

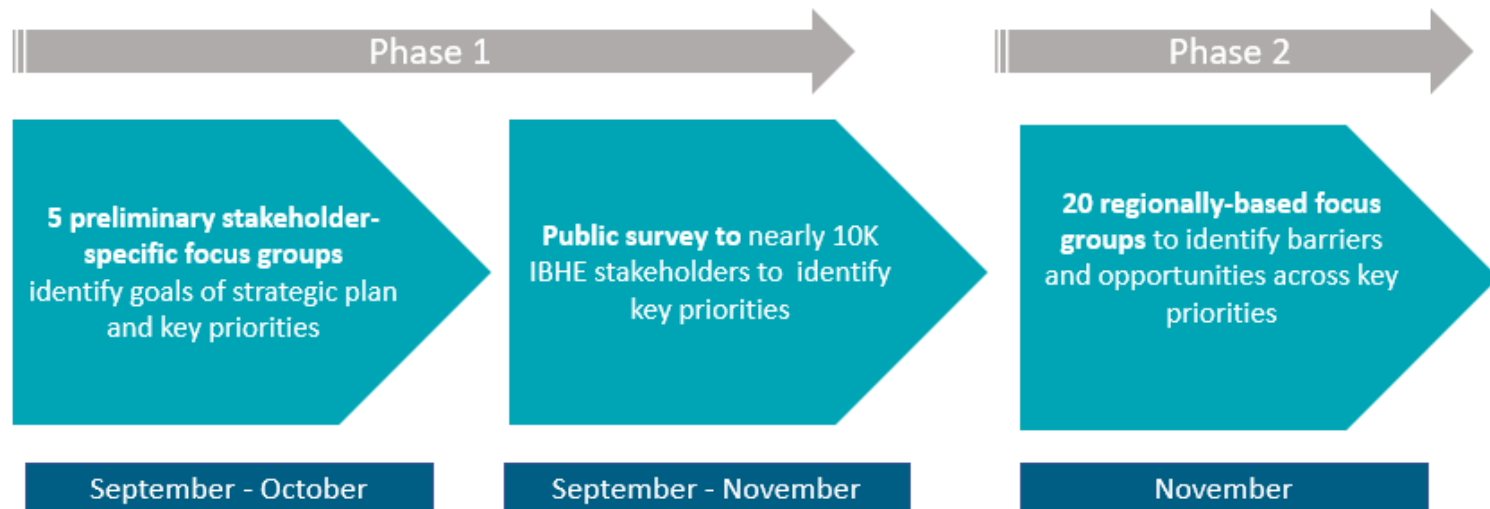
Illinois Board of Higher Education Engagement Report

December 2020

UPD Consulting is supporting the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), and the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) in the development of a strategic plan. A variety of audiences were engaged through focus groups and an online survey. This document serves as the foundation for incorporating these diverse perspectives and stakeholder feedback into the strategic direction. The feedback will be used to frame the work of the Advisory Committee and Design Works Groups.

Phase 1 & Phase 2 Engagement Timeline:

As the chart below outlines, the engagement process for the IBHE strategic plan consisted of Phase 1 and Phase 2 including three components: a preliminary set of focus groups with key stakeholders, a public survey distributed statewide, and regionally-based focus groups.



Phase 1 & Phase 2 Key Takeaways:

IBHE's vision is to have *an equitable, accessible, innovative, nimble, and aligned higher education system that ensures individuals, families, and communities across the state thrive*. As part of setting a strategic direction, IBHE developed a set of core principles and three working priorities to be addressed in the Strategic Plan. Below are key recommendations made by stakeholders to support IBHE in fulfilling its vision, over the next ten years, across these three priority areas.

IMPROVE AFFORDABILITY, INCREASE ACCESS AND MANAGE COSTS

- **Address prohibitive higher education costs**, including costs associated with tuition, books, and internet
- **Develop a funding strategy** that acknowledges student debt and provides stability to offset unpredictability of the political landscape
- **Understand competing priorities and responsibilities for students** who may have to work full time and attend school full time
- **Stabilize state funding structures** to reduce burden of cost on students and families, allow for better and more long-term planning for institutions, and provide more supports to underserved students
- **Provide programs for high school students**, such as early college offset learning gaps, in postsecondary learning
- **Increase transferability across different institutions** and between workforce and higher education institutions to allow working adults to demonstrate their competencies

INCREASE POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIAL/DEGREE ATTAINMENT AND DEVELOP TALENT

- **Communicate the value of higher education** and lifelong learning to students and working adults
- **Create connections and preparatory pipelines with employers** for students to have real-world application of skills
- **Hire more faculty and staff of color** to increase recruitment and retention of underrepresented populations
- **Develop private partnerships to increase corporate investment in higher education**, build relationships between businesses and local institutions and create P-20 talent pipelines
- **Create opportunities for meaningful collaboration across colleges and universities** that enable all learners to have access to education experiences of their choice and empowers them to access careers

CLOSE EQUITY GAPS

- **Expand opportunities for asynchronous learning** for all students to increase postsecondary attainment
- **Hire more multilingual counselors and resource staff** to garner trust among students, specifically undocumented students
- **Provide culturally competent support** for underserved students seeking guidance, scholarships and mentorship
- **Increase investment in and the utilization of minority businesses** in higher education to further recruitment, create pipelines and foster connections with the greater community
- **Prioritize equity-driven decisions** about programs and structures for the success of all students, especially those that are underrepresented or historically underserved to include student supports and affordable options to ensure postsecondary attainment

Engagement Report Details

The following sections include detailed feedback from a variety of voices including the IBHE board, students, higher education administration, key legislators, and regional stakeholders. The feedback serves as data points for building out the overall strategic direction.

Phase 1 Preliminary Focus Groups and Input: What were the emerging themes?

We held preliminary focus groups with Board Members, Public University Presidents/Chancellors, Community College Presidents, and Legislators. In addition, IBHE staff collected input from the Faculty Advisory Council, Student Advisory Council, Community College Presidents' Council, Legislative Higher Education Working Group, ISAC Commissioners, and Academic Leaders. This preliminary focus group engagement resulted in the following key questions across different issues areas.

Issue	Key Questions for the Strategic Plan to Answer
Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we ensure affordability, accessibility, and postsecondary attainment for underrepresented students? How can we use evidence-based funding practices and data-driven metrics to close equity gaps? • How do ensure the student supports and culture and climate necessary for underrepresented students and faculty? • How do we create inclusive definitions of success across institutions? How are institutions held accountable for the success of all students, especially those that are underrepresented or historically underserved?
Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we create a funding strategy that provides stability to the offset unpredictability of funding cycles? • What can the state realistically afford? How do we address student debt?
Operating Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How might we restructure the size, scale, and mix of delivery models to meet community needs and available resources? • What is an effective governance structure that will create a resilient and nimble higher education system? • What is the role of IBHE relative to the state of higher education and other partners? • How will the higher education system collaborate and build on the diversity of institutions and regional differences in Illinois?

Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we create instructional practices that are student-centered and flexible to the needs of 21st century learners? How do we address the out-migration of students from Illinois?
Workforce /Talent Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we continuously meet the state’s workforce/talent development needs? • How do we use successful scalable models to enable all learners to have access to education experiences of their choice, that empowers them to access careers and become civically engaged?
High School Transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do collaborate with the K-12 system to develop stronger partnerships to support college pathways? • What is the role of early college?

Phase 1 Survey: What are the key issue areas for Illinois’ stakeholders?

IBHE directly sent a survey to key stakeholders across the P-20 education continuum, business, community-based organizations, and advocacy organizations; all were encouraged to distribute to their networks. The survey resulted in responses from 9,671 stakeholders. (See Appendix A for details on survey participants.)

The public survey was designed so that participants selected up to three issue areas that were important to them out of eight total areas (e.g., cost, enrollment, equity, quality of instruction, employer/higher education relationship, student supports, operating structure, high school transition). Participants then selected specific sub-issues that were most important to them out of their selections.

Given that participation from underserved or historically represented groups was low (N=2456 with Black or African American, Latinx, Asian or Asian American, indigenous within these identity groups), focus groups within the next phase of engagement targeted these groups.

Key: Across the different roles (N size varies based on sample), more than 75%, 50-75%, 25-50% selected this issue area. *

What are the top three issue areas for different stakeholders? (N size)							
	All Students (N = 3337)	Faculty (N=1945)	College Administrators (N=1035)	K-12 Administrators (N=117)	Community Members (N=100)	Early Childhood (N=36)	Employers (N = 71)
1	Cost (1239)	Cost (1020)	Enrollment (652)	Cost (81)	Cost (87)	Cost (23)	Cost (49)
2	Employer Relationship (1445)	Equity (1020)	Cost (560)	Equity (53)	Equity (66)	Equity (19)	Equity (37)
3	Equity (1239)	Enrollment (885)	Student Supports (378)	Student Supports (44)	Employer/higher education relationship (43)	Quality of Instruction (18)	Employer/higher education relationship (34)

*31 percent of participants surveyed chose not to select their stakeholder affiliation.

Note: The percentages, as illustrated by the colors, were calculated from the total number of participants surveyed within that stakeholder particular stakeholder group. For example, there were 81 percent of students who selected cost as important to them (students who selected cost/all students surveyed = 1239/3337). As a result, this box is represented by dark green, indicating that more than 75 percent of students selected this item. Here we can see the saturation or extent to which different stakeholder groups selected the **issues areas** that matter to them most in higher education.

Key: Across all participants (N=9761), more than 25%, 15-25%, 10-15%, and 5 -10% selected this granular issue area.

Within each issue area, what are the top granular issues? (N size)								
Costs (N=5387)		Quality of Instruction (N=2748)	Equity (N=3489)	Student Supports (N=2992)	Employer Relationship (N=2748)	Enrollment (N=2311)	Operating Structure (N=1810)	High School Transition (N=1164)
1	Affordability (3535)	Academic Excellence (2227)	Closing the equity gap (2405)	Mental health/trauma-informed practices (1575)	Graduating with a clear path to land a job or pursue further schooling (2061)	Retention of current students (1817)	Efficiency of institutions operations (1308)	Developmental education (768)
2	Student debt burden (2748)	Flexibility in academic programs (1174)	Climate and culture on campus (2220)	COVID 19 Impact (631)	Graduates who have the knowledge and skills desired by employers (1839)	Recruitment of new students (1742)	Structure of higher education in Illinois (1065)	Students who leave high school well prepared to pursue a career or college major (732)
3	Gap between financial aid and full cost of college (1512)	Teaching methodology (1021)	Diverse faculty (2094)	Academic advising (646)	Institutional ability to meet employer workforce needs (1046)	Changing demographics (882)	Governance of higher education (1040)	High school college advising (592)

Note: The percentages, as illustrated by the colors, were calculated from the total number of participants surveyed (N = 9671). For example, 36 percent of participants surveyed selected affordability as a granular issue of importance (survey participants who selected affordability/total survey participants = 3535/9671). As a result, this box is represented by dark green, indicating that more than 25 percent of participants selected this item. Here we can see the saturation or extent to which all the survey participants **granular issues** that matter to them most in higher education.

Phase 2 Focus Groups: What are the key barriers and opportunities within each priority?

With input from the survey and preliminary focus groups, the IBHE identified three working priorities for the strategic plan:

1. Increase postsecondary attainment/credentialing, and develop talent
2. Close equity gaps
3. Improve affordability, increase access, and manage costs

Below are the barriers and opportunities within each priority identified **by participants** during the 20 focus groups (see Appendix B for full list of participants). The landscape review also provides context for resources and potential partners for the IBHE’s strategic planning.

Increase Postsecondary Credential/Degree Attainment and Develop Talent			
	Barriers	Opportunities	Resources
1	Mistrust of the higher education system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promote and communicate the value of higher education and lifelong learning to students, working adults, and work with them as early as middle school ● Develop multiple ways for students to promote their credentials that are recognized by employers and aligned to their needs ● Increase connections and preparatory pipelines with employers for students to have real-world application of skills ● Partnerships can play a role in sending talented employees to community colleges for certification programs with cost sharing arrangements ● Internship/externship service as a requirement for graduation for more hands-on experience ● Crediting work experience would increase access for students who are disadvantaged in a standardized test environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Holistic wrap around services (professional training, financial literacy) ● Student support groups formed and run by local alumni ● Life experience credits
2	Work-life balance, especially for working adults		
3	Focus on attracting higher education staff that reflect student body (increase minority hiring)		
4	Additional guidance needed for returning students/older adults		
5	Unfeasible for most students transferring from 2-year		



	community colleges to transfer and complete undergraduate degree in 4 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Standardized tests should be supplemental, not a requirement, to help the applicant, instead of hurting them● Information about job opportunities and scholarships is not as accessible at Community Colleges● Support needed to complete critical forms and requirements such as FAFSA● Limited faculty and staff of color creates barriers for students attempting to make connections, seek mentors and adjust to new culture● Address cultural barriers and competing expectations of certain student populations who may come from families that are hesitant for their children to attend college● Encourage collaboration between community colleges and local employers to provide employment opportunities to offset tuition costs for working adults, and better align industry needs with academic offerings● Increase public private partnerships to increase corporations' investment in higher education, build relationships between businesses and local institutions, and create talent pipelines● Explore opportunities for P-20 system to work more closely with employers to develop a true career pathway	
6.	Misalignment of the current academic offerings and employer needs creates challenging gaps between talent pools and employers		
7.	Speed of obtaining the degree and availability of classes serves as a barrier. General education requirements are also burdensome for students		
8.	Student debt from prior higher education experiences hinder students pursuing more loans		

Close Equity Gaps		
Barriers	Opportunities	Resources
1. Access to technology and broadband access, especially in rural areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide comprehensive student supports (e.g., mentoring, advising, equipment, mental health) ● Create a shared understanding of what equity means across the IBHE and different institutions ● Connect pathways through high school with college literacy infused beginning at middle school ● Adjust virtual format to include more engagement from employers and facilitate small in-person experiences. ● Engage BIPOC alumni in post-secondary programs, such as serving as mentors and career training ● Engage/hire multilingual counselors and resource staff to garner trust among students ● Provide more culturally competent support for underserved students seeking guidance, resources, scholarships, mentorship ● Create a sense of belonging for students of color on campus to improve retention ● Greater investment in and utilization of minority businesses in higher education to further recruitment, create pipelines and foster connections with the greater community ● Increase recruitment and retention efforts of local underrepresented populations ● Cultivate feeling of belonging in younger students in the K-12 system to better prepare them for experiences in higher education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student support centers on campus ● City College program for returning students ● Second chance programs for specific student populations: single mothers, working adults ● Initiatives and programs for students with disabilities
2. Lack of belonging for students of color		
3. Lack of access to information for 1st generation students		
4. Lack of provisions for undocumented students		
5. Lack of representation in the classroom, staff, and faculty		
6. Lack of support for students' adjustment to foreign cultures		
7. Employer recruitment technology filters out community college graduates competing against bachelor degreed candidates		



8.	Personalized learning may not be achievable in some virtual courses		
9.	Large knowledge gaps in access within minority populations		
10.	Disproportionate placement of minority students in remedial classes which leads to discouragement and delays in graduation		

Improve Affordability, Increase Access, and Manage Costs

Barriers		Opportunities	Resources
1	Academic progress is based on seat time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop comprehensive, flexible pathways for demonstration of completion and competency ● Provide increased transferability across different institutions, and between workforce and higher education institutions so working adults can demonstrate their competencies ● Partnerships with employers to create clear incentives post-graduation and tuition sharing with the business community ● Affordability is directly related to career development as students believe the price of education is disconnected from the return on investment ● Scholarships for working adults are significantly lacking and prevent them from accessing federal financial aid ● Develop more corporate partners to increase paid opportunities and assist with cost barriers ● Increase vocational credentialed opportunities to provide pathways for pay and employment ● Rise in tuition cost is not proportionate with federal grants/loans ● Increase and stabilize state funding structures to reduce burden of cost on students and families, allow for better and more long-term planning for institutions, and provide more supports to underserved students ● Provide further access to scholarship and support services in more languages ● Offer more supports to parents and families who may wish for their children to attend college but do not have the access, experiences, or knowledge to help their children navigate the process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Open Educational Resources ● Federal outreach and student service programs (e.g., TRiO) ● Public/Private Partnerships ● Dual enrollment programs ● Feeder internships from school to local employers
2	Higher education cost is prohibitive (including books)		
3	Access to broadband internet in hard-to-reach areas (e.g., rural areas)		
4	Reduction in state funding has led to a greater dependence on tuition for revenue		
5	Lack of materials in non-English languages		
6.	Limited provisions for undocumented and non-citizen students		
7.	Lack of counselors who can speak to and support a myriad of student and family experiences (first generation, immigrant, undocumented)		
8.	Underestimation of certain student groups by teachers, counselors, and education		



	professionals; overemphasis on 2-year degree attainment and less emphasis on possible path to 4-year institutions		
9.	Lack of resources for middle class students and families who may be considered low income but still cannot afford the cost of college	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Offer clear guidance and counseling on multiple career paths according to major, students' interest and community needs to better inform students on their career options● Shrinking enrollment means less scheduling options and less value for students who are still responsible for tuition despite rising costs● Provide on campus job opportunities to help nontraditional students remain on campus and alleviate barriers for working adults attempting to obtain degrees● Provide childcare for students who may need it to lessen costs, decrease time away from campus, and alleviate mental burden on students who are also parents● Expand opportunities for asynchronous learning for all students but particularly working adults who may have scheduling conflicts between classes and work● Offer exclusive classes for non-traditional students who may feel more comfortable around more similar peers with more similar schedules and life experiences● Provide specific educational opportunities and tracks for students who may be returning after losing their job due to COVID 19● Create a nimbler educational system that allows institutions to adjust academic course offerings for students and industry needs	
10.	Competing priorities and responsibilities for students who may have to work full time and attend school full time		
11.	Lack of bridge programs for high school students		
12.	Disparities in K-12 education manifest in learning gaps in postsecondary learning		

Appendix A: Survey Participants

- **Sample Size:** 9671
- **Role:** 3337 (35%) Student, 1945 (20%) Faculty, 1035 (11%) College Administrator, 117 (1%) K-12 Administrators, 117 (1%) Community Member, 36 (1%) Early Childhood, 71 (1%) Employers, 3013 (31%) Chose to not identify
- **Education Affiliation:** 4453 (46%) 4-year College, 1623 (17%) 2-year College, 88 (1%) K-12, 216 (2%) Credential Program, 126 (1%) Government, 109 (1%) Employers, 107 (1%) Early Childhood, 103 (1%) Workforce Development, 99 (1%) Advocacy group, 2747 (28%) Chose to not identify
- **Race/Ethnicity:** 5581 (58%) White/Caucasian, 794 (8%) Black/African American, 777 (8%) Latinx, 356 (4%) Asian/Asian American, 77 (1%) American Indian/Alaska Native, 433 (4%) Other, 19 (.02%) Pacific Islander, 1634 (17%) Chose to not identify

Appendix B: Focus Group Participants

A total of 170 participants were surveyed across 20 regionally-based focus groups.

Region
Northwest Region A
Northwest Region Group B
Southern Region Group A
Southern Region Group B
Southwest Region
Central Region



North Central Region
West Central Region
Northern Stateline Region
Northeastern Region Group A
Northeastern Region Group B
Northeastern Region Group C
Northeastern Region Group D
East Central
IBHE-Facilitated Group—held in Spanish
Co-Host: Chicago State University Participants: Black Leaders
Co-Host Latino Policy Forum (held in Spanish)
Co-Host: Young Invincible Participants: Current and Former Students

Appendix C: Focus Group Questions

Affordability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key barriers/challenges for ensuring access and improving the affordability of higher education for students and working adults in Illinois? • What are the key opportunities/resources to improve the affordability of higher education in Illinois?
Attainment and Talent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key barriers/challenges for students and working adults in obtaining postsecondary credentials or degrees? • From an employer perspective, what are the key barriers/challenges to accessing talent with the necessary skills and abilities from the higher education system? • What are the key opportunities/resources to increase the number of people with postsecondary credentials /degrees to prepare students and working adults for careers and civic life and drive the state's economy?
Equity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What additional barriers/challenges do you see in the education system that prevent student success, * for those who are underrepresented or historically underserved?* • What additional opportunities/resources are needed to ensure student success and close equity gaps for those who are underrepresented or historically underserved?
<p><i>*Student success includes items like access, enrollment, persistence within higher education, & completion of degree or credential</i></p> <p><i>** Students who are Black or African American, Latinx, low-income, first generation, rural, working adults, have disabilities, among other identity intersections</i></p>