for knowledge sharing and peer learning.



5 Webinars



10 Learning Sessions with office hours and direct connections to experts from the early childhood field



By the Numbers

NEARLY

\$15.7 MILLION



IN GRANTS ACROSS
8 PARTNERSHIPS
MOSTLY TO MSIs

NEARLY

3,100 DEGREES



ATTAINED

Includes AA and BA degrees, Child Development Associate [CDA] credentials, and state-issued certifications

100 PARTNERS
ENGAGED TO SUPPORT
COLLABORATION
AND THE SUCCESS OF
INNOVATIVE GRANTS

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE DIVERSITY OF GRANTEE IHEs

- » Innovation grants span five tribal nations and/or Indigenous student populations.
- » Two institutions are Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander–serving institutions (AANAPISIs).⁶
- » Grantee IHEs have diverse student bodies, with students who speak more than 29 languages and dialects.



INCLUDING (BUT NOT LIMITED TO):

Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin, Hmong, Vietnamese, Punjabi, Somali, Hawaiian, Ho-Chunk, Omaha, Oromo, Hawaiian Creole, Tagalog, Ilocano, Japanese, Cantonese, Samoan, Korean, Marshallese, Ukrainian, Salish, Lummi, Nooksack, Lushootseed, S'Klallam, Kootenai, Cheyenne, and Crow

GRANTEE PARTNERSHIPS



CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO



Key Accomplishments

[WATCH INNOVATION VIDEO](#)

The Universities and Partners Learning, Innovating, Fostering Equity, Transforming California ECE Degrees (UP-LIFT CA) innovation pilot utilizes partnerships to achieve a shared vision: to improve preparation for early childhood educators and diversify California's workforce of early educators. Key accomplishments include:

- Developing a shared competency framework that aligns existing coursework to ECE teaching performance expectations across each campus
- Strengthening curriculum by expanding coursework that promotes culturally responsive teaching practices
- Piloting an observation-based competency assessment tool and complementary guidance to measure dual language learner teacher competencies and development of guidance to support these competencies
- Developing institution-wide recruitment strategies aimed at building upon an already diverse student body
- Creating collaborative learning opportunities to support faculty members and teacher preparation programs in understanding and implementing the PK-3 Early Childhood Education Specialist Instruction credential

Partnerships

Sacramento City College

Cosumnes River College

California Polytechnic University

California State University, Bakersfield

California State University, Pomona

Bakersfield College

Taft College

Partnerships for Education, Articulation, and Coordination through Higher Education

Early Childhood Educators representing California's Community College system

Early Edge California

California State University Chancellor's Office

CSU's Educator Quality Office (EdQ)

California Commission on Teacher Credentialing

Curriculum Alignment Project

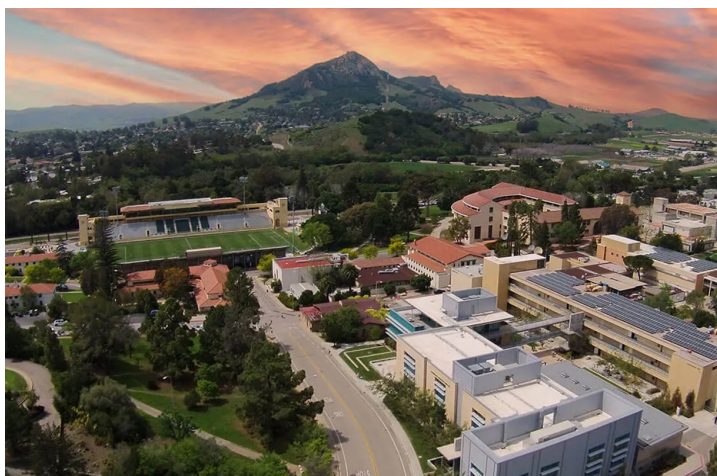
Community-based ECE providers and districts

Clinical partner(s)

An Innovative Practice

UP-LIFT CA focused on building an early childhood workforce that represents the children and families within California communities.

[WATCH VIDEO](#)



COLLEGE OF MENOMINEE NATION



Key Accomplishments

The College of Menominee Nation’s innovation pilot created many opportunities to implement more culturally responsive programming and practices that are deeply connected to American Indian culture. Key accomplishments include:

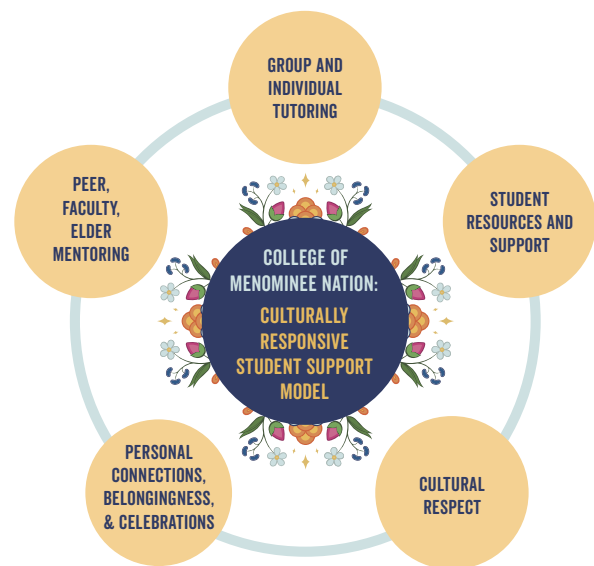
- Implementing a Culturally Responsive Student Support Model that provides culturally responsive induction and comprehensive supports for students to promote wellness, educational success, and retention
- Integrating culturally responsive activities and assessments into the curriculum to better serve the student community
- Partnering with leaders across tribal education, Head Start, and immersion programs to meet ongoing educational needs and provide professional development opportunities for students



Dr. Lauren “Dr. Candy” Waukau Villagomez

Faculty Member / Teacher Education Program and Menominee Elder

COLLEGE OF MENOMINEE NATION



An Innovative Practice

The College of Menominee Nation’s innovation pilot created a sense of community for students that honors and validates the Native experience.

[WATCH VIDEO](#)



Partnerships

- Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin
- Menominee Indian Head Start
- Menominee Indian Day Care
- Menominee’s Immersion Teacher Training Program
- Lac Courte Orielles Ojibwe University
- Wisconsin Early Childhood Association
- Edgewood College



Key Accomplishments

Supporting Early Educator's Development (Project SEED) is an effort that provides an innovative, fully funded teacher preparation experience for professionals interested in earning a degree in birth–five (B–5) education. Key accomplishments include:

- Providing comprehensive, wraparound supports through mentorship and academic coaching, as well as financial resources to alleviate barriers related to pursuing education
- Partnering to remove barriers to admission, particularly related to prerequisite credits and entry examinations
- Establishing a culturally relevant professional development institute and network for mentor teachers, ECE leaders and providers, and principals supporting Project SEED teachers

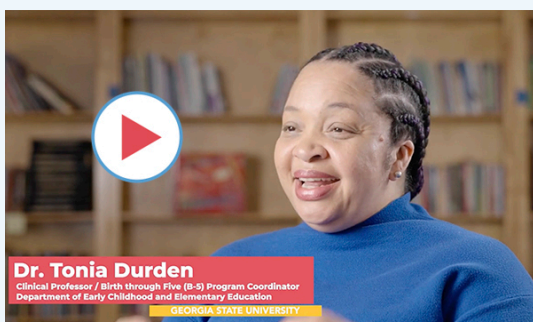


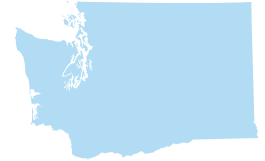
Partnerships

Georgia's Professional Standards Commission (GAPSC)
Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG)
Georgia's Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL)
United Way of Greater Atlanta
Atlanta Public Schools
YMCA of Metro Atlanta

An Innovative Practice

Project SEED attributed its student success and retention to its grounding ideology of supporting students beyond the classroom.





Key Accomplishments

North Seattle College created multiple and accessible opportunities for current and future teachers to obtain higher education, particularly for its multilingual students. Key accomplishments include:

- Establishing the first early childhood bachelor's degree program in the United States taught entirely in Spanish
- Developing a credit-bearing, community-based program that meets the requirement of a 12-credit certificate toward an ECE degree
- Creating more flexibility for students to obtain ECE certificates through amending an institutional "residency requirement" and redesigning barrier classes (such as math and English) to make courses more accessible
- Designing adoptable course shells for the statewide common courses that make up the initial ECE certificate in Spanish and Somali, as well as supporting existing efforts to do the same for Mandarin and Arabic



An Innovative Practice

North Seattle College is an open-access educational institution, meaning that courses are open to all members of the community. North Seattle's student population consists of many working professionals, the average age being 43 years old. The student body is also extremely diverse, and the ECE Department is committed to highlighting the strengths and assets of its diverse student body in its innovation pilot efforts.⁷

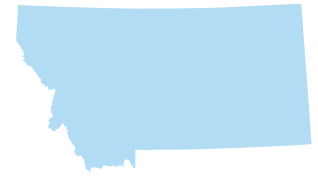
[WATCH VIDEO](#)

Partnerships

- The Washington Department of Children, Youth, and Families
- The Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Council
- Basic and Transitional Studies Department
- The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges
- Eastern Washington University
- Columbia Basin College
- Big Bend College
- Skagit Valley
- Yakima Valley
- Imagine Institute
- Child Care Aware of Washington
- Seattle Public Schools in the Academy for Rising Educators
- Chinese Information and Service Center
- Bainum Family Foundation
- The University of Washington
- My Brother's Teacher
- Voices of Tomorrow
- Seattle College's Foundation



SALISH KOOTENAI COLLEGE



Key Accomplishments

Salish Kootenai College is leading a collaborative effort to strengthen its robust, rigorous, and uniquely integrative Indigenous Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Program and increasing the coordination of state agencies focused on early care and education, tribal language revitalization, and gaps in services for tribal nations. Key accomplishments include:

- Expanding the ECE workforce and streamlining pathways to degree completion for full-time students, as well as developing advanced educational programs (such as the Curriculum and Instruction MEd) that incorporate cultural, linguistic, and instructional expertise
- Integrating Indigenous languages (Salish); early literacy; and Science, Math, Engineering, and Technology (STEM) to create a uniquely blended educational approach
- Partnering with local nonprofits, state and local agencies, and tribal leaders to elevate the needs of tribal communities while also advocating for language and cultural preservation
- Elevating tribal voices to the state level through the work of a Tribal Policy Coordinator



Partnerships

Chief Dull Knife College/Northern Cheyenne Head Start (Lame Deer, MT)

Flathead Valley Community College (Kalispell, MT)

Northwest Indian College (Bellingham, WA)

Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribal Early Childhood Services (Flathead Indian Reservation, Pablo, MT)

Montana Zero to Five

Fort Peck Community College

Little Bighorn College

Raise Montana

National American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start Collaboration Office

An Innovative Practice

With Native Americans traditionally underrepresented in higher education, the Indigenous Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Program centered the Native American student experience to encourage Indigenous learning and empower Native students with the resources and supports to strengthen themselves from within.

[WATCH VIDEO](#)





Key Accomplishments

The Colorado Higher Education Consortium, led by the University of Colorado, Denver, has utilized partnership and collaboration across IHEs statewide to influence changes across the ECE workforce. Key accomplishments include:

- Creating a learning consortium of four 4-year IHEs alongside the entire community college system across the state to foster collaboration and solve issues related to curriculum alignment and enhancements, as well as expanding access to degrees and degree alternatives
- Developing partnerships with local organizations to create a mentor community that recruits community-based working professionals into degree programs and supports students' practicum and teacher residency experiences
- Creating and funding an ECE Workforce Policy position within the Department of Higher Education to enhance higher education's influence in ECE workforce policy discussions and to bridge the gap between two distinct early childhood teacher preparation and credentialing systems managed by separate state agencies

Partnerships

Office of Governor Jared Polis

Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE)

Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC)

Colorado Community College System (CCCS)

Colorado's Council of Deans of Education (CCODE)

Early Childhood Higher Education Partnership (ECHEP)

University of Northern Colorado (UNC)

Metropolitan State University Denver (MSU)

University of Colorado, Colorado Springs (UCCS)

Westminster Public Schools

Ignacio School District

Pueblo Community College

Trinidad State College

Northeastern Community College

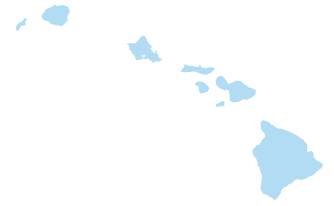
San Luis Valley Early Childhood Council



An Innovative Practice

Partners in Colorado helped their state's early childhood system deepen its engagement with the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE). The grant funded a new Early Childhood Workforce Policy Director at CDHE, facilitating collaboration with other higher education initiatives. A key legislative priority was to make industry credentials credit-bearing and applicable to degree programs. Consequently, the CDA can now be credited at all public colleges and universities in Colorado.

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I AT MĀNOA



Key Accomplishments [WATCH INNOVATION VIDEO](#)

The ECE³ Project at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's College of Education transformed its teacher preparation and career pathways programs, focusing on alignment and cultural responsiveness, while placing Hawai'i's values, diversity, and community-based strengths at the heart of its efforts. Key accomplishments include:

- Updating and aligning coursework with national performance standards in the field to incorporate equitable teaching practices and help students to enter the profession feeling confident and prepared
- Providing an intensive, yearlong professional development experience for faculty, Ho'āla Hou, which is meant to reenvision and align teaching and curriculum with Hawaiian culture and traditions, ultimately supporting student success and degree completion
- Fostering partnerships to create high-quality, clinically based field experiences that allow students to gain practical teaching experience in Kamehameha Schools' Nā Kula Kamali'i preschool program across four Hawaiian islands
- Funding a statewide workforce compensation study to build shared understanding about potential policy recommendations to inform advocacy and legislative efforts for increased compensation for the ECE workforce

Partnerships

Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL)

Early Learning Board (ELB)

Hawai'i Department of Education (DOE)

Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB)

Hawai'i Department of Human Services (DHS)
Child Care Program

Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) Early Intervention
Services (EIS)

UHCCs ECE Programs

Chaminade University

Hawai'i Careers with Young Children (HCYC)

Hawai'i Association for the Education of Young Children
(HiAEYC)

Head Start Association of Hawai'i (HSAH)

Kamehameha Schools (KS)

People Attentive to Children (PATCH)

Hawai'i Children's Action Network (H-CAN)/Hawai'i's Early
Childhood Advocacy Alliance (HECAA)

Early Childhood Action Strategy (ECAS)

Keiki O Ka Aina Family Learning Centers (KOKA-FLC)

Counties of Maui, Kaua'i, Honolulu, Hawai'i

Kia Ika Ike (coalition of preschool directors)

P-20 Hawai'i (P-20)

Learning to Grow (LTG)

County Early Childhood Coordinators in the Counties of
Maui, Kaua'i, Honolulu, and Hawai'i

Hawai'i Lieutenant Governor's Ready Keiki Initiative

Hawai'i State Legislators

Samuel N. & Mary Castle Foundation

Hawai'i Community Foundation (HCF)

An Innovative Practice

Through collaboration and communication efforts, the ECE³ Project facilitated partnerships that created innovative change in the IHE system across the state.

[WATCH VIDEO](#)



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA



Key Accomplishments

The Responsive Equitable System for Preparing Early Childhood Teachers (RESPECT) Across Nebraska innovation pilot focused on building a culturally sustaining, strengths-based framework designed to generate multiple pathways for both traditional and nontraditional students to achieve their educational goals across multiple campuses. Key accomplishments include:

- Creating a shared competency-based framework that defines and aligns common expectations for educator preparation, credentialing, and licensing across all early childhood settings to better serve students at every stage of their careers
- Utilizing a community-based participatory research approach that cultivates authentic community partnerships and ensures that the competency-based curriculum and pathways are implemented in ways that are contextually grounded and culturally sustaining (“Nothing about us without us”)
- Building accessible pathways and supports to ensure that all members of Nebraska’s early childhood workforce have equitable opportunities to earn bachelor’s degrees and teaching certifications in early childhood education



Partnerships

Buffett Early Childhood Fund
Buffett Early Childhood Institute
Nebraska Association for the Education of Young Children (NeAEYC)
Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
Nebraska Department of Education
First Five Nebraska
Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Early Learning Connections
Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative
Educare

Chadron State College
University of Nebraska—Kearny
University of Nebraska—Omaha
University of Nebraska Medical Center
Nebraska Indian Community College
Little Priest Tribal College
Metro Community College in Omaha
Central Community College
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

An Innovative Practice

The RESPECT Across Nebraska innovation pilot prioritizes building the trust of the community and allowing their voice to guide this effort.

[WATCH VIDEO](#)



IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD



Through these innovation pilots, The Collaborative aimed to elevate the ECE workforce, break down systemic barriers in higher education for early educator Indigenous students and students of color, and promote professional compensation for a workforce frequently paid unjust wages. In the years since its inception, grantees have worked to remove systemic barriers by fostering environments where innovations can embed themselves deeply into the fabric of teacher preparation programs.

Grantees have shared significant lessons learned in the past three years of planning and implementing their innovation pilots. These lessons learned apply to policies and practices that impact not only students but staff, education leaders, and administrators across their higher education institutions. The commonality of these lessons learned underscores the importance of relationships, power dynamics, and mental models as foundational elements driving impactful changes in policies, practices, and resource allocation. These insights, rooted in the systems change framework shared in the [2023 Strategies for Systems Change report](#), illuminate the interconnected strategies necessary for sustainable change and emphasize the collaborative efforts required to dismantle barriers and foster meaningful transformation within IHEs and beyond.



Lessons Learned

1 Comprehensive and flexible student supports are crucial to helping students attain degrees.

Several strategies were leveraged across innovation pilots to create or increase the types of support that met students where they were. Students experience a variety of challenges to entering and completing degree programs, including working full-time jobs and caring for family. This is especially true for students from underrepresented and marginalized backgrounds, whose cultural, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds are not always centered in higher education spaces and for whom lack of access to resources and rigid institutional policies make degree attainment challenging.⁸ Tailoring supports helps IHEs create more inclusive and equitable environments, which enhance a student's ability to succeed personally and academically.

- Grantees removed barriers for students, starting with recruitment and admission, and redefined what is mandatory to enter higher education and demonstrate success along the way.
- Grantees employed wraparound services, acknowledging that students lead multifaceted lives and, therefore, require comprehensive, holistic solutions throughout their higher education journey.
- Grantees focused on competency-based frameworks and alignment across university systems to more effectively serve students at various stages of their careers, support the facilitation of transfer credit across institutions, and make it easier to award credit for prior learning.

Grantees learned that one-size-fits-all supports do not meet the needs of diverse students with diverse experiences. By listening to students, grantees identified the most common barriers for their most marginalized students and worked with relevant partners to be more responsive to the needs of their population. For example, Georgia State University's Project SEED realized that significant logistical and financial barriers prevent students from entering the early childhood program and completing their degrees. To eliminate these barriers, the grantee collaborated with the consortium of University System of Georgia partners to look closely at institutional transfer agreements to ensure they are equitable in an effort to streamline prerequisite courses and eliminate barriers in the student admission process. These updates mean transfer students are often program-ready in less than a semester—compared with the previous one to two years of coursework needed before the creation of the Associate of Science degree—increasing encouragement and retention. In addition, grantees in Georgia, Wisconsin, and Washington, as well as others, knew that barriers for students aren't limited to admissions: students have a variety of needs as they often work full-time and take care of children and other family members. To support students, Project SEED offsets financial concerns by eliminating the financial burden and challenge of tuition and fees while also providing up to \$500 per semester to aid students with such costs as book purchases, lost funds for leaving work early, childcare expenses, and transportation costs. The College of Menominee Nation, North Seattle College, and the University of Nebraska are deploying mentors to support the culturally specific needs of their diverse student populations.



Being responsive to students in eliminating barriers to the admission process and providing resources to support their financial well-being is one step toward alleviating students' challenges; however, once students are enrolled and begin their coursework, challenges related to past experiences and credit hours, degree options, and pathways could lead to student confusion, overwhelm, or burden with an overload of requirements. To eliminate this barrier, many grantees took steps to reimagine how students can advance their careers with degree and certificate options, transfer options, alignment of competency frameworks, and alignment across university systems. For example, Salish Kootenai College realized the need for students to advance toward a degree in manageable steps and created a one-year early childhood certificate as a stackable credential for those beginning their ECE pathway. In Hawai'i, there was a need to clarify and improve alignment of ECE career pathways from high school to continued education. The ECE³ Alliance at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa has developed and piloted an infant-toddler certificate pathway, updated early childhood program administration courses, and worked with partners to create a statewide Bachelor's in Education in ECE birth-through-age-eight program.

The steps taken in these examples, and others, were successful because grantees were committed to **removing barriers for students, particularly for students of color, by uncovering systemic inequities and taking decisive action**. Entrenched and pervasive disparities are embedded within institutions' policies, practices, resources, and cultural norms. Uncovering systemic inequities is the first step toward addressing them and involves recognizing both the historical and current barriers facing students, particularly students of color and Indigenous students. This requires a strong equity framework that recognizes students' realities and activates a desire to meet those needs.



“
We really do have a responsibility to figure out ways in which we can create social service resources for our teachers so they can pursue not only advanced educational opportunities, but also sustain their life as it relates to taking care of their families, taking care of themselves, having a livable wage. If we are really invested in children and therefore the teachers that teach these children, then we have to think about wraparound services that are unique and that are supportive just for our workforce.”

– DR. TONIA DURDEN,
Georgia State University

2 Students and the education leaders who serve them benefit from culturally responsive and sustaining learning experiences.

Educators across the country are continually striving to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population despite the structural inequities embedded in society and within educational institutions. How these inequities show up on campuses and classrooms must be clearly understood and specifically addressed. When IHEs implement culturally responsive and sustaining education, learning environments become more inclusive and supportive, respecting students' diverse cultural and racial backgrounds. For educators and administrators, ongoing professional development focused on culturally responsive and sustaining education fosters better teaching practices, reduces biases, and promotes equity. This dual approach better provides equitable opportunities for students and builds the capacity of staff to succeed in supporting students' multiple expressions of diversity as assets for teaching and learning.

- Grantees built capacity among educators and education leaders to be effective with increasingly diverse student populations.
- Grantees supported students with comprehensive resources and teaching that keep culture at the center.
- Grantees moved beyond language access toward language justice so that students can participate equitably across IHEs.

What Is Language Justice?

Typically language is thought about in terms of access, which encompasses the laws and policies that guarantee people access to written, verbal, or visual materials or services in their preferred languages. Language justice goes beyond access, representing an evolving framework based on the notion of respecting every individual's fundamental language rights—to be able to communicate, understand, and be understood in the language they prefer and in which they feel most articulate and powerful.⁹



Higher education as a whole is becoming increasingly racially diverse; however, less than 28% of full-time faculty identify as people of the global majority/Black, Indigenous, and people of color (PGM/BIPOC).¹⁰ As IHEs increasingly serve students who have historically lacked equitable access to higher education, grantees identified the need to continuously support both students and the educators and leaders who serve them. For example, Project SEED offered ongoing professional development for mentor teachers, site placement principals, and directors, while ECE³ piloted a professional learning community for mentor teachers who serve practicum students. Supporting teachers in working with diverse groups of students enhances teachers' ability to meet students' unique needs and create inclusive and effective learning environments, leading to improved educational outcomes and equity.

IHEs demonstrated the importance of recognizing and keeping students' identities and cultures at the center so that these supports have a meaningful impact, reinforcing the importance of relationships and intentional connections across IHEs and partners. In Hawai'i, 77.6% of the state's population identifies as PGM/BIPOC, so there is a need to ground the state's early childhood workforce system of support in diversity and community-based assets. ECE³'s theory of improvement

centers on Keiki (children) and Ohana (family), and the grantee's approach includes the voices of current and prospective students in the ECE teacher degree pipeline. In Wisconsin, the College of Menominee Nation was chartered by the Menominee people but now serves more than 83 tribes. In order to serve Indigenous students well, the grantee created programming and policies that support Indigenous students. These efforts have included hiring an Indigenous wellness director who focuses on the impact of healing for the Indigenous community, connecting students to ancestral practices, and creating culturally responsive induction supports that provide students with a strong foundation of traditional teaching and understanding alongside course content. And while grantees across innovation pilots are increasing culturally responsive and sustaining resources, they are also infusing these practices into teaching. In California, students receive specific training focused on best practices in dual language learner teaching, antiracist teaching practices, and high-quality online learning. UPLIFT-CA provides enriching teacher learning experiences through a combination of culturally responsive curricula, collaborative supervision, online learning, and opportunities to teach in various early childhood settings.



Grantees have learned the importance of centering the most marginalized identities to create increasingly accessible and equitable teacher preparation environments. While this effort starts by listening to the needs and experiences of current and future students, it also requires action on the challenges and barriers raised to increase accessibility. For example, North Seattle knew that classes exclusively taught in English were limiting the college's student population who speak over five languages including Arabic, Somali, Mandarin, Oromo, and Spanish. Its current student population is approximately 50% Spanish speaking. To better serve students, North Seattle expanded the Early Childhood Education Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS) to offer a version taught entirely in Spanish, making it the first early childhood bachelor's degree program in the United States available in Spanish. For tribal colleges, language justice means the preservation of Native language. For this reason, Salish Kootenai College has developed a Native Language Educator degree program to meet the critical need for Native language teachers who are both working toward fluency in Native languages and skilled in teaching. This program emphasizes educational practices that sustain and revitalize language and culture, including practicum experiences in which teacher candidates engage in hands-on Indigenous teaching techniques. By providing comprehensive resources, focusing on language justice, and building capacity among educators and leaders, IHEs provide students with all the resources they need to learn to their full potential, and IHEs affirm their belief in students' ability and worth, as well as the IHEs' high expectations for students.

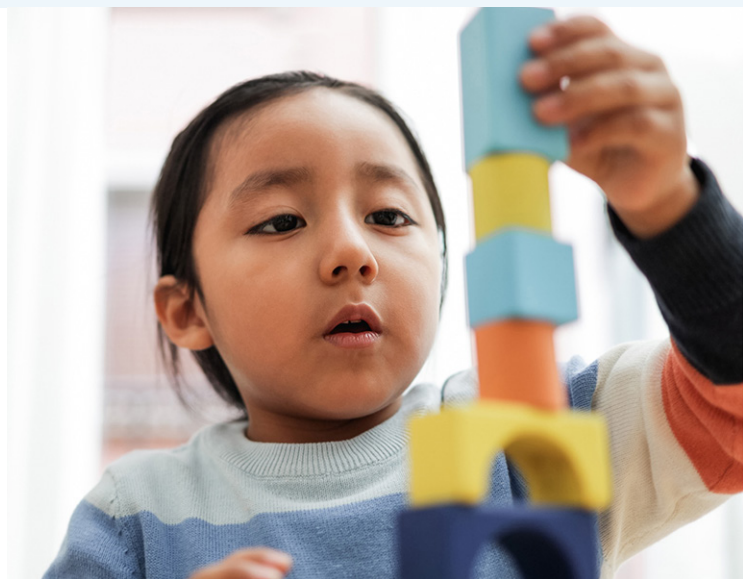
The efforts in these examples, and others, were successful because grantees **recognized the integral role of IHEs in creating a more diverse and representative field of early educators** by implementing culturally responsive and sustaining education. By building capacity among educators and education leaders and by meeting students' specific needs with comprehensive services, grantees have enhanced their effectiveness with increasingly diverse student populations. These efforts address structural inequities, enhance accessibility, and promote equity, ultimately leading to a diverse, representative, and effective ECE workforce.

“ I think one of the unique things about Salish Kootenai is that as a tribal college, we often are leading the way in what we’re doing and serving our tribal populations because we approach education in a different way. We invest in our students and see who they are, their unique characteristics, and the strengths that they bring. Our students face a lot of obstacles, but they really come with a lot of resilience. There’s always a way to connect with students and make them feel seen and heard. ”

– LEANNE COURVILLE, Salish Kootenai College

3 Innovation can be fostered when IHEs and their partners shift to collaborative, interdisciplinary approaches.

Silos are common in IHEs, where departments often operate independently, limiting cross-disciplinary interaction and collaboration. However, by shifting mental models related to collaboration and fostering partnerships within the institution and with external interest holders,¹¹ IHEs can break down these barriers. Internal collaboration allows for the pooling of resources and expertise, while external partnerships with policymakers, community, and state organizations bring diverse perspectives, complementary strategies, and additional resources.



- Grantees brought together diverse interest holders in effective and action-oriented spaces.
- Grantees fostered meaningful collaboration toward greater alignment and shared resources between IHEs.
- Grantees aligned their efforts with larger state and national organization expectations and standards to create greater consistency across the field.

Across innovation pilots, grantee partnerships such as the ECE³ Alliance in Hawai‘i, RESPECT Across Nebraska, and Colorado University Consortium have systematically built relationships with partners on and outside their campuses in order to foster greater collaboration. These partners range from community colleges and early childhood teacher preparation programs to state agencies, policymakers, and philanthropic organizations. For instance, UPLIFT-CA has established statewide network partnerships with clinical partners to support practitioners, fostered intersegmental campus partnerships to aid transfer students from community colleges, and hosted statewide communities of practice with representatives from various campuses. Innovation pilots have demonstrated how internal partnerships have led to significant policy and practice changes. For example, North Seattle College amended residency requirements, RESPECT Across Nebraska removed credentialing barriers for tribal students, and Project SEED restructured advising supports to provide tailored advising to students earlier in their higher education journey. In Colorado, partners strengthened faculty relationships across institutions of higher education to remove barriers to degree completion. They developed shared Credit for Prior Learning and Prior Learning Assessments, now available statewide.



Grantees have not only increased collaboration inside and outside of their IHEs but also aligned with national standards and expectations to create greater consistency across the field. In 2022, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing created a new teaching credential for prekindergarten through third grade in California. UPLIFT-CA collaborated with CSUs, local community colleges, state agencies, and ECE providers to align early childhood curriculum with state standards. Grantees are also aligning to and building on national organizations' expectations and standards, such as the [NAEYC Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators](#), creating greater consistency across the field. The College of Menominee Nation and RESPECT Across Nebraska have adopted and built upon these frameworks to meet diverse needs and uphold high standards, demonstrating the potential for leveraging existing models of success. This alignment ensures that ECE teacher preparation programs not only are culturally responsive but also adhere to high-quality standards that prepare students effectively for their careers.

The efforts in these examples, and others, were successful because grantees **built trust among decision-makers with bold leadership, enabling them to work together in collaborative and integrative ways**. Navigating the landscape of transformative change presents unique challenges for early childhood leaders. Ensuring equitable participation and fostering engagement around the collaborative tables are crucial first steps. Increased trust fosters a shift from siloed thinking to a shared understanding of the system's challenges. By investing in authentic relationship building, leaders can break down barriers and

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And in the early childhood education world, we're including the Commission on Teacher Credentialing, the State Board of Education, and Health and Human Services, which is where many of the early childhood education programs are administered. So this work can't happen without partnerships. We have been very intentional in trying to create partnerships that make sure that our earliest learners have the most high-quality experience possible and fully embrace and build on their diversity as we seek to educate them. ”

– DR. PIA WONG, CSU Sacramento

empower collective ownership of solutions. Leaders can effectively navigate the inevitable ups and downs of transformative work by implementing strategies that build trust, address power dynamics, and manage shifting accountabilities. While demanding, successful collaboration harnesses the collective power of partners to achieve a greater impact than individual efforts could. By fostering genuine collaboration and aligning with national standards, IHEs have created robust support systems that address the diverse needs of their student populations. By prioritizing collaboration, resource sharing, and adherence to high standards, IHEs can significantly impact the early childhood education field, ensuring a diverse, well-prepared workforce that meets the needs of all students.

4 IHEs can address systemic inequities in teacher preparation by centering student voices and embracing power redistribution.

Those most impacted by a system's challenges are the ones closest to the most effective and equitable solutions. When students, especially those from underrepresented groups, have a say in the decisions that affect their education, programs become more responsive and equitable. Redistribution of power ensures the inclusion of diverse perspectives, which is crucial for identifying and addressing systemic barriers that might otherwise be overlooked. To create truly inclusive and effective teacher preparation programs, IHEs should prioritize the voices and needs of students, especially those from marginalized communities. This effort involves not only listening to students' feedback but also creating spaces where their input directly influences policy and program development. By actively listening to and making space in decision-making forums for students, IHEs can foster a more collaborative and equitable environment. Ultimately, when power is shared and diverse voices are heard, teacher preparation programs can better serve all students and contribute to a more just and inclusive educational system.



- **Grantees centered student and community voices in collaborative processes with educators and decision-makers to continuously improve teacher preparation programs.**
- **Grantees responded to top-down mandates with bottom-up reform, fostering a mindset of opportunity and abundance.**

Grantees across innovation pilots have learned that educators, students, and decision-makers all have a role in improving teacher preparation programs. This process starts with centering student and community voices: although students and communities are traditionally overlooked, they are actually closest to the challenges and therefore best positioned to serve as co-creators of solutions, programs, and policies. Engaging students and communities isn't just a set of activities but instead is an intentional way of communicating and decision-making that is rooted in relationship building and power-sharing. For this reason, IHEs have learned that they must enact a comprehensive approach, creating practices and institutionalized mechanisms that share power with and vest decision-making control in students and communities. This approach is exemplified by North Seattle's student-informed liberatory design process for math courses, which centered the experiences of PGM/BIPOC and multilingual providers to uplift solutions from those closest to the challenges. Grantees are also engaging in community-based participatory research partnerships, as seen with RESPECT Across Nebraska, which uses focus



groups, interviews, and PhotoVoice to highlight community strengths and gather ideas about early childhood experiences, emphasizing “nothing about us without us.” Students have a deep and intimate knowledge of their educational environment, as well as scientific, technical, historical, and cultural insights. When these perspectives are shared and incorporated into decision-making, IHEs become better informed, more confident, and better able to meet diverse needs. Trust is built by establishing communicative relationships between the institution and its students, who can then see how they played a role in achieving positive outcomes.

Grantees know that bringing students to decision-making spaces is not enough to ensure transformative and sustainable progress. Educators and decision-makers must also leverage their locus of control and sphere of influence to drive these improvements. Responding to top-down mandates with bottom-up reforms, grantees have emphasized an “all staff” approach, supporting students, staff, and leadership to envision stronger early childhood teacher preparation programs. Grantees in Hawai‘i and California learned that collective efforts among IHEs can lead to greater impact. Instead of viewing other institutions as competitors, they see one another as collaborators working toward a shared goal. This mindset fosters partnerships and encourages the pooling of resources for more substantial and sustained change. Such a reciprocal approach helps IHEs respond to statewide policies impacting teacher certification, credentialing, and increased funding while fostering greater collaboration with those closest to implementation when building and supporting workforce systems. This approach can also be seen in how grantees worked inside their IHEs, ensuring that department leadership was included while implementers continuously refined practice based on the feedback from interest holders.

“ [RESPECT Across Nebraska] is a project where everybody’s welcome. It’s not just tokenism where we have bodies of color in the meeting, but it’s actually, these are the voices that need to be elevated. So everybody else, be quiet, and let’s hear what they have to say. ”

– DR. ALEXA EUNICE COOK, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

The efforts in these examples, and others, were successful because grantees understood that sustainable, transformative change requires a multifaceted approach that engages individuals across all levels of decision-making and implementation. Effective leadership is crucial for crafting strategies and policies that drive change, yet it must be complemented by those who possess the practical skills and understanding necessary for implementation. Leaders often articulate the vision and set the direction, and their sustained, energetic commitment can help to mobilize and empower, but the implementers are the ones who translate that vision into tangible actions on the ground. This collaboration ensures that initiatives are not only well conceived but also effectively realized, fostering a more inclusive and resilient framework for sustainable progress. Moreover, involving diverse voices and perspectives at all levels of decision-making cultivates a more comprehensive understanding of the complex challenges at hand, leading to more informed and impactful solutions. Including marginalized identities, particularly people of the global majority, in leadership and implementation roles ensures that the unique challenges and strengths of these communities are recognized and addressed. This inclusivity enriches the decision-making process, bringing forth innovative ideas and perspectives that might otherwise be overlooked. More effective and sustainable ways of change will emerge by creating a multifaceted process built upon relationship building, trust, respect, and affirmation of community knowledge and power.

**“
Higher ed as a field is no longer
seen as a stagnant, unresponsive
bureaucracy, but as a nimble,
innovative partner in advancing
the early childhood workforce.
Again, this is about higher ed
as a field, not as individual
institutions. As a result, this
allowed additional funding, in the
form of scholarships and other
seed funding for innovations, to
flow to IHEs across the state to
support degree attainment. ”**

**– DR. KRISTI KAUERZ,
University of Colorado Denver**





SUSTAINABILITY

This report encapsulates valuable insights gleaned from the innovation pilots of various grantees, but it's important to acknowledge that not all lessons learned can be fully captured within these pages. Learning is a continual process that extends beyond this document. Similarly, efforts to promote the sustainability of the grantees' work have been a continual process as part of this pilot grant. Issues and ideas related to sustainability were consistently raised in the learning community space, which included sessions with guest experts who provided insights on creating resilient and adaptive strategies. Additionally, preparing for the videos featured in this report helped grantees identify their target audience and key messaging, ensuring their work was communicated effectively to those who could help sustain and scale their efforts. This comprehensive approach ensured that sustainability was not just a final phase but a continual consideration throughout the grant process.

From the outset of the grant, sustainability was a central focus, and it was discussed and strategized to ensure the long-term impact of the initiatives. Activities promoting sustainability were embedded into the proposed actions of the grantees, emphasizing the necessity of building sustainable practices in every stage of implementation. Grantees' efforts toward sustainability included dedicated capacity and resources, culturally responsive teaching practices and policy changes, storytelling, and continued communication and collaboration.

Transformative change in organizations and institutions requires **dedicated capacity and resources** because it involves complex and sustained efforts that go beyond routine operations. Several grantees exemplified this approach in their programs. For example, North Seattle College embedded sustainability by creating a credit-bearing, community-based program and a bachelor's degree program taught entirely in Spanish. These initiatives are not only innovative but also deeply aligned with the diverse needs of the student population. By making these programs an integral part of their institutional framework, the college ensures long-term relevance and accessibility independent of external funding.

Grantee partnerships designed solutions to reflect students' cultural values and address equity, like **culturally responsive teaching practices and policy changes** to remove barriers. University of Hawai'i at Mānoa incorporated sustainability by



aligning their curriculum with Hawaiian cultural values and traditions. Through initiatives like the Ho‘āla Hou professional development program, faculty members receive support in adopting culturally responsive teaching methods. This alignment with local culture ensures that these teaching methods remain meaningful and effective over time, strengthening the overall educational experience for students.

Project SEED at Georgia State University implemented key sustainability strategies by revising their admissions policies to better attract and retain students. The removal of standardized testing requirements, a major barrier for many marginalized students, not only opens doors for a more diverse group of future educators but also creates a sustainable, equitable admissions process that will continue to benefit students long after the grant period.

In addition to policy changes, grantees used **storytelling** as a powerful tool for sustainability. The College of Menominee Nation, for instance, utilized storytelling to honor and validate the Native experience, ensuring that cultural heritage remains a fundamental part of their educational approach. By centering their program on community values and traditions, the college has established a culturally rooted framework that can be sustained and expanded upon, regardless of external funding constraints.

UPLIFT-CA has demonstrated strong collaboration across CSU campuses and with diverse partners by fostering reciprocal learning spaces that connect CSU campuses, community colleges, and local school districts. Through these partnerships, it has developed peer-driven learning opportunities and shared ideas and successes in creating new programs that support California’s new PK-3 credential. The **continued communication and collaboration** with cross-institutional support ensures that grantees not only sustain their work but also build stronger, more interconnected systems that can adapt and thrive beyond the pilot phase.

By embedding successful strategies, scaling impactful interventions, and transforming where necessary, grantee partnerships demonstrate how thoughtful planning and continuous effort are essential for achieving lasting positive outcomes in early childhood education. Adequate resources enable ongoing communication and collaboration among IHE staff and their partners, fostering a collaborative approach to change. For instance, through Project SEED, wraparound supports were provided to alleviate barriers for students, ensuring that students receive the holistic support needed to succeed. This comprehensive approach to removing barriers demonstrates a long-term commitment to sustainable practices in education.

However, sustainability requires more than just embedded strategies. Additional resources are needed to support ongoing peer collaboration, dedicated personnel, and holistic access to higher education. Some grantees have identified the need for more streamlined partnerships with local education agencies, as well as increased buy-in from higher education leadership, such as deans. Continuous leadership development for principal investigators and higher education stakeholders is another critical area that needs attention to ensure that institutions have the capacity to maintain and grow their programs. Achieving and maintaining these sustainable outcomes also hinges on addressing the financial realities of higher education. Sustained financial investment is crucial to support the capacity to scale successful programs, embed best practices, and ensure long-term impact.





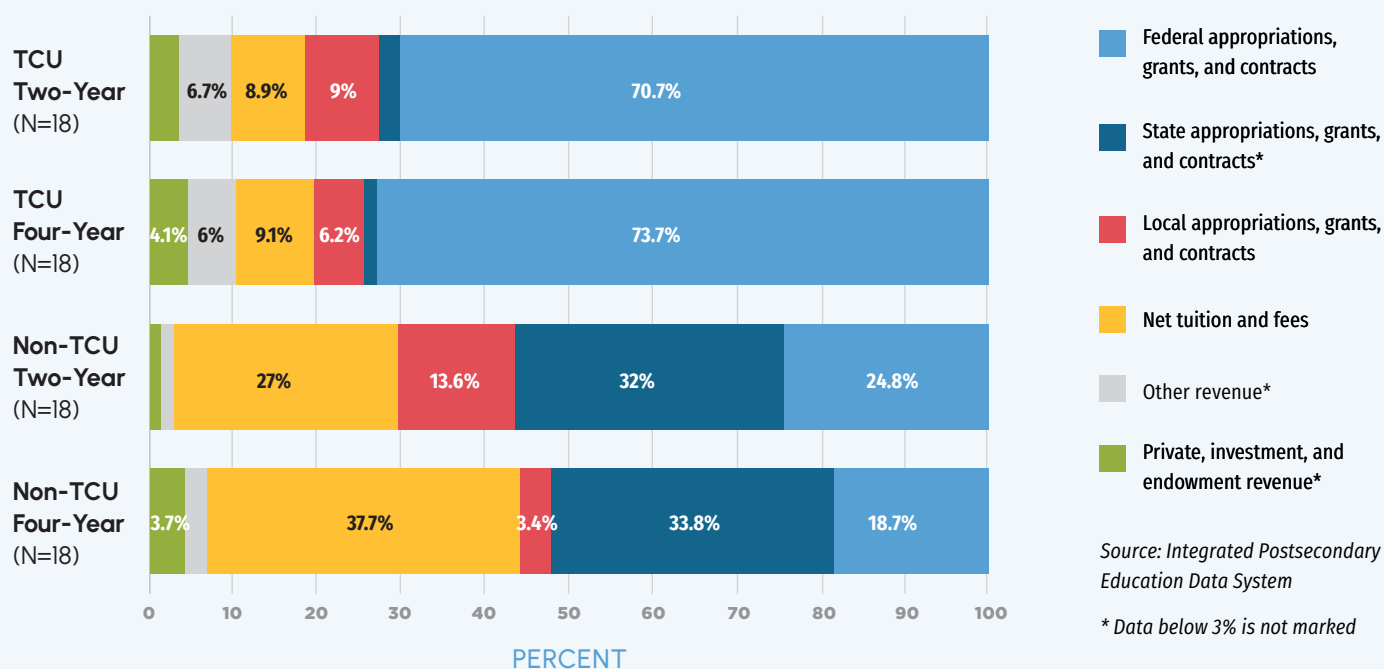
THE NEED FOR INCREASED FEDERAL INVESTMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Increased federal and tribal investment in higher education plays a crucial role in scaling innovative strategies to achieve transformative change. Aligning federal, state, and local resources is essential for supporting such change, particularly for tribal communities that face unique needs alongside systemic challenges shared by many under-resourced populations. While tribal investment remains vital, federal funding must increase substantially to adequately address the growing needs of all IHEs. Historically, states and the federal government have provided significant financial support for higher education, but state funding has declined significantly in recent years, particularly since the Great Recession, while federal funding has increased, narrowing the funding gap.¹² However, this increased federal support is insufficient to offset the overall decline in public funding for higher education, especially as tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) face additional funding challenges. Federal investments must rise further to meet the needs of tribal communities and ensure equitable access to education across all sectors, as these institutions often operate with fewer resources than their non-tribal counterparts.

The federal government primarily provides financial aid to individual students and funds specific research projects, whereas states generally support the operations of public institutions. Research shows that federal and state investments account for significant shares of public college and university budgets, and federal investment is even higher for TCUs' budgets, but for TCUs, the reliance on federal investments even higher.¹³ The recently announced funding increase for the Tribal Colleges and Universities Head Start Partnership Program by the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is a positive step. This \$2 million increase brings the annual investment to \$8 million, with the aim of graduating over 700 tribal educators with ECE degrees by 2028. Yet, while this investment is commendable, it highlights the disparity between the growing needs of TCUs and the limited scale of federal funding they receive. Far greater federal investment is essential to expand institutional capacity, provide scholarships, and ensure these programs continue to meet the evolving needs of tribal students and communities.

In 2024, IHEs face numerous challenges, including demographic shifts, political and cultural tensions, and financial instability. These factors are particularly acute for TCUs, which are often under-resourced compared to other public institutions. As IHEs grapple with rising operational costs, their ability to fund innovations—such as culturally responsive programming—often hinges on securing strong federal leadership and increased investment. Without a significant increase in federal funding, institutions are forced to make difficult strategic decisions that can limit their capacity to meet evolving student needs and address systemic inequities.

Figure 1: Average Revenue Snapshot at TCUs and Public Non-TCUs, Academic Year 2013–2014



The financial realities of colleges and universities, especially TCUs, involve multiple interest holders, each playing a crucial role. Federal and tribal governments must take a more active role in addressing the long-standing funding inequities faced by TCUs. Philanthropic investment, while important, cannot solve these complex challenges alone. Federal leadership must further increase support through expanded grant programs and larger funding streams to tribal institutions. Tribal governments must also advocate for ongoing collaboration with the federal government to ensure that long-term, sustainable funding is secured. While tribal nations play a key role in advocating for and supplementing federal funding, the onus of transforming and sustaining TCUs cannot rest solely on tribal resources.

Federal investments should be designed not only to provide immediate support but also to address structural funding gaps and expand institutional capacity at TCUs. Although a few states, like North Dakota and Montana, provide limited financial support for non-Native students at TCUs, the vast majority of states do not fund TCUs—despite the fact that many non-Native students attend these institutions. This places an even greater responsibility on federal funding to support these institutions and ensure they can serve their diverse student populations.

Moreover, TCUs struggle with local funding limitations because they cannot benefit from local property taxes due to their federal trust status. To address these financial challenges, we need a comprehensive strategy that includes significant increases in federal investment, stronger partnerships with tribal governments, and a commitment to funding equity for

underfunded institutions like TCUs. Federal and state governments should prioritize policies that emphasize equitable access to higher education, recognizing the unique role TCUs play in both Indigenous communities and the broader educational landscape.

Institutional leaders also need to focus on sustainable financial practices and long-term innovation. This requires the federal government and tribal nations to take the lead in providing both operational funding and programmatic support. Accreditation bodies must adapt to include financial health, innovation, and equity as critical metrics and work to ensure that TCUs have the resources to meet these benchmarks. At the same time, philanthropic organizations and the private sector should direct resources toward initiatives that promote equity, innovation, and sustainability in TCUs, ensuring these institutions remain viable and can meet their students' needs for years to come.

By significantly increasing federal investment and working closely with tribal governments, colleges and universities—particularly TCUs—can work toward achieving financial stability and equitable access to education. Without this increased federal support, the transformational efforts currently underway at TCUs and other institutions will struggle to achieve their full potential, further exacerbating the equity gaps that exist within higher education today.

Furthermore, there is an opportunity for funders and other partners to provide support for learning and peer collaboration, creating environments where innovative ideas can flourish and long-term relationships are built. Without dedicated resources for continued learning and partnership building, initiatives are likely to falter under the weight of logistical and operational demands placed on existing staff.

In order to move from a robust pilot effort to a longer-term, sustainable implementation approach, more intentional work is required. For example, focusing on simply reproducing strategies that were successful in other contexts may not address the deep systemic issues faced by local communities. Instead, transformative change requires ongoing reflection, adaptation, and investment in strategies that address the specific needs of diverse students and their communities.

A sustainability reflection tool, provided in [Appendix C](#), offers a structured framework to help grantee partnerships and those leading and implementing transformative strategies assess and strengthen the long-term impact and resilience of their initiatives.





CONCLUSION

Although solutions have been created to address most existing challenges, IHEs, their partners, and funders may not have the collective capacity to implement successful strategies at scale. To drive true systems-level change, investments must be comprehensive, including substantial federal, state, and local involvement in addressing root-cause issues. Complex challenges require complex solutions and ongoing, meaningful partnerships, which cannot occur in isolation. Centering the voices of students, future students, and early childhood providers is essential for supporting sustainable and transformative change in teacher preparation programs. We can create a more equitable and resilient educational landscape by addressing these issues holistically.

IHEs are uniquely positioned to drive impactful policy reform, both within the realm of higher education and across their states. As experts in preparing the next generation of educators, they can partner beyond their own institutions to dismantle barriers for students and future educators and shape policies that create a brighter, more equitable tomorrow for students everywhere. Although the journey toward transformed early childhood teacher preparation programs is far from complete, this report demonstrates the opportunities that exist for IHEs and their partners to accelerate change and remove barriers for students seeking early childhood degrees. As grantees move toward making successful strategies sustainable, they are digging deeply into the next phase of change and continue to lead the way in transforming the field.

APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY

Various terms and phrases throughout this report have been intentionally chosen to recognize and amplify the strengths and assets of students across institutions of higher education (IHEs). Some terms may differ from the conventional terms used in higher education spaces, because our goal throughout the report has been to promote an inclusive and empowering narrative that reflects the diversity of students across these innovation pilots. We encourage you to embrace this perspective as you read through the report.

ASIAN AMERICAN AND NATIVE AMERICAN PACIFIC ISLANDER–SERVING INSTITUTION (AANAPISI): An AANAPISI is defined under the Higher Education Act as a college or university with an undergraduate enrollment that is at least 10 percent Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander.

INNOVATION PILOT AND/OR USE OF IHE’S NAME: Where efforts have a formalized title, we use that title throughout the report. If no formalized title has been used to describe the IHE’s efforts, we use the IHE’s name instead.

INTEREST HOLDER: “Interest holder” is used to avoid the negative connotations associated with “stakeholder,” including its colonial and exclusionary implications. “Interest holder” promotes inclusive and equitable engagement practices, avoiding problematic notions of ownership and power.

LANGUAGE JUSTICE: Language justice is an evolving framework based on the notion of respecting every individual’s fundamental language rights—to be able to communicate, understand, and be understood in the language they prefer and in which they feel most articulate and powerful. Rejecting the notion of the supremacy of one language, language justice recognizes that language can be a tool of oppression, as well as an important part of exercising autonomy and advancing racial and social justice.

MINORITY-SERVING INSTITUTIONS (MSI): “Minority-serving institution” is a term used to describe a range of postsecondary institutions. There are MSIs with founding missions to educate a particular demographic of students, such as historically Black colleges and universities and tribal colleges and universities. In addition, there are MSIs that have met a federally defined threshold of enrollment of a particular demographic and student financial need (measured by the proportion of Pell Grant–eligible students), such as Hispanic-serving institutions and Asian American Native American Pacific Islander–serving institutions (AANAPISIs).

PEOPLE OF THE GLOBAL MAJORITY / BLACK, INDIGENOUS, AND PEOPLE OF COLOR (PGM/BIPOC): People of the global majority refers to Black people; Indigenous people; Brown people; Latinx peoples, particularly Indigenous and Afro-Latinos; Pacific Islanders; Native Hawaiians; the Inuit communities / Alaska Natives; Native Americans; Arabs; Western Asians / Middle Easterners with dark skin; North Africans; Southeast Asians; South Asians; East Asians; Africans with dark skin; biracial and multiracial people who are mixed with one or more of the above; and people and groups who cannot access White privilege. This term decenters Whiteness in understanding race and acknowledges that PGM are in the majority worldwide and, in the United States, will outnumber those who identify as White as early as 2050.

TRIBAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES (TCUS): Colleges and universities are meant to provide a transformative postsecondary experience and education for the Indigenous population and non-Native students from in and around Native communities. TCUs are chartered by their respective tribal governments, including the 10 tribes within the largest reservations in the United States. The 35 accredited TCUs operate more than 90 campuses and sites in 15 states and serve students from well over 250 federally recognized Indian tribes.

APPENDIX B: GRANTEE VIDEOS



UPLIFT-CA (CA)

- [Innovation Spotlight](#)
- [Innovation Grant Overview](#)



Salish Kootenai College (MT)

- [Innovation Spotlight](#)
- [Innovation Grant Overview](#)



RESPECT Across Nebraska (NE)

- [Innovation Spotlight](#)
- [Innovation Grant Overview](#)



College of Menominee Nation (WI)

- [Innovation Spotlight](#)
- [Innovation Grant Overview](#)



Project SEED (GA)

- [Innovation Spotlight](#)
- [Innovation Grant Overview](#)



North Seattle College (WA)

- [Innovation Spotlight](#)
- [Innovation Grant Overview](#)



The ECE³ Project (HI)

- [Innovation Spotlight](#)
- [Innovation Grant Overview](#)

APPENDIX C: SUSTAINABILITY REFLECTION TOOL

As grantees chart their next steps after their pilots, it's important to consider which insights can be applied universally to those seeking program transformation, whether they are planning for sustainability, implementing change, or strategizing for the future. This section provides valuable guidance for those interested in applying the innovative practices and lessons learned featured in this report.

Grantees are now in the learning and sustaining phases of their work. They are gaining significant insights to adjust and refine their strategies for sustainable solutions. The following considerations and next steps can help grantees and others working on transformative change determine how to sustain their progress.

1 WHAT GETS EMBEDDED?

Answering this question involves determining where there is organizational and institutional capacity to absorb successful strategies into existing programs and functions to become permanent parts of programming and policy.

→ CONSIDERATIONS

- How has the strategy demonstrated success, and is there quantitative and qualitative data to affirm this?
- Are there any departments or existing programs within the IHE whose vision and activities align with this strategy?
- Does the IHE have the necessary staff capacity, including time, experience, funding, and other resources, to support this strategy sustainably?

If you have answered yes to these considerations, then embedding the strategy might be best.

→ NEXT STEPS

- Ensure alignment between the strategy's intended outcome and the mission, vision, and values of the organization where the strategy will now be embedded, and identify nonnegotiable elements.
- Create clear documentation and guidelines, including a comprehensive onboarding guide, training plan, or both for all relevant partners.
- Establish feedback loops to monitor integration and make necessary adjustments.

2 WHAT GETS SCALED?

Answering this question involves determining the viability of scaling up successful strategies to broaden reach and increase impact.

→ CONSIDERATIONS

- How can leaders assess whether sufficient funding and capacity (time, experience, funding, and other resources) exist to support the scaling process, and can additional funding be secured if needed?
- How easily can the current processes be standardized and replicated across different locations or contexts, and what additional complexities might arise when scaling that would need to be managed?
- What tools and methodologies are in place to effectively collect and analyze data at a larger scale, and how effective are they?

If you have sufficient answers to these considerations, then scaling the strategy might be best.

→ NEXT STEPS

- Plan for resource allocation and management, determining what resources (financial, human, technological) are required to scale.
- Develop standard operating procedures to maintain consistency and quality of the efforts.
- Implement robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to measure continued success and opportunities for refinement.

3 WHAT GETS TRANSFORMED?

Answering this question involves determining the parts of strategies that need fundamental change or evolution to achieve success.

→ CONSIDERATIONS

- What structural or organizational changes are necessary to create conditions for greater success with this strategy, and which practices or policies might need to be reevaluated or replaced?
- What existing partnerships can be strengthened or new partnerships formed to support this strategy moving forward?
- Who will be most impacted by the intended changes, and how can the transition period be effectively managed and any unintended consequences be mitigated?

If embedding and scaling were not obvious fits, then transforming the strategy might be best.

→ NEXT STEPS

- Plan for organizational changes, including leadership and structural adjustments.
- Identify potential new partners who can provide additional resources, expertise, or support.
- Consider who is most impacted by this strategy and uplift their voices and experiences to co-create changes to strategies.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Center for Policy, Research, and Evaluation. (n.d.). *Section 2: Higher Education Context and Barriers to Equitable College Access and Readiness*. NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. <https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/research-evaluation/section-2-higher-education-context-and-barriers-equitable-college>
- 2 In this report, we will use the term “interest holder” instead of “stakeholder” to avoid the negative connotations associated with “stakeholder,” including its colonial and exclusionary implications. The term “interest holder” promotes inclusive and equitable engagement practices, avoiding problematic notions of ownership and power.
- 3 Alban, C., Belyakov, C., Decker, C., Lawrence, N., & Snyder-Fickler, E. (2024). *The Seeds of Success: Investing in Early Childhood Workforce* [Research brief]. Duke Sanford Center for Child & Family Policy. <https://childandfamilypolicy.duke.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/01/Seeds-of-Success-Research-Brief.pdf>
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- 5 Johnson Bowles, K. (2022). Why Can’t Higher Education Change? *Inside Higher Ed*. [https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/just-explain-it-me/why-can%E2%80%99t-higher-education-change#:~:text=Because%20the%20systems%2C%20traditions%20and,%2C%20and%20oversight%20\(accountability\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/just-explain-it-me/why-can%E2%80%99t-higher-education-change#:~:text=Because%20the%20systems%2C%20traditions%20and,%2C%20and%20oversight%20(accountability))
- 6 An AANAPISI is defined under the Higher Education Act (HEA) as a college or university with an undergraduate enrollment that is at least 10 percent Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander.
- 7 The enrolled student population at North Seattle College, both undergraduate and graduate, is 40.8% White, 13.3% Hispanic or Latino, 10.6% Black or African American, 10.5% Asian, 7.49% two or more races, 0.342% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and 0.342% American Indian or Alaska Native.
- 8 Center for Policy, Research, and Evaluation. (n.d.). *Section 2: Higher Education Context and Barriers to Equitable College Access and Readiness*. NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. <https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/research-evaluation/section-2-higher-education-context-and-barriers-equitable-college>
- 9 Payton, C., Lee, J., Noguez Mercado, A. P., & Uliasz, A. (2020). *Language Justice During COVID-19* [Web log]. American Bar Association. https://www.americanbar.org/groups/young_lawyers/projects/disaster-legal-services/language-justice-during-covid-19/
- 10 National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). *Race/Ethnicity of College Faculty*. Institute of Education Sciences. <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=61>
- 11 In this report, we will use the term “interest holder” instead of “stakeholder” to avoid the negative connotations associated with “stakeholder,” including its colonial and exclusionary implications. The term “interest holder” promotes inclusive and equitable engagement practices, avoiding problematic notions of ownership and power.
- 12 Pew Charitable Trusts. (2019). *Two Decades of Change in Federal and State Higher Education Funding* [Issue brief]. <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2019/10/two-decades-of-change-in-federal-and-state-higher-education-funding>
- 13 Nelson, C. A., & Frye, J. R. (2016). Tribal College and University Funding: Tribal Sovereignty at the Intersection of Federal, State, and Local Funding. *ACE CPRS Issue Brief*. <https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Tribal-College-and-University-Funding.pdf>



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