



 **WICHE**

Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

# WORKPLAN

FY 2027



# FY 2027 WORKPLAN

## Our Mission ☆

The member states and Pacific Island members of the Commission work collaboratively to expand educational access and excellence for all residents of the West. By promoting innovation, cooperation, resource sharing, and sound public policy among states and institutions, WICHE strengthens higher education's contributions to the region's social, economic, and civic life.

## Our Vision 🚀

WICHE envisions a future where regional collaboration among the states and Pacific Islands strengthens the West through higher education and workforce development.

## The Workplan

Each May, WICHE's 48-member Commission develops and approves the compact's annual Workplan. The Workplan highlights WICHE's strategic priorities and outlines the activities, projects, and initiatives of the organization for the fiscal year (FY) 2027, beginning July 1, 2026, all of which are intended to advance WICHE's mission.

## Our Strategic Priorities

- ▶ **AFFORDABILITY & FINANCE (A/F):** Supporting alignment of appropriations, tuition, and financial aid policy and practice across institutional, state, and federal levels to reduce cost barriers and expand postsecondary opportunity.
- ▶ **ACCESS & SUCCESS (A/S):** Expanding access to and success in postsecondary education by developing and sharing evidence-based strategies and technologies.
- ▶ **WORKFORCE & SOCIETY (W/S):** Partnering across sectors (including health, behavioral health, business, and industry) to strengthen education-to-workforce pathways and meet regional talent needs so communities can thrive.
- ▶ **INNOVATION (I):** Advancing innovation in teaching and learning, leadership, student supports, technology, and the policies and practices that expand postsecondary access and success and the value of credentials.
- ▶ **VALUE & ACCOUNTABILITY (V/A):** Strengthening data quality, transparency, and analytic capacity to develop shared measures to assess the value of postsecondary education and its impact across the West, including outcomes beyond workforce measures, so decision-makers can improve how they invest time, effort, and resources.

## How WICHE Advances Its Mission

WICHE implements the Workplan by conceptualizing and managing a vast array of programs, projects, and initiatives, and by developing valuable resources that address the needs of members through four operational units:

- ▶ **PROGRAMS AND SERVICES (PAS):** The Programs and Services unit is where students thrive and institutional leaders collaborate. The unit focuses on expanding student access and success while fostering higher education collaborations that support institutional strategic priorities. Through its Student Access Programs, the unit helps institutions and students — at the undergraduate, graduate, and professional levels — maximize academic resources, optimize enrollment capacity, and reduce costs. Additionally, the unit convenes higher education leaders to address shared challenges, advance common goals, and support the development of emerging and aspiring college and university leaders. This engagement often takes the form of grant-funded communities of practice that facilitate in-depth exploration of key issues and solutions. The unit, recognizing the importance of cost efficiency, also partners with the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC) to provide joint purchasing programs that generate savings for postsecondary institutions, state and local governments, and educational nonprofits.
- ▶ **POLICY ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH (PAR):** The Policy Analysis and Research unit supports better-informed decision-making by providing policy analysis and data resources and leveraging its convening power to foster regional collaboration. The unit leads research projects and collaborative initiatives focusing on open educational resources, workforce challenges in the West, and supporting postsecondary education and completion. WICHE staff provides expertise on higher education issues, including demographic change, governance, adult learners, state and federal financial aid, finance, articulation and transfer, federal policy, and college completion initiatives. WICHE is responsible for implementing the Western region's State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (W-SARA). The unit's publication series, *WICHE Insights*, explores a wide range of significant policy issues. The unit also undertakes major long-term grant-funded projects, collaborates with other regional and national organizations, and provides short-term technical assistance to partners.
- ▶ **BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROGRAM (BHP):** The WICHE Behavioral Health Program, established in 1955, seeks to support the public systems of care and the workforce that serve people with behavioral health issues and their families. The program pursues this mission through partnerships with state behavioral health agencies, federal agencies, advocacy and consumer groups, and higher education institutions. The WICHE BHP's activities focus on direct technical assistance to state and local agencies, policy analysis and research, support of state behavioral health agency data analysis, and higher education liaison activities to enhance workforce development and campus behavioral health.

- ▶ **WCET – THE WICHE COOPERATIVE FOR EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGIES:** WCET promotes collaboration and information-sharing related to digital learning in higher education. Established in 1989, WCET’s mission is to be the leader in the practice, policy, and advocacy of digital learning in higher education. It works in three divisions: WCET membership, State Authorization Network (SAN), and Every Learner Everywhere. Memberships through WCET and SAN support hundreds of higher education professionals across the U.S. and Canada. Every Learner’s mission is to help institutions use new technology to innovate teaching and learning, with the ultimate goal of improving outcomes for every learner. WCET’s strategic plan focuses on practice, policy, and community in fulfilling its vision of a future where high-quality digital learning fosters success for educators and learners.

## Our Work, Activities, and Projects

WICHE, a regional interstate higher education compact founded on the principle of collaboration, prides itself on working in partnership across these four units to better serve the West. The final section of this Workplan highlights collaborations across WICHE. When appropriate, some initiatives also extend beyond the WICHE region.

Each of the following sections is organized according to these categories:

- ▶ **CURRENT ACTIVITIES:** Current work that is either classified as Ongoing Services and Resources (continuing work supported by the General Fund or fees) or Projects and Initiatives (continuing or new work supported by grants, contracts, or fees)
- ▶ **NEW DIRECTIONS:** Commission-approved projects for which staff is seeking funding
- ▶ **POTENTIAL FUTURE PROJECTS:** Projects that staff is considering pursuing and/or bringing to the Commission for approval; also listed are previously considered projects that staff are proposing to remove from the Workplan
- ▶ **COMPLETED PROJECTS:** Projects that staff finished in FY 2027

Note: Current Activities are not assigned prioritization rankings since they are initiatives WICHE staff has already committed to undertaking. Projects in the New Directions category are prioritized by relevance to WICHE’s mission, opportunity, and staff competence. Potential Future Projects are not assigned prioritization rankings because they have not been approved and remain under consideration by the Commission.

# PROGRAMS AND SERVICES (PAS)

## Current Activities – Ongoing Services and Resources

*Continuing work supported by the General Fund or by fees.  
All work in this category is considered high priority.*

**Focus:** A/F Affordability & Finance A/S Access & Success W/S Workforce & Society I Innovation V/A Value & Accountability

Project	Focus	Geo Scope	Staff FTE	Partners
Western Academic Leadership Academy (Academy)	W/S, V/A	Western	0.2 and consultants	Forum and Alliance members
Western Academic Leadership Forum (Forum) • 2027 Annual Meeting • Collaborative Projects	A/S, W/S	Western	0.4	WICHE states and Pacific Island jurisdictions; 50 institutions, 11 systems
Western Alliance of Community College Academic Leaders (Alliance) • 2027 Annual Meeting • Collaborative Projects	A/S, W/S	Western	0.4	WICHE states and Pacific Island jurisdictions; 68 institutions, eight systems
Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP)	A/F, A/S, W/S, V/A	Western	1.25	All WICHE states, CNMI, and Guam fund and/or enroll students through PSEP's 134 cooperating programs
Western Regional Graduate Program (WRGP)	A/F, W/S, A/S	Western	1.1	WICHE states and Pacific Island jurisdictions; 67 participating institutions
Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE)	A/F, W/S, A/S	Western	1.1	WICHE states and Pacific Island jurisdictions; 171 participating institutions
MHEC Technology Contracts	A/F, V/A	WICHE, MHEC, NEBHE, SREB	1.1	21 vendors offering hardware, software, printers and peripherals, data and networking, security services, and other technology services

Project	Focus	Geo Scope	Staff FTE	Partners
MHECare Student Health Solutions	A/F, A/S	WICHE, MHEC, NEBHE, SREB	1.1	Two vendors offering student health and wellness insurance and services
WICHE Group Property Insurance	A/F	WICHE	0.1	Marsh and former MHEC MPP participating institutions and systems
Peer-to-peer Virtual Convenings	A/F, A/S, W/S, I, V/A	Western	0.15	WICHE states and Pacific Island jurisdictions, Policy Analysis and Research unit

The **WESTERN ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP ACADEMY (ACADEMY)** is an annual professional development initiative to enhance the pool of chief academic leaders for both two- and four-year institutions in the Western region. The Academy’s sessions focus on the intricacies of academic leadership, the establishment of academic objectives and priorities, and the cultivation of the essential skills of chief academic officers.

The **WESTERN ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP FORUM (FORUM)** brings together WICHE region chief academic officers and senior academic leaders from four-year institutions, related systems, and state coordinating and governing boards to exchange ideas and information, share resources and expertise, and collaborate on regional initiatives. The Forum is funded primarily by membership dues, with additional support from annual meeting sponsors.

The **WESTERN ALLIANCE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE ACADEMIC LEADERS (ALLIANCE)** brings together chief academic officers and senior academic leaders at community colleges and technical schools, related systems, and state coordinating and governing boards to exchange ideas and information, share resources and expertise, and collaborate on regional initiatives supporting the two-year higher education sector. Like the Forum, the Alliance is funded by membership dues and annual meeting sponsors.

The **PROFESSIONAL STUDENT EXCHANGE PROGRAM (PSEP)** provides affordable access for students to healthcare professional programs across the region in 10 healthcare fields. Participating states and territories in the West appropriate funds to support their residents in these academic programs.

The **WESTERN REGIONAL GRADUATE PROGRAM (WRGP)** allows WICHE-region residents to pay reduced out-of-state tuition rates for over 2,200 master’s degrees, graduate certificates, and doctoral programs at participating public universities. Structured similarly to the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE), Western public universities may offer any

graduate program at the WRGP tuition rate at their discretion. Participating institutions may charge WRGP students up to 150% of resident tuition, but most charge in-state tuition.

The **WESTERN UNDERGRADUATE EXCHANGE (WUE)** is WICHE's signature undergraduate tuition savings program and the nation's largest of its kind, saving students hundreds of millions in tuition annually. Over 170 public two- and four-year WICHE-region institutions charge WUE students no more than 150% of out-of-state tuition instead of in-state tuition.

**MHEC TECHNOLOGY CONTRACTS** enables institutions to purchase hardware, software, and technology services through competitively bid cooperative purchasing agreements. Several contracts are available to K-12 districts; state, county, local governments; and education-related nonprofits. Hundreds of institutions and other entities in the WICHE region benefit from aggregated volume purchases that lower product costs and save money and time. This program is offered in partnership with the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC).

**MHECARE STUDENT HEALTH SOLUTIONS** offers savings through various health insurance options to students and their dependents who cannot obtain insurance from elsewhere. This program, implemented in partnership with MHEC, offers student health insurance and wellness services provided by UnitedHealthcare Student Resources and the HealthMarkets Insurance Agency, Inc.

The **WICHE GROUP PROPERTY INSURANCE** is exclusively available to institutions that formerly participated in the MHEC's Master Property Program (MPP). WICHE's sponsorship ensures these institutions can maintain campus property insurance.

Policy Analysis and Research unit staff provide support to the region through regular **PEER-TO-PEER VIRTUAL CONVENINGS** on federal issues, student access and success, improving the value proposition for postsecondary education, and sharing promising approaches and strategies to common challenges in the West. The primary convening is a bimonthly call among state and system chief academic officers (and institutional staff where appropriate) that fosters collaboration on challenges facing higher education. The unit has also spun off a separate call on health workforce issues and helps support an institutionally focused call in collaboration with the Programs and Services unit.

## Current Activities – Projects and Initiatives

*Continuing (or new) work supported by grants, contracts, or fees.  
All work in this category is considered high priority.*

**Focus:** A/F Affordability & Finance A/S Access & Success W/S Workforce & Society I Innovation V/A Value & Accountability

Project	Focus	Geo Scope	Funding	Staff FTE / Timeline	Partners
Joint Compact for Faculty Development and Opportunity	A/S, W/S	U.S.	Mellon Foundation \$150,000 grant	0.1 12/24 – 11/26	Policy Analysis and Research unit, NEBHE, SREB
Technology and Partnerships for Transfer Success	A/S, I	U.S.	Anonymous \$435,000 grant	0.25 2/24 – 10/26	13 institutions in 5 states
WICHE Academy for Leaders in the Humanities	A/S, W/S	Western	Mellon Foundation \$1.5 million grant	0.5 (7/26 – 9/26 to complete reporting) 1/23 – 9/26	Western postsecondary institutions

The **JOINT COMPACT FOR FACULTY DEVELOPMENT AND OPPORTUNITY:** Staff are collaborating with the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE) and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), two of the three other higher education regional compacts, on a project to educate and inform interested parties about faculty demographics. Funded by a grant from the Mellon Foundation, the deliverables include a landscape analysis of faculty demographics and will culminate in a national convening. The proposed work will also include creating a data dashboard to provide the findings to the funder. The project concludes in fall 2026.

**TECHNOLOGY AND PARTNERSHIPS FOR TRANSFER SUCCESS:** An anonymous funder approved moving grant funds originally slated to support the technology infrastructure of the Interstate Passport® program to a new initiative called Technology and Partnerships for Transfer Success. Since spring 2024, six projects involving 13 institutions across five states have been participating in a community of practice to support the implementation of



technology solutions that help students transfer credit between partner institutions. Grant activities will continue through fall 2026.

The **WICHE ACADEMY FOR LEADERS IN THE HUMANITIES** offers leadership development to tenured humanities faculty members. WICHE is collaborating with the Mellon Foundation and other key stakeholders to develop a two-year, campus-based immersive experience for faculty leaders. These leaders attend a three-day WICHE Institute for Leaders in the Humanities in Boulder, Colorado, focused on three key competencies: career planning and development, project management, and organizational design and agility. They will collaborate with upper-level academic administration to learn more about daily campus operations, how to execute successful change projects, receive internal and external mentoring, and build a new professional network with the fellows appointed at other institutions.

## New Directions

*Commission-approved projects for which staff is actively seeking funding, prioritized as follows:*

**Focus:** **A/F** Affordability & Finance **A/S** Access & Success **W/S** Workforce & Society **I** Innovation **V/A** Value & Accountability  
**Project prioritization:** ■ Relevance (mission critical) ■ Opportunity (funding) ■ Competence (staff/consultants)

Project	Focus	Priority	Geo Scope	Funding	Staff FTE / Timeline	Partners
Reducing the Postsecondary Attainment Gap for American Indians and Alaska Natives: Linking Policy and Practice	A/S		U.S.	TBD	TBD	Tribal colleges, Tribal education departments, higher education organizations
No Holding Back – Tools for Assessing Administrative Holds	A/S, A/F		U.S.	TBD	TBD	National Association of Collegiate and University Business Officers (NACUBO), members of the Alliance and Forum, and Policy Analysis and Research unit

## **REDUCING THE POSTSECONDARY ATTAINMENT GAP FOR AMERICAN INDIANS AND ALASKA NATIVES: LINKING POLICY AND PRACTICE**

, an initiative begun in late 2017 with funding from Lumina Foundation, continues to have strong relevance considering the persistent postsecondary attainment gap of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students compared to other student populations. Staff will seek funding to continue efforts to reduce or eliminate these gaps at Native American-Serving Nontribal Institutions (NASNTIs) by supporting relevant high-impact practices and fostering institutional and Tribal collaborations to share and expand sustainable student support systems on campuses. Another primary objective is to continue strengthening NASNTIs' presence and impact in state and federal higher education policy arenas and to create a collaborative network of institutions serving large numbers of AI/AN students.

**NO HOLDING BACK – ASSESSING THE USE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HOLDS:** In 2023, the Programs and Services (PAS) and Policy Analysis and Research (PAR) units collaborated with the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) to provide institutions in the West with tools to (re)evaluate their administrative hold policies to improve student success and better use their data in policy formation. Staff have been collaboratively socializing the toolkit through presentations at national conferences with the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO). We will continue distributing these resources and seek new partners interested in the continued application of the tools and exploring policy implications.

## **Potential Future Projects**

*Work that staff are considering pursuing and bringing to the Commission for approval, along with ideas generated by Commissioners.*

**ALLIANCE ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP ACADEMY:** As a part of the PAS unit's leadership development portfolio, this program would identify, develop, and prepare aspiring leaders for career advancement and success in progressively more complex administrative roles at community, junior, and technical colleges across the West. The curriculum for this program would emphasize coordination among academic affairs, student affairs, and enrollment management, as is common in higher education.

**LEADERSHIP ACADEMY FOR EMERGING HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY EXPERTS:** As a part of the PAS unit's leadership development portfolio, this program, conducted in partnership with the PAR unit, would be designed specifically for those who work in higher education policymaking, policy analysis, and policy implementation settings. This program would serve to enhance the knowledge, skills, and capacity of emerging higher education policy experts.

**LEADERSHIP ACADEMY FOR FACULTY ACROSS DISCIPLINES:** As a part of the PAS unit's leadership development portfolio, this program would be designed specifically for tenured faculty across academic disciplines (e.g., arts and humanities, STEM, social sciences, and business and development) who have administrative aspirations. The curriculum would be designed to develop and prepare future college and university leaders to assume senior-level roles on campuses across the West.

**DUAL MISSION INSTITUTION NETWORK AND CONVENING:** Dual mission institutions are a unique and emergent institutional type that is present throughout the West. Representing a new model for higher education, dual mission institutions offer a range of bachelor's degrees, career-focused associate degrees, and workforce training programs. Their commitment to access, innovative credentialing practices, and strong industry partnerships allows them to meet the needs of their regions directly. This project would build on the work of the American Council on Education (ACE) and serve as a networking and learning space for senior academic leaders at dual mission institutions in the WICHE region.

**PSEP ADMINISTRATION TIMELINE REDESIGN:** To serve students, states, and institutions well, the administration of the Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP) seeks to balance the timelines of state legislatures and budget committees with the needs of student applicants and the institutions that they apply to. Working with a consultant, the Student Access Programs (SAP) team would review the current administrative process to learn more about how and when applicants are selected and notified, and how those selections are communicated to institutions and states. After this initial assessment, the team will determine the best way to redesign and implement a new timeline, if necessary.

**PSEP TRANSPARENCY PROJECT:** PSEP students do not have comparable tuition and contact information as students interested in the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) and the Western Regional Graduate Program (WRGP). The SAP team, along with consultants, would like to evaluate which information is most important to PSEP students when selecting an academic program. The team, with technology support, would design new program pages that will function similarly to the WUE and WRGP online tuition savings finder pages. These pages would include tuition costs and relevant details on how the support fee is administered within the program, as well as important contact information and highlights of the program offerings. These pages would be updated annually by the professional programs to ensure up-to-date information for prospective and current students.

**WUE AND WRGP INSTITUTIONAL PARTNER ENGAGEMENT:** Institutional partners are integral to the continuation and expansion of WUE, WRGP, and PSEP, and engagement activities with these institutional partners may take many forms. The goal is not only to engage more with participating institutions but also to learn more about those institutions that appear to be a good fit for Student Access Programs that are not yet participating.

Exploration will begin with enrollment management leaders who use WICHE's tuition savings programs as a tool in their enrollment strategy to determine whether the team will need additional support from a consultant.

**A NETWORK FOR CYBERSECURITY RESOURCE SHARING:** Cybersecurity costs have steadily increased over the last decade, with the advent of artificial intelligence (AI) introducing new risks and threats to institutional cybersecurity. This landscape introduces an increasingly unbalanced higher education infrastructure in which more highly resourced institutions in highly populated areas can maintain stronger cybersecurity and staffing, whereas less resourced institutions, especially those in rural and remote areas, face staffing shortages and lower operational budgets and are simply less equipped to respond to the expanding cybersecurity enterprise needs. Higher education faces unique and heightened risks due to the diversity of stakeholders and the need to manage sensitive student data. This project will partner with technical, nontechnical, and cybersecurity professionals at institutions of all sizes in the WICHE states and Pacific Island jurisdictions to support sharing resources, promising practices, and sound policies.

**A TOOLKIT TO ASSESS THE RETURN ON TECHNOLOGY INVESTMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION:** Building on work done through Cost-savings Partnerships and the Technology and Partnerships for Transfer Success initiatives, staff propose developing a toolkit to help equip higher education institutions with a protocol and methodology to identify hidden costs, measure impact, and strengthen relationships across institutions to improve outcomes before, during, and after the procurement process. This project will partner with community colleges and universities in WICHE states and Pacific Island jurisdictions to develop a clear understanding of all stakeholders involved in the procurement, implementation, and maintenance of technology systems at institutions of higher education. To accomplish this goal, WICHE proposes partnering with trusted experts, such as the National Association of Collegiate and University Business Officers (NACUBO), EDUCAUSE, and/or WCET, that have engaged in community-based problem solving on other issues around technology and strategic finance. The project will require forming cross-functional teams at institutions across the West to develop and test the toolkit and offer institutional perspectives.

# POLICY ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH (PAR)

## Current Activities – Ongoing Services and Resources

*Continuing work supported by the General Fund or by fees.  
All work in this category is considered high priority.*

**Focus:** A/F Affordability & Finance A/S Access & Success W/S Workforce & Society I Innovation V/A Value & Accountability

Project	Focus	Geo Scope	Staff FTE	Partners
<i>Benchmarks: WICHE Region</i>	A/F, A/S, W/S, V/A	Western	0.025	N/A
Legislative Advisory Committee (LAC)	A/F, A/S, W/S, I, V/A	Western	0.25	WICHE states and Pacific Island jurisdictions
Peer-to-peer Virtual Convenings	A/F, A/S, W/S, I, V/A	Western	0.15	WICHE states and Pacific Island jurisdictions, Programs and Services unit
<i>Regional Fact Book for Higher Education in the West</i>	A/F, A/S, W/S, V/A	Western	0.025	N/A
State Policy and Data Profiles	A/F, A/S, W/S, I, V/A	U.S.	0.2	N/A
<i>Tuition and Fees in Public Higher Education in the West</i>	A/F	Western	0.025	WICHE states and Pacific Island jurisdictions
<i>WICHE Insights</i>	A/F, A/S, W/S, I, V/A	Western	0.1	N/A
WICHE Policy Webinar Series	A/F, A/S, W/S, V/A	Western	0.1	Variable
WICHE State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (W-SARA)	A/S, I, V/A	Western	2.45	NC-SARA, W-SARA, MHEC, NEBHE, and SREB

The regularly updated **BENCHMARKS: WICHE REGION** data resource analyzes key higher education metrics and information about the West's progress in improving access to, success in, and financing of higher education. This resource helps stakeholders monitor regional changes over time and informs discussions in policy and education communities. Utilizing WICHE's Policy Analysis Research Database (PAR), the *Benchmarks* data dashboard also includes state information and regional metrics.

The **LEGISLATIVE ADVISORY COMMITTEE (LAC)** informs the Commission and staff about significant legislative issues related to higher education, and staff serves the LAC by informing members about emerging policy issues in the West and relevant policy research. LAC members are appointed by the Commission and meet annually. Each WICHE Executive Committee member can appoint up to four legislators to serve on the LAC. Commissioners who are also legislators are ex officio members of their LAC delegation.

PAR unit staff provide support to the region through regular **PEER-TO-PEER VIRTUAL CONVENINGS** on federal issues, student access and success, improving the value proposition for postsecondary education, and sharing promising approaches and strategies to common challenges in the West. The primary convening is a bimonthly call among state and system chief academic officers (and institutional staff where appropriate) that fosters collaboration on challenges facing higher education. The unit has also spun off a separate call on health workforce issues and helps support an institutionally focused call in collaboration with the Programs and Services (PAS) unit.

The **REGIONAL FACT BOOK FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE WEST** presents regional and state-by-state data and analysis on policy indicators across a range of topics. These fiscal, demographic, economic, and social indicators provide up-to-date information for policymakers, educators, and researchers in the West. The *Fact Book's* downloadable data tables are updated periodically throughout the year. WICHE supplements the core data sources as much as possible to keep this resource contemporary and examines the overall utility of the full suite of data resources.

WICHE is continuing to identify what would be most useful for the **STATE POLICY AND DATA PROFILES** that could provide additional state and Pacific Island jurisdiction's postsecondary contexts and data. The PAR enables the PAR unit to provide more detailed and relevant information specific to each WICHE state and Pacific Island jurisdiction. Staff will work with agency and institutional staff from across the region to determine how this resource could be structured to be most beneficial.

**TUITION AND FEES IN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE WEST** annually provides comprehensive data about the tuition and fee rates published by public higher education institutions in the WICHE region, including changes in tuition and fee rates over the past

one-, five-, and 10-year periods. In addition to total tuition and fees, the report displays the average mandatory fees for each institution, state, and Pacific Island jurisdiction, over the past one, five, and 10 years, as well as what proportion of total tuition and fees they represent. WICHE also annually provides a second analysis examining the implications and state finance and financial aid trends.

The **WICHE INSIGHTS** series consists of periodic briefs that illuminate a higher education policy or research topic or that supplement a regular WICHE activity or release (such as the annual *Tuition and Fees* or the quadrennial *Knocking at the College Door* report).

The **WICHE POLICY WEBINAR SERIES** features staff, partners, and higher education stakeholders periodically hosting digital forums for registrants on selected higher education topics of interest. In FY 2027, WICHE will continue to identify webinar opportunities that will be of interest and use to the region.

The **WICHE STATE AUTHORIZATION RECIPROCALITY AGREEMENT (W-SARA)** is a voluntary agreement among states designed to establish comparable standards for U.S. states, territories, and freely associated states regulating postsecondary distance education. SARA expands access to postsecondary educational opportunities while ensuring meaningful consumer protections. WICHE coordinates and oversees the membership of SARA states in the West through the WICHE State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (W-SARA). WICHE collaborates with the other regional compacts and the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) to provide national coverage and ensure consistency in the agreement’s implementation.

## Current Activities – Projects and Initiatives

*Continuing (or new) work supported by grants, contracts, or fees.*

*All work in this category is considered high priority.*

**Focus:** A/F Affordability & Finance A/S Access & Success W/S Workforce & Society I Innovation V/A Value & Accountability

Project	Focus	Geo Scope	Funding	Staff FTE / Timeline	Partners
Increasing Access, Affordability, and Equity Using OER: A National Consortium	A/F, A/S, I, V/A	U.S.	\$553,000	0.95 10/24 – 10/26	Hewlett Foundation, MHEC, NEBHE, SREB

Project	Focus	Geo Scope	Funding	Staff FTE / Timeline	Partners
Support for the Wyoming Innovation Partnership	A/S, W/S, I, V/A	Western	\$131,896	0.75 7/27 – 12/27	Wyoming Community College Commission, Wyoming Governor’s Office
<i>Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates</i>	A/S, W/S	U.S.	\$190,000	0.3 01/24 – 06/27	College Board, Lumina Foundation
Rural Higher Education Center – Evaluating Train-in-Place Rural Nursing Programs	W/S, A/S, I, V/A	Colorado, New Mexico, Wyoming, WICHE region	\$249,970	0.25 9/24 – 8/29	Institute for Education Sciences, MDRC
A Landscape Analysis of Completion Strategies in the West	A/F, A/S, W/S, V/A	WICHE region	\$201,443	0.6 1/25 – 8/26	ECMC Foundation
The Hole in State Policy: Short-term Credentials	A/S, W/S, I, V/A	WICHE region	\$598,000	0.65 5/26 – 12/28	Pew Charitable Trusts
Improving Policy and Practice to Support Behavioral Health on Campus	A/S, W/S, I, V/A	National	\$150,000	0.25 1/26 – 8/26	Jed Foundation, Lumina Foundation, Trellis Foundation, MHEC, NEBHE, SREB, WICHE Behavioral Health Program
Textbook Price Transparency	A/F, A/S, V/A	WICHE region	\$25,000	0.1 2/26 – 5/27	Michelson 20MM Foundation

### **INCREASING ACCESS, AFFORDABILITY, AND EQUITY USING OER: A NATIONAL CONSORTIUM:**

The PAR unit has received an additional round of funding to continue work with the three other regional higher education compacts — the Midwest Higher Education Compact (MHEC), the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE), and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) — focused on scaling the successful adoption of high-quality open educational resources (OER) to improve student outcomes, increase equity,

and improve affordability. Staff have received indications that this work is likely to receive additional funding.

**SUPPORT FOR THE WYOMING INNOVATION PARTNERSHIP:** WICHE was contracted by the Wyoming Community College Commission to provide project management for a broad initiative that seeks to modernize and focus Wyoming's efforts to develop a resilient workforce and economy. The effort aims to better align Wyoming's economic development agenda by increasing collaborations among state entities and, ultimately, local partners. WICHE also works closely with the Wyoming governor's office and the Wyoming Business Alliance on this initiative.

***KNOCKING AT THE COLLEGE DOOR: PROJECTIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES:***

In December 2024, the PAR unit successfully released the 11th edition of state, regional, and national forecasts of high school graduates. During FY 2027, staff will continue sharing lessons from the work and developing supplements, including analyses of projections for the Pacific region and assessing projections for male and female graduates.

**RURAL HIGHER EDUCATION CENTER – EVALUATING TRAIN-IN-PLACE RURAL NURSING PROGRAMS:**

WICHE has received federal funding as part of a larger consortium focused on rural higher education to evaluate rural train-in-place programs at three sites in the West. Although this work is focused on three states, WICHE expects to broadly share and distribute the findings from this work (as well as those of our consortium partners). This is one component of WICHE's broader efforts to support the region in meeting workforce challenges. This project is expected to run through FY 2029.

**A LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS OF COMPLETION STRATEGIES IN THE WEST:** As a first step in broader work on the value in postsecondary education, WICHE has been funded to carry out a landscape analysis of completion initiatives currently underway in the West. This work will help address a major concern in ensuring value in higher education, as non-completers are likely to receive little or no value for their time, effort, and expense. WICHE staff will complete this work while also identifying potential partners for further work on the value of postsecondary education. Staff received an extension through August 2026 to continue dissemination efforts.

**THE HOLE IN STATE POLICY: SHORT TERM CREDENTIALS:** WICHE previously completed a portion of the broad project envisioned here (and approved by the Commission) through convening key stakeholders and authoring a white paper on state approaches to short-term credentials. Building on that effort, WICHE expects to receive a 2.5-year grant from Pew Charitable Trusts to convene cohorts of states to examine key policy and data questions related to short-term credentials, including approaches to consumer protection, support for implementing Workforce Pell programs, and addressing private providers.

**IMPROVING POLICY AND PRACTICE TO SUPPORT BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ON CAMPUS:**

The PAR unit is partnering with the Jed Foundation (JED) to host a national convening focused on state approaches to improving behavioral health in postsecondary education. JED has secured funding to support the convening in late FY 2026. WICHE continues to provide strategic direction and collaborate closely with JED in planning the meeting. Together with the other regional compacts, WICHE expects to use the meeting to outline additional future efforts to support this work in the West. This convening will accomplish some, though not all, of the project’s scope previously approved by the Commission.

**TEXTBOOK PRICE TRANSPARENCY:** With funding from Michelson 20MM Foundation, WICHE is conducting a landscape scan of legislation and policy in the West related to textbook price transparency. The project complements WICHE’s existing funding from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, focused on scaling the adoption of open educational resources (OER).

**New Directions**

*Commission-approved projects for which staff is actively seeking funding, prioritized as follows:*

**Focus:** A/F Affordability & Finance A/S Access & Success W/S Workforce & Society I Innovation V/A Value & Accountability  
**Project prioritization:** ■ Relevance (mission critical) ■ Opportunity (funding) ■ Competence (staff/consultants)

Project	Focus	Priority	Geo Scope	Funding	Staff FTE / Timeline	Partners
Building Evidence for Scale – Policy and Practice Solutions for Adult Learners	A/S, W/S		U.S.	\$1.5M - \$2M	1.75 4 years	TBD
Policy Paper Series on Affordability	A/F, A/S		Western	\$500,000	1.5 2 years	TBD
Western Postsecondary Data Users Network	A/S, W/S, V/A		Western	\$50,000	0.5 6 months	Western states

Project	Focus	Priority	Geo Scope	Funding	Staff FTE / Timeline	Partners
Articulating the Value of Postsecondary Education in the West	TBD		Western	TBD	TBD	Western states
Policy and Practice Solutions for Workforce Shortages	A/S, W/S, I		Western	\$400,000	1.0 2 years	TBD
National Task Force for College Closures	A/F, A/S, V/A		U.S.	\$750,000	1.5 18 months	MHEC, NEBHE, SHEEO, SREB
Cybersecurity Training for Senior Nontechnical Leaders	I, W/S		Western	In-kind	.05 7/24–6/25	WCET, DHS, FEMA

### **BUILDING EVIDENCE FOR SCALE – POLICY AND PRACTICE SOLUTIONS FOR ADULT**

**LEARNERS:** Building on its Adult College Completion Network and other work related to adult learners, WICHE proposes pursuing new approaches to achieve four objectives: a) build the evidence base for effectively serving adult learners; b) facilitate collaboration among network members; c) share scalable solutions across the field; and d) link adult college completion work with the broader agenda to support opportunity. The project will also seek to partner with WICHE states, Pacific Island jurisdictions and other key stakeholders to increase the number of adults with a postsecondary credential of value. To accomplish that goal, the project will identify high-impact supports for adult learners that correlate with increased credential completion; develop effective and aligned policy and practice for serving adult learners in concert with WICHE members, postsecondary systems and institutions, employers, and local leaders; and measure the impact of initiatives aimed at increasing adult postsecondary credential completion to drive continuous improvement.

**POLICY PAPER SERIES ON AFFORDABILITY:** The PAR unit will commission a series of papers focused on policy and practice actions to improve postsecondary affordability. The papers (including WICHE as a lead author) will aim to provide rigorous, actionable research accessible to policymakers.

**WESTERN POSTSECONDARY DATA USERS NETWORK:** Education and workforce development agencies continue to improve data systems that have the potential to provide critical information to students and their families, policymakers, and institutional leaders.

To take full advantage of these systems, states, territories, and freely associated states must have highly competent staff to analyze the available data and convert it to usable information for improving programs and policies. Additionally, researchers must have opportunities to explore new areas of research that can drive policy conversations. Barriers to taking advantage of these data systems include limited opportunities for state postsecondary researchers to engage in professional development, heavy workloads managing existing reporting duties, leaving little time for exploratory analyses, and few chances to network with colleagues to address common problems. WICHE hopes to address these issues by exploring the need for and, if appropriate, establishing a Western Postsecondary Data Users Network, which would convene key system and institutional education and workforce researchers, as well as key staff from WICHE states and Pacific Island jurisdictions, to address common questions, provide technical assistance, and assist in professional development. This network would ensure that Western policymakers have access to high-quality evidence to develop, assess, and improve education and training policies and programs.

**ARTICULATING THE VALUE OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION IN THE WEST:** The PAR unit will work on multiple approaches to understand and articulate the value of postsecondary education for various stakeholders, with a focus on where that value does not meet broader expectations. This effort will begin with a general articulation of the broad dimensions of value, including the economic return to individuals and communities, civic and cultural value, and other social dimensions of value that are not easily captured in earnings data. This work will have an explicit focus on how value is articulated in different Western contexts.

**POLICY AND PRACTICE SOLUTIONS FOR WORKFORCE SHORTAGES:** The PAR unit regularly convenes key staff from the WICHE region to focus on ways to address short- and long-term workforce shortages in health fields using General Fund dollars. Staff has developed a broader proposal to carry out a project that would implement solutions being developed while focusing on building a strong research base into effective and sustainable long-term policy and practice.

**NATIONAL TASK FORCE FOR COLLEGE CLOSURES:** WICHE will pursue resources to support an in-depth expert task force focused on identifying policy and practice gaps related to precipitous college closures and recommending concrete, evidence-based approaches for addressing them. This conversation necessitates the broad engagement of state regulators, federal agency staff, accreditors, and other key education leaders. WICHE believes the regional compacts are well-placed to foster the necessary engagement and participation in this important work.

**CYBERSECURITY TRAINING FOR SENIOR NONTECHNICAL LEADERS:** As an additional component of the cybersecurity initiative, WICHE is continuing to develop partnerships with cyber experts and conducting outreach to WICHE states and Pacific jurisdictions to provide training for institutional nontechnical leaders for cyber protection.

## Potential Future Projects

*Work that staff are considering pursuing and bringing to the Commission for approval, along with ideas generated by Commissioners.*

**DUAL CREDIT POLICY AND RESEARCH:** Dual credit is ubiquitous across the region. As it has spread, interest in better understanding the long-term impact, identifying the ways it can be improved, and how different funding approaches affect implementation and student success. The PAR unit will continue to identify opportunities to engage in this work in ways that benefit the West, including projects that would improve the overall data ecosystem, evaluate different policy approaches to dual credit, and examine different state approaches to serving students.

**SUPPORTING EVIDENCE FOR STUDENT SUCCESS:** The PAR unit will continue to identify areas where WICHE can help build policy- and practice-relevant research focused on organizational priorities, including student access and success, postsecondary value, and reaching underserved populations, including rural students, military and Veteran students, adult learners, incarcerated individuals, and students of color. Additionally, this work could include topic-specific research and analysis.

**LEVERAGING WORK-BASED LEARNING TO IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES AND MEET WORKFORCE DEMANDS IN RURAL AREAS:** The goal of this work would be to help facilitate the development of partnerships among institutions and businesses to ensure effective linkages between the workplace and the classroom through co-op/internship programs. Staff believe this approach may have particular benefits for rural areas.

**STATE POLICIES TO SUPPORT MEETING STUDENTS' BASIC NEEDS:** Housing and food security are crucial issues for students across the West (and the United States as a whole). While campus-level supports such as food banks and emergency grants and loans can help, this effort would examine state- and territory-level policies that can improve student outcomes, including better alignment of social services and education programs, improved access to benefit programs, and other approaches.

**WESTERN POLICY FORUM:** An annual convening designed to advance WICHE's mission by bringing together key postsecondary leaders in the WICHE region to learn about successful strategies around access and success, accountability, finance, workforce, and innovation.

**LEADERSHIP ACADEMY FOR EMERGING HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY EXPERTS:** As a part of the PAS unit’s leadership development portfolio, this program, conducted in partnership with the PAR unit, would be designed specifically for those who work in higher education policymaking, policy analysis, and policy implementation settings. This program would serve to enhance the knowledge, skills, and capacity of emerging higher education policy experts.

## Completed Projects

*Work that staff finished in FY 2026:*

**COLORADO POSTSECONDARY PATHWAYS INITIATIVE PLANNING GRANT:** WICHE served as the fiscal agent for Colorado Postsecondary Pathways Initiative, which laid the foundation for an approach that would connect Colorado’s opportunity seekers with high-quality education, training, and career opportunities. This four-month planning grant mapped out a statewide coalition that would aim to ultimately bridge the gap in messaging and advocacy between K-12 education and employers by leveraging strategic partnerships with postsecondary providers.

**SUPPORTING STATE OPPORTUNITY INDEX PARTICIPATION IN THE WEST:** This was a brief project approved by WICHE’s President under her authority over projects under \$50,000. Through this work, WICHE worked with states and institutions in the West to increase participation in Strada Education Foundation’s State Opportunity Index. This national survey had not previously secured sufficient participation in several Western states to report on key indicators of student success and state policy outcomes. The work began in March 2026 and was expected to be completed by the conclusion of FY 2026.

## Current Activities – Ongoing Services and Resources

*Continuing work supported by membership dues or by fees.  
All work in this category is considered high priority.*

**Focus:** **A/F** Affordability & Finance **A/S** Access & Success **W/S** Workforce & Society **I** Innovation **V/A** Value & Accountability

Project	Focus	Geo Scope	Staff FTE	Partners
WCET Member Services and Support	A/S, I	U.S. and Canada	WCET staff	471 member institutions, agencies, organizations
Digital Learning Practices	A/F, A/S, I	U.S. and Canada	3.75	WCET members, Every Learner Everywhere, other organizations
Digital Learning Policies	A/S, I, V/A	U.S.	2.25	WCET members, SAN, NASASPS, NC-SARA, other organizations
WCET Annual Meeting	A/S, W/S, I	U.S. and Canada	1.5	WCET members, sponsors
WCET Leadership Summit	A/S, W/S, I	U.S. and Canada	0.5	WCET members, sponsors
WCET Webcast Series	A/S, W/S, I	U.S. and Canada	1.0	Various
wcetMIX (Member Information Exchange) and Member-only Resources	A/S, W/S, I	U.S. and Canada	1.0	WCET, SAN, and member leadership
WCET Leadership Communities	A/S, I	U.S. and Canada	0.1	WCET members
State System and Multi-Institutional Consortia Digital Learning Leaders	A/F, A/S, I	U.S.	0.25	Higher education systems and multi-institution consortia
State Authorization Network (SAN)	A/S, I, V/A	U.S.	4.0	183 memberships representing ~ 966 institutions, regional compacts, state agencies, organizations, NC-SARA
WCET Steering Committee Annual Priorities	A/F, A/S, I, V/A	U.S.	0.25	WCET-elected Steering Committee and other members

**WCET MEMBERSHIP SERVICES AND SUPPORT** helps colleges, universities, higher education organizations, state agencies, and companies understand both the practice and policy of digital learning by providing timely information and a collaborative community. The popular WCET *Frontiers* blog features promising practices, innovations, emerging policies, compliance advice, and member profiles.

WCET and Every Learner Everywhere continue to collaborate to provide in-depth analysis of **DIGITAL LEARNING PRACTICES** that have an impact on faculty and students. These groups are noted for their experience in providing members and the field with information on digital learning practices that enhance student success. Past areas of focus include artificial intelligence (AI), digital student support services, digital accessibility, student-centered course design, professional learning for faculty and leaders, evidence-based teaching practices, assessment and academic integrity, microcredentials, and learning analytics.

WCET and the State Authorization Network (SAN) continue to collaborate to provide in-depth analysis of **DIGITAL LEARNING POLICIES** (federal, state, and accreditation) that have an impact on faculty and students. WCET and SAN are noted for their expertise on policy issues, including consumer protections for digital learning students, regular and substantive interaction for distance education, state authorization of out-of-state activities, out-of-state professional licensure regulatory requirements, and digital learning definitions.

WCET hosts an **ANNUAL MEETING, A MEMBER-ONLY VIRTUAL LEADERSHIP SUMMIT, AND MONTHLY WEBCAST SERIES**. WCET's annual conference is an in-person event, bringing together up to 400 leaders and practitioners interested in good practices in digital learning in postsecondary education. Members and nonmembers attend. The member-only Virtual Summit takes place in the spring and is a half-day, single topic-focused event, with an average attendance of 150 members and nonmembers. Semimonthly "Closer Conversations" webcasts are member-only facilitated discussions around key digital learning issues.

**WCETMIX** is a digital platform to support communication, collaboration, and resource-sharing among WCET members with over 5,000 participants (members and nonmembers). Members are invited to communicate through WCET's popular NEWS and DISCUSS digital forums.

WCET also facilitates two leadership groups, using wcecMIX for asynchronous discussion. The leadership groups are for WCET members interested in networking and collaborating with other members around leadership topics. The groups are:

- ▶ **LEADup:** Leaders in (Higher) Education and Digital Learning: A group for new and emerging leaders in digital learning in higher education.
- ▶ **VISION:** Visionaries in Online Learning and Innovation: A group of senior leaders interested in fostering an environment for networking, collaboration, and idea exchange.

SAN also uses wctMIX to support collaboration and the timely communication of announcements among its members.

The **STATE SYSTEM AND MULTI-INSTITUTIONAL CONSORTIA DIGITAL LEARNING LEADERS** meet monthly to share their unique challenges and solutions in using cooperation and shared services to better meet the needs of students, faculty, and administrators at their member institutions.

The **STATE AUTHORIZATION NETWORK (SAN)** is a membership organization, created in 2011 as a network of WCET, that empowers its members to successfully resolve state and federal regulatory challenges to improve student consumer protections in digital and experiential learning across state lines. SAN serves postsecondary institutional staff who must translate and implement educational technology regulations and the agencies that support that work. Related issues include state institutional approvals, reciprocity, professional licensure, employment law issues, international compliance, and military-related considerations.

SAN is a regularly requested presenter on state authorization and related regulatory compliance. Additionally, SAN continues to grow its library of resources and tools, provides members with an online eight-week training, webinars, and in-person workshops, as well as facilitates communication so that members can cooperate to identify common needs, track emerging policies and regulations, evaluate their efficacy, and share lessons learned. SAN recently released the *State-to-State Institutional Approval for Distance Education Handbook* to support institutions that must seek institutional approval for interstate distance education directly from states as opposed to obtaining state institutional approval through participation in the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (SARA).

Each year, the **WCET STEERING COMMITTEE** selects **ANNUAL PRIORITIES** to provide insights and resources to assist members. In 2026, the Steering Committee will focus on:

- ▶ **Microcredentials and Short-term Credentials** How can institutions effectively design and deliver short-term credentials and effectively leverage workforce Pell once it's available in mid-2026?
- ▶ **Change Management and Leadership** What strategies and models can help higher education leaders guide and support their teams during times of dynamic change? How can artificial intelligence be leveraged?
- ▶ **Learning Analytics and Data-driven Decision Making** How can institutions best interpret data and leverage data to effectively make the case for their online learning programs? What are innovative ways AI can be used for data analysis and data visualizations?

## Current Activities – Projects and Initiatives

*Continuing (or new) work supported by grants, contracts, or fees.  
All work in this category is considered high priority.*

**Focus:** A/F Affordability & Finance A/S Access & Success W/S Workforce & Society I Innovation V/A Value & Accountability

Project	Focus	Geo Scope	Funding	Staff FTE / Timeline	Partners
Artificial Intelligence: Policy and Practice in Higher Education	A/S, W/S, I, V/A	U.S.	Internal	0.25 7/25 – 6/26	WCET, external consultants, and other digital learning nonprofits as needed
Emerging Federal Policies	A/F, I, V/A	U.S.	Internal	1.5 7/25 – 6/27	WCET, SAN, Policy Analysis and Research unit
Every Learner Everywhere	A/F, A/S, I	U.S.	Gates Foundation \$33,607,570	5.8 Through 6/27	13 partner organizations
Federal Judicial and Policy Tracker	A/S, I, V/A	U.S.	Internal 2025 – indefinite	0.25	External consultants, SAN and WCET staff
Planning to Deliver: A 1EdTech and WCET Accessibility Workshop Series	A/S, I, V/A	U.S.	Participant fees	0.2 7/25 – 6/26	1EdTech
Axim Collaborative	A/S, I	Arizona and Texas	Subaward from Axim Foundation \$60,000	0.2 2026 – 2028	Alamo Colleges, Rio Salado College, Inscribe

The impact of **ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)** has undergone an extensive buildup and is now upon us. AI will remain one of WCET’s focus areas in FY 2027 and will include continued work on AI literacies as well as assisting institutions in using our *AI Education Policy, Guideline, and Practice Ecosystem Framework* to develop comprehensive institution-level AI policies. This work is being funded through internal investment, but may lead to additional external funding opportunities.

This year continues to bring significant **EMERGING FEDERAL POLICIES** formed by the federal administration's first-year priorities, several of which could directly affect institutions serving students through digital learning. Key priorities include program accountability regardless of modality or sector, stronger alignment between education and workforce outcomes, accreditation reform, and a leaner U.S. Department of Education. In 2025, the administration issued multiple executive orders directing the department to advance these priorities, including accreditation reform and reductions in department staffing. With the enactment of the One Big Beautiful Bill (OB3) on July 4, 2025, the department was further directed to develop higher education regulations to implement the statute. In response, the department initiated negotiated rulemaking to address loan limits, the expansion of Pell Grants for short-term programs through Workforce Pell, and the development of program accountability measures applied consistently across institutional sectors and modalities. Consistent with these priorities, the department also launched a separate negotiated rulemaking on accreditation reform. WCET and SAN will continue to monitor these federal policy developments, inform members, and engage in the SARA Policy Modification Process to support improvements to reciprocity policies.

**EVERY LEARNER EVERYWHERE** is a network of 13 partner organizations working collaboratively to harness digital learning technology, driving innovation in higher education to improve outcomes for every learner. WCET is an intermediary for the network and also one of the participating partners. The most involved partner organizations include Achieving the Dream, American Public and Land-Grant Universities, and the Online Learning Consortium. The network builds capacity in colleges and universities to improve student outcomes through digital learning by providing direct institutional support, timely resources and toolkits, and ongoing analysis of institutional practices and market trends. Service topics include information on digital learning pedagogical practices, evidence-based teaching practices for digital learning, and techniques for putting students first in the classroom. The network regularly provides free webinars, blogs, and publications on these topics, as well as multiple services, including professional learning and consultative services for interested institutions.

In 2025, SAN and WCET created a web-based **FEDERAL JUDICIAL AND POLICY TRACKER** to help the public track the development of federal statutes, regulations, guidance, and court opinions that affect digital technology in higher education. Since the development of judicial opinions and legal requirements often undergo a lengthy process that is challenging to follow, the tracker provides an easy way to follow these developments and participate in the federal regulatory process.

WCET is collaborating with 1EdTech on an accessibility workshop series, **PLANNING TO DELIVER: A 1EDTECH AND WCET ACCESSIBILITY WORKSHOP SERIES**, to help institutions proactively and collaboratively work towards compliance with the U.S. Department of



Justice accessibility rules, while also ensuring all of their content is accessible for the best user experience.

WCET was included as a subawardee in an **AXIM COLLABORATIVE** grant awarded to Alamo Colleges and Rio Salado College. The primary goal of the project is to dramatically increase the connection and sense of belonging for fully online learners, leading to an improvement in student retention through the use of human-centered technology that builds genuine virtual learning communities, expands social capital for online learners, and improves outcomes. WCET will support the grant by providing opportunities for participants to convene as well as disseminate findings.

## New Directions

*Projects that may need WICHE President approval for which staff is actively seeking funding, prioritized as follows:*

**Focus:** A/F Affordability & Finance A/S Access & Success W/S Workforce & Society I Innovation V/A Value & Accountability  
**Project prioritization:** ■ Relevance (mission critical) ■ Opportunity (funding) ■ Competence (staff/consultants)

Project	Focus	Priority	Geo Scope	Funding	Staff FTE / Timeline	Partners
From Framework Fog to Focus: Partnership to Support Emerging AI Ecosystems in Higher Education	A/S, I		U.S.	Funder TBD	0.25 3 years	External consultant and WCET members
Global Compliance Handbook	A/F, A/S, I, V/A		U.S.	Internal	0.25 1 year	External consultant and SAN staff

**FROM FRAMEWORK FOG TO FOCUS: PARTNERSHIP TO SUPPORT EMERGING AI ECOSYSTEMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION** builds on WCET’s successful 2025 revision to its AI policies and practices framework. WCET is exploring the possibility of gaining external funding to develop a multiyear project that would assist institutions in developing AI ethical and responsible use guidelines through a community of practice. In addition to facilitating

the development of a vibrant community of practice, the project would also surface robust, generalizable research that can be used to further modify the framework and assist a broad group of institutions in successfully developing and adopting AI policies and guidelines.

SAN will create a **GLOBAL COMPLIANCE HANDBOOK** to help institutions create country-specific compliance plans for serving students outside the U.S. through distance education. It will highlight key considerations including institutional approval, data privacy, web accessibility, and other country-specific requirements.

## Completed Projects

*Work that staff finished in FY 2026:*

**EVERY LEARNER EVERYWHERE** focused on strengthening the network by creating a new strategic plan and operationalizing this plan in coordination with the network, updating its services framework, remediating all content for accessibility, reorganizing the team under the leadership of the new director, engaging in a listening tour with the network partners and external stakeholders, and conducting multiple workshops on sustainability planning. The network created new learning experiences that can be provided directly to individuals or as pathways to individuals and institutions, provided multiple services to cohorts of institutions, and hosted free webinars to the field. The network continued to be a recognized leader in transformational digital learning through multiple conference presentations, resources, and blog posts.

The 2025 **WCET ANNUAL MEETING** took place in Denver, Colorado, in October 2025. The 37th Annual Meeting had nearly 300 attendees. Sessions covered an array of digital learning and higher education topics, including information about recently released regulations, artificial intelligence, alternative assessments, microcredential strategies, and digital learning growth and sustainability. The Annual Summit for Women in eLearning was held in conjunction with the Annual Meeting and brought together nearly 75 attendees to discuss various topics, including leadership, AI, and mentorship.

The **MEMBER-ONLY VIRTUAL SUMMIT** topic for 2025 focused on the intersection of policy and practice for the development of high-quality digital learning. Held in partnership with Quality Matters, the Summit attracted 361 registrants. Topics included artificial intelligence, accessibility, short-term Pell, and the ROI of digital learning. This was the first time that WCET has partnered with another organization for our Virtual Summit, and the partnership with Quality Matters was a success.

The **WCET WEBCAST SERIES** is popular with the WCET community because it is free and open to all, featuring experts and practitioners who share pragmatic advice and lessons learned on digital learning topics. Topics for 2025 included compliance with Department

of Justice accessibility rules cost and price of distance education, AI and accessibility, and course sharing models.

The **SAN IMPLEMENTATION WORKSHOP** was held in March 2026 in Boulder, Colorado. The workshop builds upon the lessons learned in the virtual *SAN State Authorization Foundations Course*. Participants explored strategies for developing policies and processes to implement student consumer protections directed by state and federal requirements for out-of-state activities of their institutions. Participants were placed in small mentor-led groups to receive expert support and facilitate networking with peers.

New **SAN RESOURCES** include the *State-to-State Institutional Approval for Distance Education Handbook*, which supports institutions that do not participate in State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements, including those located in California. Additionally, SAN released resources for professional licensure compliance including *Survey Findings on the True Scope of Licensure Compliance*, and a member-only *Nursing Program State-Specific Requirements Chart*, providing practical, state-by-state program approval guidance for nursing programs.

Each year, the **WCET STEERING COMMITTEE** selects **ANNUAL PRIORITIES** to provide insights and resources to assist members. Working groups are formed to advise and assist in developing webinars, conference sessions, blog posts, reports, and other resources to inform the membership. The selected topics for 2026 were:

- ▶ **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** As institutions move beyond conversations about academic integrity, how can they develop institutional-level policies for the ethical and responsible use of AI across all segments of the institutional community? Additionally, how can institutions develop AI literacies that will assist students, faculty, and staff in successfully navigating rapidly evolving AI systems?
- ▶ **Digital Learning Operations** What strategic role should digital learning play as institutions respond to shifting workforce development needs and declining traditional-age student populations? What are the ways in which digital learning leaders can help campus leadership better understand the role and importance of digital learning in the strategic planning process?

SAN also directed a third edition update of the book, **STATE AUTHORIZATION OF COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**, targeted to be released in spring 2026. The book serves as a guide to the legal basis for college degrees, diploma mill problems, state approvals, state authorization reciprocity, federal regulations for state authorization of distance education, and professional licensure state, and federal requirements.

WCET completed several AI projects. **SUPPORTING GOVERNANCE, OPERATIONS, AND INSTRUCTION AND LEARNING THROUGH ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE** analyzed the results of a spring 2025 survey of institutional-level AI policies and practices. Additionally, WCET

published a second version of its popular AI policies framework, **AI EDUCATION POLICY, GUIDELINE, AND PRACTICE ECOSYSTEM FRAMEWORK 2025**. This resource assists institutions in developing deliberately designed, mature, institution-level AI policies and guidelines that support the successful adoption and deployment across the entire institution. Finally, WCET published in January 2026, **AI LITERACIES IN PRACTICE: A COMPREHENSIVE PLAYBOOK FOR HIGHER EDUCATION**, which assists institutions in contextualizing a comprehensive set of AI literacies that can then be deployed across the campus.

WCET also completed the development of its **DISTANCE EDUCATION MATURITY TOOLKIT**, a member-only resource comprised of a comprehensive tool that institutions can use to evaluate the maturity of their online education programs. The toolkit also includes a series of case studies and tools that institutions can use to surface stakeholder needs and concerns in order to strengthen their distance education programs.

### Potential Future Projects

*Work that staff are considering pursuing:*

**Focus:** A/F Affordability & Finance A/S Access & Success W/S Workforce & Society I Innovation V/A Value & Accountability  
**Project prioritization:** ■ Relevance (mission critical) ■ Opportunity (funding) ■ Competence (staff/consultants)

Project	Focus	Priority	Geo Scope	Funding	Staff FTE / Timeline	Partners
Online Education Research Agenda	A/S, I, V/A	■ ■ ■ ■	U.S.	Internal initially	0.1 1 year	Policy Analysis and Research unit and external consultants

**ONLINE EDUCATION RESEARCH AGENDA** Despite the prevalence of distance education and digital learning (most students now take at least one online course), research on what constitutes high-quality distance education and best practices for developing and offering distance education remains scant. In fact, some of the current research is poorly designed and/or tells an incomplete story. Toward that end, the Policy Analysis and Research unit and WCET propose the development of a distance education/digital learning research agenda that would outline the areas of needed research. Grounded in practitioner experience and informed by state policy, legislative, accreditor, and quality assurance perspectives, the agenda will identify research needs, clarify why they now matter, and identify actionable next steps for the field.

# BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROGRAM

## Current Activities – Ongoing Services and Resources

*Continuing work supported by membership dues or by fees.  
All work in this category is considered high priority.*

**Focus:** A/F Affordability & Finance A/S Access & Success W/S Workforce & Society I Innovation V/A Value & Accountability

Project	Focus	Geo Scope	Staff FTE	Partners
BHP Member Service and Support	A/S, I	Western	0.2	WICHE- region behavioral health authorities
Western States Decision Support Group (WSDSG): Annual Membership Program	A/S, I, V/A	Western	0.2	WICHE-region behavioral health data specialists

**BHP MEMBER SERVICE AND SUPPORT:** The WICHE states and Pacific Island jurisdictions are asked to contribute a nominal support fee of \$15,000 each to the WICHE BHP to be a member of the Behavioral Health Oversight Council to provide guidance to and collaboration with fellow members. As part of the regional collaborative, states have a platform to perform regional collaborative projects; have access to regional training to support workforce development and systems improvement; have available to them consultation and technical assistance on a variety of policy issues; and be part of an interstate networking and resource sharing collaborative.

**WESTERN STATES DECISION SUPPORT GROUP (WSDSG) SUPPORT GROUP:** Since 1985, the WICHE BHP has hosted the WSDSG, which serves as an information-sharing network and collaboration group for state behavioral health data and evaluation staff from WICHE states and territories. WSDSG members discuss emerging issues in behavioral health data collection, reporting, and system evaluation. The WICHE BHP also organizes an annual forum featuring training and presentations. WSDSG is funded through an annual membership fee of \$6,000.

## Current Activities – Projects and Initiatives

*Continuing (or new) work supported by grants, contracts, or fees.  
All work in this category is considered high priority.*

**Focus:** A/F Affordability & Finance A/S Access & Success W/S Workforce & Society I Innovation V/A Value & Accountability

Project	Focus	Geo Scope	Funding	Staff FTE / Timeline	Partners
Alaska Psychology Internship Consortium (AK-PIC) – Interns and Technical Assistance*	A/S, W/S	Western	\$219,550	0.12 6/25 – 5/26	State of Alaska; Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority; Alaska Psychiatric Institute
Alaska Psychiatric Institute – Regulatory Compliance Technical Assistance	A/S, V/A	Western	\$197,100	0.0 <sup>†</sup> 7/23 – 7/26	Alaska Psychiatric Institute
Alaska Psychiatric Institute – Clinical Peer Review	W/S, V/A	Western	\$150,000	0.0 <sup>†</sup> 7/25 – 6/26	Alaska Psychiatric Institute
American Academy of Addiction Psychiatry (AAAP) State Opioid/Tribal Opioid Response (SOR/TOR) Technical Assistance	A/S, W/S	Western	\$169,751	0.14 9/24 – 9/27	American Academy of Addiction Psychiatry
Arizona Evidence-Based Practices (EBPS) Fidelity Monitoring*	W/S, V/A	Western	\$1,076,827	7.3 7/25 – 6/26	State of Arizona
Arizona – Mercy Care C.A.R.E.S. Training	W/S, V/A	Western	\$70,000	0.0 <sup>†</sup> 2/24 – 3/26	Mercy Care
Arizona – Training and Quality Recommendations for System Improvement for Severe Mental Illness Population	W/S	Western	\$338,706	0.0 <sup>†</sup> 2/26 – 9/26	State of Arizona
Colorado Behavioral Health Administration Rural Behavioral Health Initiative	W/S, A/S	Western	\$1,558,920	1.5 10/24 – 9/26	State of Colorado
Guam Psychology Internship Consortium (GU-PIC)*	A/S, W/S	Western	\$358,424	0.75 10/25 – 9/26	U.S. Territory of Guam

Project	Focus	Geo Scope	Funding	Staff FTE / Timeline	Partners
Hawai'i Psychology Internship Consortium (HI-PIC)*	A/S, W/S	Western	\$2,361,302	0.5 7/25 – 6/26	State of Hawai'i
Hawai'i Recruitment of School-based Clinical Psychologists*	W/S	Western	\$100,000	0.0 <sup>†</sup> Ongoing	State of Hawai'i
Hawai'i Recruitment of School-based Behavioral Health and Social Workers*	W/S	Western	\$125,000	0.8 Ongoing	State of Hawai'i
Hawai'i Early Intervention Services Compensation Study	W/S, A/F	Western	\$124,600	0.12 5/25 – 4/26	State of Hawai'i
Idaho Psychology Internship Consortium (ID-PIC)*	A/S, W/S	Western	\$125,000	0.13 7/25 – 6/26	State of Idaho
Montana Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Workforce Needs Assessment	W/S	Western	\$308,338	0.5 10/25 – 3/27	State of Montana
Montana PACT Fidelity Reviews*	W/S, V/A	Western	\$349,575	1.5 7/24 – 6/25	State of Montana
Mountain Plains Rural Opioid Technical Assistance Center (MP ROTAC)	A/F, A/S, I	Western	\$536,355	3.0 9/22 – 9/26	U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
National Institutes of Health Behavioral Health Aide Assessment	W/S	Western	\$175,127	0.75 10/21 – 7/26	Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium; Northwest Indian College; University of Alaska – Anchorage
Nevada Psychology Internship Consortium (NV-PIC)*	A/S, W/S	Western	\$495,965	0.25 8/25 – 8/27	State of Nevada
New Mexico Psychology Internship Consortium (NM-PIC)*	A/S, W/S	Western	\$354,399	0.5 8/24 – 8/26	State of New Mexico, Indian Health Service

Project	Focus	Geo Scope	Funding	Staff FTE / Timeline	Partners
Oregon State Hospital Psychology Internship Program* (OSH-PIP)	A/S, W/S	Western	\$3,000	0.0 <sup>†</sup> 7/25 – 6/26	State of Oregon
Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP)*	W/S	Western	\$720,000	2.25 9/25 – 8/26	JBS International
Together With Veterans* – Rural Veteran Suicide Prevention	W/S	U.S.	\$1,419,567	3.25 4/25 – 3/26	U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Rocky Mountain MIRECC
Sanford Health Psychology Internship Consortium (SH-PIC)*	A/S, W/S	Western	\$64,530	0.25 4/25 – 3/26	Sanford Health
South Dakota IMP(ACT) Fidelity Reviews*	W/S, V/A	Western	\$100,120	0.25 6/25 – 5/26	State of South Dakota
South Dakota Psychology Internship Consortium (SD-PIC)*	A/S, W/S	Western	30,000	0.25 8/22 – 6/26	State of South Dakota
South Dakota Civil Commitment Assessment	A/S, W/S	Western	\$46,014	0.0 <sup>†</sup> 1/26 – 5/26	State of South Dakota
University of Texas Mental Health Dissemination, Implementation, and Sustainment (MHDIS) Center for HHS Regions 6 and 8	A/S, W/S	Texas	\$48,450	1/25 – 9/29 5 years	University of Texas
Utah Psychology Internship Consortium (UT-PIC)*	A/S, W/S	Western	\$35,074	0.0 <sup>†</sup> 7/24 – 6/26	State of Utah
WICHE States BHP-Research and Development Projects	W/S, I	Western	\$171,981	1.4 7/25 – 6/27	WICHE region

\* The WICHE BHP expects these projects will be renewed or have already been renewed for FY 2027.

† 0.0 FTE indicates that WICHE relies on consultants and/or subcontractors for this work.

**ALASKA PSYCHOLOGY INTERNSHIP CONSORTIUM (AK-PIC) INTERNS AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:**

The WICHE BHP supports the ongoing operations of the AK-PIC for interns and faculty, including its engagement in the Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Centers (APPIC) and achievement/maintenance of American Psychological Association (APA) accreditation. The AK-PIC is a multisite consortium of Alaska agencies that maintains at least one supervising psychologist on-site to provide supervision and didactic training to interns.

**ALASKA PSYCHIATRIC INSTITUTE – REGULATORY COMPLIANCE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:**

The WICHE BHP was selected through a competitive bidding process to assist the Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API) in maintaining compliance with regulating agencies through a review of policies, health information management, infection control, milieu management, risk management, medical staff credentialing, pharmacy practices, and life safety code and environment of care. The WICHE BHP conducts on-site reviews and provides guidance on addressing shortcomings in policies and execution.

**ALASKA PSYCHIATRIC INSTITUTE-CLINICAL PEER REVIEW:**

A consulting WICHE psychiatrist will conduct peer reviews at the request of the Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API) Medical director or CEO. Up to six selected cases may be reviewed each year to provide an objective clinical assessment and identify opportunities for improved care. Following the reviews, a collaborative debrief with API staff will occur to discuss findings and potential improvements.

**AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ADDICTION PSYCHIATRY (AAP) STATE OPIOID/TRIBAL OPIOID RESPONSE (SOR/TOR) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:**

The WICHE BHP is partnering with the AAP to assist with implementing provisions of its SOR/TOR grant through the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The WICHE BHP provides training and technical assistance to rural behavioral health workers for the purpose of supporting families impacted by substance misuse in rural and tribal communities. These trainings and workshops will support enhancements to the mental and behavioral health system through networking among state and tribal programs.

**ARIZONA EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES FIDELITY MONITORING:**

The WICHE BHP partners with the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System to support the implementation and fidelity reviews of four evidence-based practices (EBPs) in the Maricopa County and statewide public behavioral health systems. The WICHE BHP supports a team of fidelity reviewers who evaluate approximately 20 different providers in Maricopa County and 19 different providers across the state each year.

**ARIZONA MERCY CARE C.A.R.E.S. TRAINING:**

The WICHE BHP collaborates with Arizona-based Mercy Care through its C.A.R.E.S (Community Action Resources Education and Service) community-giving initiative to plan and provide training to increase workforce

expertise by implementing training strategies for evidence-based practices: Trauma-informed Care for Children, Youth, and Adults; Transition to Independence Model; Infant-Toddler Mental Health Coalition of Arizona 0-5 Training; and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Substance Use Disorders, including Opioids.

**ARIZONA – TRAINING AND QUALITY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT FOR SEVERE MENTAL ILLNESS POPULATION:** The Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (hereinafter “AHCCCS”) has contracted with the WICHE BHP to design a plan for a comprehensive training program and development of policy recommendations to meet the overall project goal of improving the quality of services provided to members diagnosed with serious mental illness (SMI) who are receiving treatment under court order through Arizona’s Title 36, including those who are unsheltered.

**COLORADO BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ADMINISTRATION (BHA) RURAL BEHAVIORAL HEALTH INITIATIVE:** The State of Colorado, BHA contracted with the WICHE BHP to help the state increase access to behavioral health services and support for older adults living in rural Colorado. The intent of this project is to build rural healthcare capacity to identify and refer individuals with behavioral health needs to appropriate services. The WICHE BHP will develop training modules for rural health providers to build awareness and skills in using behavioral health assessments, as well as confidence in referring patients to appropriate channels for services and care, including telehealth opportunities to support the behavioral health needs of the community.

**GUAM PSYCHOLOGY INTERNSHIP CONSORTIUM (GUAM-PIC):** The WICHE BHP has partnered with the U.S. Territory of Guam to develop an accredited psychology internship consortium to serve Guam and build the behavioral health workforce there. The WICHE BHP assists by guiding all phases of developing a psychology internship consortium to attract and retain qualified, highly trained behavioral health professionals.

**HAWAI’I PSYCHOLOGY INTERNSHIP CONSORTIUM (HI-PIC):** The WICHE BHP supports the State of Hawai’i in the ongoing operations of an accredited psychology internship consortium. A primary goal of the internship program is to establish a pipeline to build Hawai’i’s behavioral health workforce. Two Hawai’i state agencies (the Department of Education and the Department of Health) provide funding to support HI-PIC.

**HAWAI’I RECRUITMENT OF SCHOOL-BASED CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGISTS:** The Hawai’i Department of Education contracts with the WICHE BHP to recruit and contract with clinical psychologists to fill public school vacancies across the Hawaiian Islands.

**HAWAI’I RECRUITMENT OF SCHOOL-BASED BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AND SOCIAL WORKERS:** The WICHE BHP is assisting the Hawai’i Department of Education with marketing, recruitment, screening, and referral services for school-based behavioral health

(SBBH) and social work professionals to fill public school vacancies across the Hawaiian Islands. This effort is designed to increase the employment of SBBH and social work professionals.

**HAWAI'I EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES COMPENSATION STUDY:** The Hawai'i Department of Health, Early Intervention Section, contracted with the WICHE BHP to complete another comparative review of early intervention services, compensation methodology and pricing structures for contracted services and related professional salaries, such as speech language pathologists, occupational and physical therapists, etc. The goal of these studies is to obtain comparative data from other states' early intervention programs to inform Hawai'i's rates and contracting practices and to ensure they remain competitive in maintaining a sufficient workforce.

**IDAHO PSYCHOLOGY INTERNSHIP CONSORTIUM (ID-PIC):** The WICHE BHP is assisting The State of Idaho in the ongoing operations for an accredited psychology internship consortium. The primary goal of the internship consortium is to establish a pipeline to build Idaho's behavioral health workforce, especially in rural and underserved areas. The Idaho State Board of Education received funding from the Idaho Legislature to support WICHE's assistance in expanding and strengthening the internship program.

**MONTANA BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES WORKFORCE NEEDS ASSESSMENT:** The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Division, has engaged the WICHE BHP in a contract to conduct a needs assessment to determine gaps and shortages in the state's behavioral health and developmental disabilities workforce. To assess current needs and gaps, the WICHE BHP will review available workforce data and design and conduct a community needs assessment study that includes a survey and key informant interviews.

**MONTANA PACT FIDELITY REVIEWS:** The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services' Behavioral Health and Disabilities Division contracted with the WICHE BHP to provide consultation and technical assistance to the division on the implementation of its Program for Assertive Community Treatment (PACT). This project includes conducting fidelity reviews for seven PACT programs operating across the state, developing plans and focused training to improve services, and providing consultation on outcomes and dashboard development.

**MOUNTAIN PLAINS RURAL OPIOID TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER (MP ROTAC):** In October 2022, the WICHE BHP was awarded a two-year grant from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to establish the Mountain Plains Rural Opioid Technical Assistance Center (MP ROTAC), which is dedicated to supporting opioid and stimulant prevention, treatment, and recovery in HHS Region 8, comprising Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming. MP

ROTAC develops and distributes resources, training, and technical assistance to rural communities across the continuum of care. In September 2024, SAMHSA added funding for a third year of MP ROTAC operations, and the WICHE BHP will be completing all work on this grant by the end of September 2026. However, if a new solicitation is released by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the WICHE BHP will apply for a new grant.

**NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AIDE ASSESSMENT:** Through a research grant funded by the National Institutes of Health, the WICHE BHP collaborates with the Northwest Indian College, the Center for Alaska Native Health Research at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium to describe and evaluate the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium’s innovative approach to training behavioral health aides (BHA). The AK BHA Program provides training and education to village-based counselors, increasing the workforce in remote areas. This three-phase research project will support the long-term goal of gathering evidence on the effectiveness of the AK BHA program in building local capacity for place-based behavioral health services in rural and remote American Indian and Alaska Native community settings.

**NEVADA PSYCHOLOGY INTERNSHIP CONSORTIUM (NV-PIC):** The WICHE BHP assists the State of Nevada in the continued operation of an accredited psychology internship consortium. The primary goal of the internship program is to establish a pipeline to build Nevada’s behavioral health workforce. The Nevada Division of Public and Behavioral Health and Nevada WICHE provide support and funding for WICHE BHP’s ongoing technical assistance and support to the operation of the NV-PIC.

**NEW MEXICO PSYCHOLOGY INTERNSHIP CONSORTIUM (NM-PIC):** The WICHE BHP is working with partner agencies to support a doctoral psychology internship consortium for the State of New Mexico. The primary goal of the internship program is to help develop New Mexico’s behavioral health workforce in rural and underserved areas. Through funding from the New Mexico Behavioral Health Services Division, the New Mexico Department of Health, and the federal Indian Health Services, the WICHE BHP is facilitating program development and helping to ensure the program meets American Psychological Association accreditation standards.

**OREGON STATE HOSPITAL PSYCHOLOGY INTERNSHIP PROGRAM (OSH-PIP):** The WICHE BHP continues to assist the Oregon State Hospital Psychology Internship Training Program by supporting and maintaining the internship’s website.

**RURAL COMMUNITIES OPIOID RESPONSE PROGRAM (RCORP):** The WICHE BHP has partnered with JBS International to reduce morbidity and mortality associated with opioid overdoses and psychostimulant misuse in high-risk communities by strengthening the organizational and infrastructural capacity of multisector consortia. As a partner in this project,

the WICHE BHP provides technical assistance to 57 rural planning and implementation opioid grantees and psychostimulant grantees funded for three years by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). WICHE anticipates a one-year extension of this project.

**TOGETHER WITH VETERANS – RURAL VETERAN SUICIDE PREVENTION:** The WICHE BHP is collaborating with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Rocky Mountain Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center (MIRECC) to support the operations of Together With Veterans (TWW), a suicide prevention program for rural communities. The program became operational in FY 2019, with four initial sites (two in Colorado, one in Montana, and one in North Carolina). Since then, the TWW program has been implemented in 38 rural communities, 32 of which have completed their three-year commitment to the program. The TWW program sites are located in rural communities throughout the country, stretching from New Hampshire to the U.S. Territory of Guam.

**SANFORD HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY INTERNSHIP CONSORTIUM (SH-PIC):** The WICHE BHP worked with the leadership of Sanford Health to help develop a psychology internship designed to provide a broad and culturally relevant training program to support the preparation and retention of doctoral-level psychologists in North Dakota and Minnesota. Sanford Health has an extensive national footprint and is a leading agency in advancing integrated health services (physical and behavioral). The internship development began primarily with Sanford’s integrated health sites in North Dakota.

**SOUTH DAKOTA IMP(ACT) FIDELITY REVIEWS:** The WICHE BHP is continuing to assist the South Dakota Division of Behavioral Health to evaluate the fidelity of the evidence-based practice, Assertive Community Treatment (ACT), at community behavioral health clinics in three locations in South Dakota. The WICHE BHP will also work with the state to develop a fidelity review scale for forensic teams.

**SOUTH DAKOTA PSYCHOLOGY INTERNSHIP CONSORTIUM (SD-PIC):** The University of South Dakota contracted with the WICHE BHP to develop a psychology internship consortium. The WICHE BHP is working with the state to identify core partners for the internship, including the South Dakota Human Services Center in Yankton and other community-based partners. WICHE’s work will extend from planning and development to supporting the achievement of accreditation of the internship program.

**SOUTH DAKOTA CIVIL COMMITMENT ASSESSMENT:** The South Dakota Department of Social Services (DSS), Human Services Center (HSC), requested WICHE technical assistance to review civil commitment statutes and processes. WICHE will conduct a comprehensive assessment of South Dakota’s involuntary commitment system, including interviews with key stakeholders, a scan of comparable processes in selected states, and identification of opportunities to improve alignment, efficiency, and clarity across regions and partner agencies.

**UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS MENTAL HEALTH DISSEMINATION, IMPLEMENTATION, AND SUSTAINMENT (MHDIS) CENTER FOR HHS REGIONS 6 AND 8:**

THE WICHE BHP serves as a sub-awardee to the University of Texas-Austin, providing technical assistance to SAMHSA grantees across two Health and Human Services Regions. The WICHE BHP will assist in establishing the advisory board and in assessing the technical assistance desired by grantees and the optimal methods for providing it.

**UTAH PSYCHOLOGY INTERNSHIP CONSORTIUM (UT-PIC):** The WICHE BHP is working with partner agencies to develop the internship consortium’s self-study to help ensure the program meets the American Psychological Association accreditation standards. The WICHE BHP will also provide technical assistance to the internship as needed by the training committee.


**WICHE STATES BHP-RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS:** To better serve WICHE states, the WICHE BHP is conducting two research projects that will result in white papers that will be used to inform WICHE state policy and decision-makers. These projects will provide important information to WICHE states and Pacific jurisdictions in planning behavioral health services and will advance the fidelity review services WICHE provides. The first research project will perform an environmental scan of Western states’ implementation and assessment of evidenced-based behavioral health evidence-base practices (EBPs). The second project will research rural adaptations of the Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Model, including adaptations, innovations, or modifications that rural providers make to improve the fit with their rural context.

**New Directions**

*Projects that may need WICHE President approval for which staff is actively seeking funding, prioritized as follows:*

**Focus:** **A/F** Affordability & Finance **A/S** Access & Success **W/S** Workforce & Society **I** Innovation **V/A** Value & Accountability  
**Project prioritization:** ■ Relevance (mission critical) ■ Opportunity (funding) ■ Competence (staff/consultants)

Project	Focus	Priority	Geo Scope	Funding	Staff FTE / Timeline	Partners
Expansion of Behavioral Health Aide (BHA) Model in Pacific Jurisdictions	W/S, A/S	■ ■ ■ ■	Western	TBD	1 year	Pacific Jurisdictions, Native Alaskan Tribal Health Consortium

Project	Focus	Priority	Geo Scope	Funding	Staff FTE / Timeline	Partners
Improving Policy and Practice to Support Behavioral Health on Campus	A/S, W/S		Western	TBD	TBD	WICHE states

**EXPANSION OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AIDE (BHA) MODEL IN PACIFIC JURISDICTIONS:**

The WICHE BHP is providing technical assistance to the Community Guidance Center in the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) to launch a pilot project implementing the BHA model of a local community behavioral health paraprofessional worker, modeled after the Alaska BHA program. Concurrently, the WICHE BHP is providing technical assistance to the Pacific Behavioral Health Coordinating Council (PBHCC) to establish a certification system for BHAs. Current funding has been provided to WICHE from the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD), and there is interest among the other Pacific jurisdictions in expanding this effort. The WICHE BHP is exploring funding sources to support such expansion.

**IMPROVING POLICY AND PRACTICE TO SUPPORT BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ON CAMPUS:**

The Policy Analysis and Research unit will continue exploring ways to improve behavioral health in postsecondary education, building on a recently completed successful project. This work will likely focus on several potential approaches, including meeting future behavioral health workforce needs, building supportive state- and system-level networks to improve the distribution of promising approaches, and catalyzing the adoption of broad-based approaches to student health and wellness.

**Potential Future Projects**

*Work that staff is considering pursuing:*

**DEVELOPMENT OF NEW PSYCHOLOGY INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS:** The past two years of the national match for psychology internship positions has seen a significant growth in the imbalance between intern applicants and accredited internship program positions. For the current match season for internships in academic year 2026-27, 4,645 applicants registered for the match, and the total number of available internship slots/positions is currently 3,969, or a shortage of 716 registered internship positions. This presents an ideal opportunity to create new slots to meet the unmet need. The WICHE BHC has started outreach to state partners to gauge interest and support.

**TOGETHER WITH VETERANS – RURAL VETERAN SUICIDE PREVENTION 2.0:** The WICHE BHP will be actively working with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to propose a continuation of the Together With Veterans – Rural Veterans Suicide Prevention Program. This will continue the recruitment and development of rural community-based projects at the local level and will include education, training, and coaching.

## Completed Projects

*Work that staff completed in FY 2026:*

**COLORADO BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ADMINISTRATION CRISIS PROFESSIONAL CURRICULUM:** The State of Colorado, Behavioral Health Administration (BHA), contracted with the WICHE BHP to provide technical assistance in developing a crisis professional training curriculum consisting of 24 distinct modules. The WICHE BHP also augmented the BHA staff with crisis-professional expertise, supported the work of a crisis-professional advisory board, reviewed curriculum modules, and developed training for crisis professionals, first responders, and youth and young adults.

**UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:** The WICHE BHP worked in partnership with the University of Wisconsin through a Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) grant to provide education and training to graduate students, practitioners, educators, and trainers. These learning collaboratives focused on the integration of substance use disorder and mental health prevention, treatment, and recovery in rural communities. The WICHE BHP provided expert trainers for a series of six training sessions over 12 weeks, twice a year, over a two-year period. Many expert trainers were provided in conjunction with the ongoing work of the WICHE BHP's RCORP and MP ROTAC initiatives.

**WASHINGTON HEALTH CARE AUTHORITY DIGITAL BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROJECT:** The Washington Health Care Authority (HCA) contracted with the WICHE BHP to assist the HCA Division of Behavioral Health and Rehabilitation's Prenatal Through 25 Program with implementing two legislative budget provisos. The provisos sought to identify digital behavioral health technologies appropriate for children, youth, and young adults. The WICHE BHP provided project management, administrative support, and subject-matter expertise for this project.

# COLLABORATIONS ACROSS UNITS

**Focus:** **A/F** Affordability & Finance **A/S** Access & Success **W/S** Workforce & Society **I** Innovation **V/A** Value & Accountability

Project	Focus	Units	Activity Category	Description
Evolving Higher Education Policy Issues	A/S, I	Policy Analysis and Research, WCET	Projects and Initiatives (variously funded)	Through WCET's <i>Frontiers</i> blog and other avenues, the Policy Analysis and Research unit and WCET contribute to the field by engaging on emerging issues on which WICHE has policy and research insights and context. This often leads to collaboration or copublication in areas ranging from state authorization of distance learning to changes in IPEDS outcome measures data, with implications for attainment metrics.
Improving Policy and Practice to Support Behavioral Health on Campus	A/S, W/S	Policy Analysis and Research, Behavioral Health Program	Projects and Initiatives (variously funded)	This convening, a collaboration between the Policy Analysis and Research Unit and Behavioral Health Program will bring together leading states focused on emerging policy approaches in this critical area.
Peer-to-peer Virtual Convenings	A/F, A/S, W/S, I, V/A	Policy Analysis and Research, Programs and Services	Current Activities	WICHE states and Pacific Island jurisdictions



