



Rhode Island's Strategic Plan for Postsecondary Education 2022-2027



Rhode Island Office of the
Postsecondary Commissioner

Shannon W. Gilkey, EdD, Commissioner

Dear Community:

For two years, the world has dealt with the unprecedented impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Rhode Island higher education community, faced with challenges that were unimaginable prior to the pandemic, has weathered the storm with a steadfast commitment to serving our students. Institutions of higher learning successfully prioritized safety and students, faculty, and staff adjusted to learning and working in new ways.

The pandemic's strain on Rhode Island's postsecondary system, however, is impossible to ignore. Similar to their counterparts across the country, several RI higher education institutions saw a drop in undergraduate enrollment since the start of the pandemic. At the same time, while workers who may have lost a job or desired to upskill increased the demand for educational and workforce training opportunities, disproportionate impacts of the pandemic made the transition difficult for our most vulnerable communities.

I am excited about the development of this strategic plan and the opportunity to put this plan into action. Developed after months of engagement with Rhode Island institutions of higher education, workforce training partners, Board of Education members, students, municipal and state elected leadership, sister state agencies, and nonprofit and business leaders, this is a plan that represents the collective voice of our stakeholder community. Rhode Islanders have spoken about what they would like to see from their postsecondary education system and this plan directly responds to that mandate.

This strategic plan sets forth an ambitious and forward-thinking vision for Rhode Island's postsecondary education system. It is now up to all of us to put this plan into motion. While the OPC team is ready to lead the work outlined in the plan, we will not be successful without the collaboration of our stakeholders. This is Rhode Island's plan for postsecondary education; let's get to work on this plan together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shannon Gilkey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Shannon" and last name "Gilkey" clearly distinguishable.

Dr. Shannon Gilkey
Commissioner of Postsecondary Education

Dear Community:

On behalf of the Council on Postsecondary Education, I am pleased to present Rhode Island's 2022-2027 Strategic Plan for Postsecondary Education.

The Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner (OPC) led the development of this plan, after an extensive outreach and engagement process that asked Rhode Islanders what they wanted and needed from their postsecondary education system. The result is a plan that will:

- ♦ close equity gaps,
- ♦ increase affordability,
- ♦ help more adults attain degrees and certifications,
- ♦ expand workforce training opportunities, and
- ♦ strengthen PK – 20 alignment.

We look forward to keeping the Rhode Island community updated on the progress of the plan, both celebrating our successes and holding ourselves accountable when necessary. I am excited to embark upon this work with the OPC team and all its partners throughout the state to help more Rhode Islanders reach their postsecondary goals.

Sincerely,



Timothy J. DelGiudice
Chair, Council on Postsecondary Education

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Enhanced Coordination and Efficiency (Statutory Duties).....	Page 30
Strategic Plan.....	Page 31
Mission.....	Page 32
Theory of Action	Page 32
Values.....	Page 33
Priorities with Measurable Goals	Page 34

ENHANCED POSTSECONDARY SYSTEM COORDINATION AND EFFICIENCY

OPC will perform its statutory duties in a manner that enhances coordination and efficiency

Data Analysis, Reporting, and Transparency

Systematically gather, process, and analyze information on all aspects of postsecondary education in Rhode Island, including identifying current and future needs. [16-59-6(1)]

Strategic Planning

Develop a strategic plan encompassing the broad goals and objectives for the state's higher education system aligned with those of the Board of Education and the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, and with the activities of the independent higher education sector, where feasible, including a 5-year strategic funding plan. [16-59-6(2)], [16-59-6(6)]

Policy Development

Formulate broad policy to implement the goals and objectives established and adopted by the Board of Education and the Council on Postsecondary Education, promoting coordination between public and independent higher education, PreK-12 education, and other stakeholders. [16-59-6(3)], [16-59-6(4)]

Fiscal Management

Assist in budget preparation for public higher education, prepare system-wide standard accounting procedures, and provide leadership on financial planning, budgeting, compliance, and other policy issues. [16-59-6(4)], [16-59-6(12)]

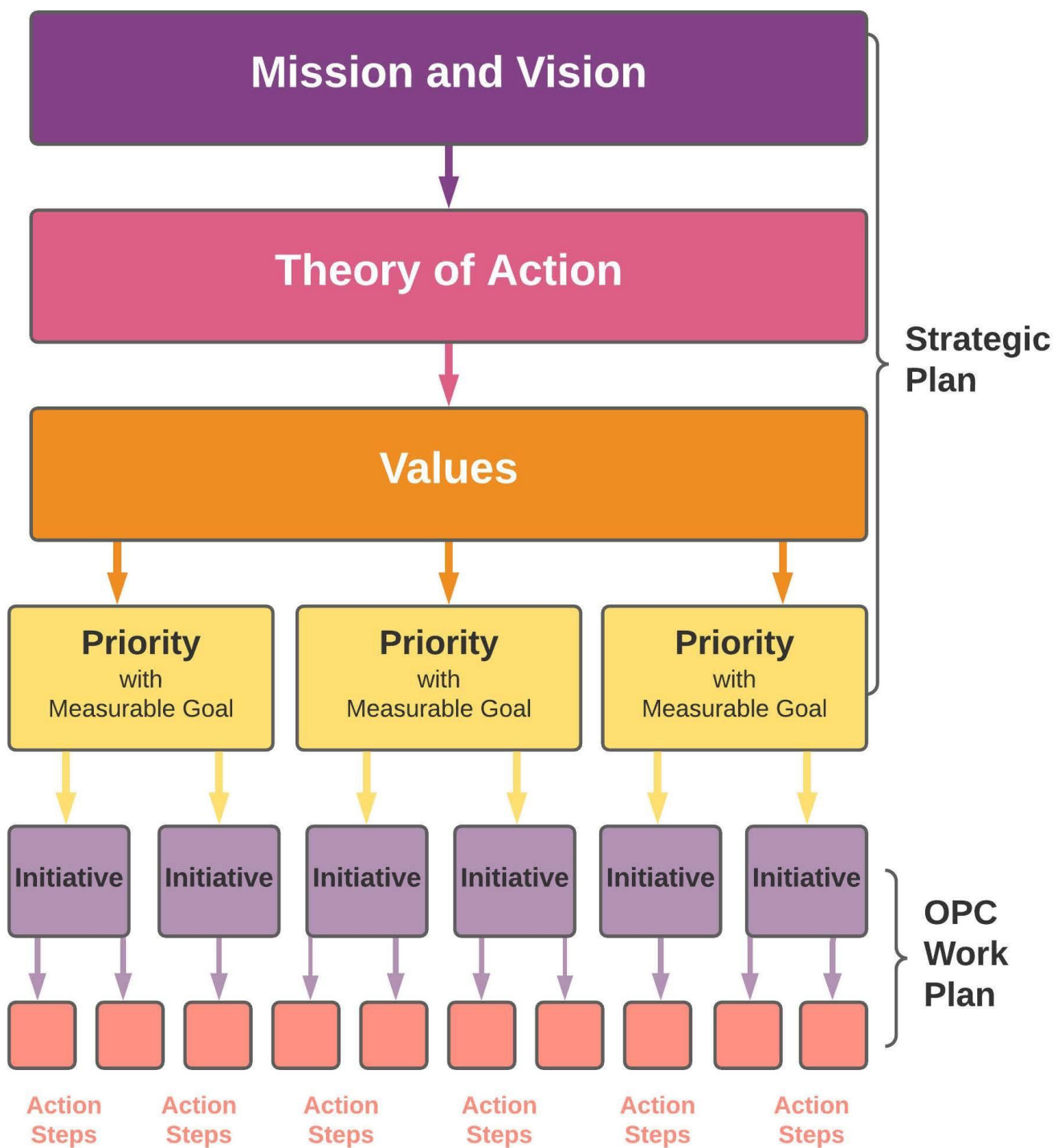
Regulatory and Administration

Administer policies, rules, and regulations of the Council on Postsecondary Education including those duties relating to independent higher education institutions. [16-59-6(10)], [16-59-6(11)]

Policy Recommendation and Program Implementation

Make recommendations to the Council on Postsecondary Education regarding system policy and programmatic operations and carry out the Council's policies and priorities. [16-59-6(7)], [16-59-6(8)], [16-59-6(9)], [16-59-6(13)]

STRATEGIC PLAN



MISSION

The mission of the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner is to ensure, promote, and expand postsecondary attainment among all Rhode Islanders by providing an effective system of postsecondary education and workforce training that is high quality, equitable, accessible, affordable, and aligned to PK-12 education and the economy. Rhode Island's system of postsecondary education should foster the economic, civic, social, and cultural growth of all Rhode Islanders, their communities, and the state.

THEORY OF ACTION

If OPC:

- Leads collaborative statewide efforts to reach Rhode Island's attainment goal of 70% of adults having a postsecondary credential by centering equity and alignment,
- Develops policies and practices that enable more Rhode Islanders to achieve postsecondary success, and
- Understands the State's current and future economic and workforce needs and partners with educational, workforce, and industry training programs to serve the Rhode Island economy

Then OPC can:

- Support institutions of higher education and policy makers to meet the needs of both our postsecondary students and our workforce partners
- Clear pathways to success for many more students, particularly from underrepresented communities

So that:

All students are well-positioned and receive robust supports to reach their postsecondary goals.

VALUES

Acting in the Best Interest of Students

Our work is conducted through the lens of what best serves our postsecondary students. We are intentional about incorporating student voice into our practices and policies. We support programming at our state's institutions of higher education, workforce training programs, and industry partners to ensure that all learners are equipped to support their families and their communities.

Collaboration and Inclusiveness

We understand that collaboration multiplies our efforts and makes us stronger and believe an effective collective impact model across the state's institutions of higher education holds the best promise to achieve scaled outcomes. We welcome and seek partners who share our vision and goals to add their contributions to ensure greater success.

Transparency

We make available up-to-date, accurate, and accessible information to our stakeholder community so the state of Rhode Island, our organization, and our partners can make data-informed decisions in furtherance of our mission and strategic goals.

Continuous Learning and Improvement

We use quantitative and qualitative data to make data-informed decisions in an ongoing effort to improve our programs, practices, processes, and services by increasing quality, strengthening our impact, and improving efficiency.

PRIORITIES

Equity

OPC recognizes that persistent gaps exist for students in Rhode Island’s postsecondary education system along the lines of race, ethnicity, immigration status, language, socioeconomic status, gender, and other identities. We are committed to uncovering and **dismantling any systemic inequities embedded in policies and practices** that hold back our students, communities, and the state from reaching their full potential. OPC designs and implements our work through an equity lens that demands that our efforts remove barriers to success for underrepresented students.

Commitments

- ♦ OPC will support postsecondary education and workforce training programs as they focus their efforts on students from underrepresented communities.
- ♦ OPC will lead a collaborative statewide effort to examine how policies and practices contribute to disproportionate disadvantages for underrepresented populations and provide recommendations for improvement.
- ♦ In partnership with state, community, and postsecondary education leaders, faculty, staff, and students, OPC will examine collective impact strategies to improve and increase student support services across the Rhode Island postsecondary system.

Measurable Goals

- ♦ By June 2023, OPC will lead the revisions of the Council on Postsecondary Education’s equity policy and the development of an equity action plan for the RI postsecondary system.
- ♦ By June 2023, OPC, in partnership with institutions of higher education, will complete a system-wide initiative to revise and expand the state’s approach to student transfer from its two-year college to four-year institutions.
- ♦ By December 2023, 100% of OPC staff will have participated in diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development.
- ♦ By December 2023, OPC will develop and recommend to the Council strategies to enhance enrollment and retention efforts at each of the public colleges.
- ♦ By June 2025, OPC will lead a statewide equity policy and practice review to remove systemic barriers that disproportionately affect communities of color and other underrepresented groups.

Affordability

OPC recognizes that affordability is a significant barrier to entry to and completion of higher education programs for many Rhode Islanders. Students and their families struggle to shoulder the financial burden of attendance, including not only tuition and fees, but also costs associated with books, housing, transportation, childcare, and other of life's responsibilities. OPC believes that the lack of affordable options should not be the reason students fail to reach their postsecondary goals. OPC is committed to working to **increase financial resources for students and connecting every student in need with the supports** they need to succeed.

Commitments

- ◆ In partnership with RI's institutions of higher education, OPC will develop strategies to connect students with resources that can help bridge affordability gaps.
- ◆ OPC will study the equity and affordability implications of expanding state-funded scholarship programs.
- ◆ In partnership with RI's public institutions of higher education, OPC will lead the development of a predictable funding policy for the public higher education system.
- ◆ In partnership with RI's institutions of higher education, OPC will propose system efficiency strategies to ensure public resources are utilized to drive student outcomes and state priorities.

Measurable Goals

- ◆ By December 2023, OPC will report to state policy makers on the implications of expanding state-funded scholarship programs.
- ◆ By December 2024, OPC will develop a predictable funding policy for consideration by the State Legislature.
- ◆ By June 2027, the statewide FAFSA completion rate will be at 80% among graduating high school students, demonstrating measurable progress each year.
- ◆ By June 2027, OPC will measure, evaluate, and advance private investment in student outcomes, and establish a system-wide public/private investment strategy that supports Rhode Island students.

Adult Success

OPC recognizes that a growing number of today's postsecondary students are adults returning to academic and training settings to earn degrees and credentials needed for their career aspirations. This expanding pool of students is typically working at least part-time, live independently, and may care for dependents. OPC recognizes the need to address the challenges that adult learners face in pursuing their academic and workforce training goals while navigating financial, time management, basic needs, and other challenges. OPC is committed to **increasing adult postsecondary completion** by removing systemic and structural barriers to enrollment, persistence, and completion. OPC is committed to supporting institutions of higher education and industry partners in creating pathways for adult students that provide both short-term credentials and longer-term degree completion

Commitments

- ◆ In partnership with RI's institutions of higher education, OPC will focus on enrollment and completion efforts with underrepresented adult communities in workforce development programs, specifically focusing on military veterans, immigrants, and those most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ◆ In partnership with RI's institutions of higher education, OPC will advocate for the expansion of and sustainable funding for navigation services and wraparound supports for adult students.
- ◆ In partnership with RI's institutions of higher education, OPC will lead a coordinated statewide strategy to ensure that state policies support adult learners enrolled in higher education or workforce training programs.
- ◆ In partnership with the nonprofit community and RI's institutions for higher education, OPC will coordinate a statewide strategy to align and scale up student services that support smooth transitions for adults into postsecondary education and training.
- ◆ OPC will partner with government agencies and community partners to identify and engage underemployed adults.

Measurable Goals

- ◆ By June 2023, OPC will conduct a gap-analysis of the support structures for adults and offer recommendations for improvement for policy makers.
- ◆ By December 2023, OPC will develop a credential registry to assist adult learners in enrolling in educational and workforce training programs.
- ◆ By June 2024, OPC, in partnership with RI's institutions of higher education, will coordinate the development of a statewide strategy for credit attainment through prior learning assessments and course completions.
- ◆ By June 2024, OPC, in partnership with RI's institutions of higher education, will develop and coordinate a system-wide process through its RI Reconnect program to reengage students with some college and no degree.
- ◆ OPC will work with the nonprofit community to align and advance student services that support smooth transitions for adults into postsecondary education and training.

Alignment with State's Workforce and Economic Development Priorities

Rhode Island has set an ambitious goal that 70% of working-age adults will obtain a postsecondary credential by 2025. OPC recognizes the importance of short-term credentials, delivered by our institutions of higher education and other training partners, that align to Rhode Island's current and future economies. OPC will work with industry partners, educators, and community leaders to **improve and expand pathways for students that lead to living wage careers**. OPC is committed to coordination the development of new opportunities in education and career training that meet the needs of an expanding adult student body and industries striving to grow.

Commitments

- ♦ In partnership with RI's institutions of higher education, OPC will recommend to the Council on Postsecondary Education workforce strategies where higher education can assist in closing workforce gaps
- ♦ In partnership with RI's institutions of higher education, OPC will connect industry partners, educators, and community leaders to build a talented workforce to support our state's priority sectors.
- ♦ In partnership with RI's institutions of higher education, OPC will lead the development of a statewide strategy to expand pathways that include short-term credentialing that align to two and four-year degrees.
- ♦ In partnership with RI's institutions of higher education, OPC will lead the development of a statewide strategy to expand pathways that include short-term credentialing with credit acquisition.
- ♦ In partnership with RI's institutions of higher education and industry partners, OPC will focus specifically on expanding opportunities for underrepresented communities, including Black, indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC), immigrants, justice-involved, and low-income adults.

Measurable Goals

- ♦ By December 2022, OPC will have workforce training programming at its three education centers (Providence, Westerly, and Woonsocket).
- ♦ By June 2023, OPC, in collaboration with state partners, will develop a plan to improve the state's longitudinal data system to provide better information on career pathways and outcomes.
- ♦ By June 2023, OPC will develop and implement a process with industry partners and government agencies to understand and address current and future workforce gaps.
- ♦ By June 2027, OPC will facilitate the enrollment of three thousand underemployed Rhode Islanders, including BIPOC, immigrant, justice-involved, and low-income students, in workforce training programs.

Secondary to Postsecondary Transitions

Too many Rhode Island high school students graduate academically unprepared for college credit-bearing coursework. OPC recognizes the importance of collaboration across the PK-12 education, higher education, and workforce training spaces to ensure students' preparedness to persist in the variety of postsecondary pathways. OPC recognizes the importance of career and technical education that leads to a career pathway and postsecondary credit. **PrepareRI, Rhode Island's interagency (with RIDE and DLT) initiative** can ensure that all students are prepared for college and career.

Commitments

- ◆ OPC will work with government agencies and our state's colleges and universities to ensure alignment in policies and priorities between secondary and postsecondary educational institutions.
- ◆ OPC will work with government agencies, local municipalities, and business partners to boost FAFSA participation, dual and concurrent enrollment, and other initiatives designed to better prepare students for postsecondary success.
- ◆ OPC will work with the nonprofit community to align and advance student services that support smooth transitions into postsecondary education.

Measurable Goals

- ◆ By June 2025, OPC, in collaboration with RIDE, will increase students participating in early college opportunities by 10%.
- ◆ By June 2027, OPC will help to close racial completion gaps in early college opportunities by 25% through increasing access and participation in programs such as, but not limited to, dual and concurrent enrollment and AP coursework and exams.