



Lumina State Attainment Collaborative Cohort Update: July 2026

State Progress Highlights

Across Lumina's State Attainment Collaborative (SAC) cohort, states are making significant progress in bringing people together to advance value-centered attainment goals. Examples of state progress are below.

These examples intend to foster collaboration and peer learning among the SAC cohort. **Please keep this information within the group and do not distribute it externally.**

Arkansas worked with ECONorthwest to apply a wage threshold specific to the state when measuring its credentials of value attainment rate. Arkansas has a lower cost of living and lower median earnings for high school graduates than the national average. Because of that, the state wanted a wage threshold that better reflected Arkansas's own economic conditions.

For 2024, Arkansas's 115 percent wage benchmark was \$41,915. That is \$3,280 lower than the national benchmark of \$45,195 for that same year. When Arkansas applied its own benchmark, the state's 2024 credential of value attainment rate was 41.0 percent – nearly 2 percentage points higher than the rate reported in Stronger Nation using the national average.

After agreeing on a wage threshold and reviewing what it meant for the 2024 baseline, the Arkansas and ECONorthwest teams looked at several possible improvement scenarios. The goal was to identify a target that

would be both ambitious and realistic. These scenarios relied on historical growth trends for Arkansas, the region, and the nation. ECONorthwest estimated possible 2040 credential of value attainment rates if Arkansas improved each year at the median, max, or 75th percentile of past growth.

Based on this analysis, the Arkansas SAC team is considering recommending a 67 percent credential of value attainment goal by 2040. The goal uses Lumina's Stronger Nation methodology, except that it applies the Arkansas wage threshold. This goal aligns with the share of Arkansas jobs that require education beyond high school. It also reflects the state's commitment to supporting postsecondary wage outcomes through its productivity funding formula. Lastly, it aims for Arkansas to be a leader in the region and the nation. The potential goal is not final or public yet and is still under consideration by the SAC team and other state stakeholders.

As the global economy changes and technology reshapes the nature of work, **Maryland** is rethinking the role of education after high school. The state is moving beyond the outdated narrative that puts traditional degrees on one side and workforce training on the other. With the Commission's approval of the 2026–2030 State Plan for Higher Education, ***Maryland's Moment: Lighting the Way Forward***, the state is positioning its entire postsecondary ecosystem, from apprenticeships to advanced degrees, as one connected engine for economic and social mobility.

One of the most important parts of this plan is the introduction of Lighthouse Credentials and Degrees. Instead of simply tracking enrollment, Maryland is focusing education investments on programs that create strong economic and civic opportunities. This approach connects the state's talent pipeline to key innovation sectors, including quantum technology, biotechnology, cybersecurity, and aerospace. It also elevates career pathways that are deeply important to society, ensuring fields like early childhood education, caregiving, and civic leadership are recognized and rewarded.

The Plan sets a major target: By 2040, 75 percent of Maryland adults in the labor force will hold a postsecondary credential or degree that clearly leads to economic and social mobility. By making equity a central part of its statewide goals, Maryland is committing to closing long-standing gaps in wealth and credential attainment.

HCM Strategists played an important role in this work by helping turn Maryland's vision into practical statewide strategies. Maryland is

advancing major efforts such as lifelong learning pathways and a whole-of-government approach to student success. For other states in the Attainment Collaborative, Maryland's new plan offers a strong example of how to pair bold, learner-centered outcomes with a clear roadmap for shared prosperity.

Nevada used its SAC grant to conduct a Lightcast analysis of how well the state's credential supply matches workforce demand. The analysis is meant to identify programs that are producing too many or too few credentials, based on state needs. This information can help guide program design, program improvement, institutional production targets, and other strategies tied to value-centered attainment.

Lightcast completed a draft of the results in May. Early findings show some areas where programs match workforce needs well, along with some major workforce gaps. The gaps are especially clear in construction trades, business and finance, aviation, data analytics, and healthcare. Some nursing and education programs are well matched to state demand. The analysis includes all credential levels, from non-credit programs through doctoral degrees.

Recommendations for expansion are based on both the size of the workforce gap and whether the program leads to a living wage. In this analysis, the living wage benchmark is \$28.67 per hour for a two-adult, two-child household. This keeps student economic outcomes at the center of program decisions. Nevada jobs are expected to grow from 1.7 million to nearly 2 million by 2035. At the same time, Nevada trails the national average in bachelor's degree attainment. These findings give the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) a system-wide planning tool to guide program expansion, consolidation, and new development across all eight institutions.

Common Questions

As states move from goal-setting into implementation, we've noticed several recurring questions, including:

- **How can we account for regional nuance?** States are consistently elevating the importance of accounting for regional nuance in the goals work. There are several strategies to consider:
 - Prioritize stakeholder engagement across the state to build regional support and gather local insight. For example, the

Illinois State Attainment Working Group is holding regional engagement sessions in each of the state's economic development regions.

- Assess priority industries and credentials by region. Many states report high-priority industries by region. Credentials of value lists that support state attainment goals can include pathways for credentials that reflect unique regional needs.
- Break down data by region whenever possible to show differences across the state.
- **How are states using the grant?** States are using SAC funding for a range of activities such as:
 - Project management and facilitation to support stakeholder engagement.
 - Short-term capacity for data analysis, strategic plan writing, and refining goals and strategies.
 - Data analysis to identify state-specific wage thresholds and related attainment rates.
 - Data analysis to assess access to high-priority programs and whether institutions can produce enough graduates in those fields.
 - Strategic communications planning and resource development.
 - Pilot programs to reengage adult learners as a strategy to advance attainment.

Looking Ahead

Please mark your calendars for two upcoming learning opportunities:

- **Thursday, July 23 from 11:30-1:00 p.m. ET: Strategic Communications.** This webinar will focus on storytelling techniques that describe the “why” behind value-centered attainment goals. Participants will also workshop messaging strategies about the value of education after high school for audiences such as institutions, workforce partners, and policymakers.
- In October, Lumina Foundation will host its 2026 state policy retreat: **Leading with Value, Building Trust**. The retreat will take place from **October 14-16 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**. Your states have been invited to submit teams for the retreat. More details for those attending the retreat are forthcoming about opportunities to reflect on the State Attainment Collaborative, highlight state progress, and learn from other states.



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