Request for Proposals: Improving State Authorization Learning Community

The State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) is pleased to announce the creation of a new project designed to help states evaluate and strengthen their authorization processes to better protect students and improve quality in higher education. This multifaceted project will build on the recommendations provided in a recent SHEEO white paper, produce original thinking on state authorization, and provide a forum for states to work on solutions to common issues with state authorization.

The creation of a Learning Community for states seeking to improve their role as the central actors in the higher education accountability space will be a core component of this project. The goal of the Learning Community is to support state efforts to evaluate and improve state authorization policies and processes systematically. Through in-person and web-based meetings, state teams will receive professional development, technical assistance, financial support, and peer learning opportunities. SHEEO is seeking letters of interest from states that are prepared to elevate state authorization as a core quality assurance and student protection function.

Thanks to the generous support of Lumina Foundation, the Learning Community will include teams from up to eight states. The Learning Community will meet once in person and three times via webinar over 18 months. Each state will receive a $15,000 grant to help jump-start evaluation and reform efforts. The Learning Community will function as an ongoing network of the state teams, SHEEO staff, and subject-matter experts from other education organizations.

Applicants are encouraged to review the SHEEO white paper, Improving State Authorization: The State Role in Ensuring Quality and Consumer Protection in Higher Education, to inform their proposals and identify specific components of the authorization process where their state will pursue improvements. We encourage applicants to be as specific as possible when identifying how they might improve authorization in their state.

Potential ideas might include, but are not limited to:

- Updating and improving authorization processes
- Conducting organizational and process evaluations
- Improving data collection and use and creating new metrics
- Adopting new technological solutions (e.g., web-based submission and review processes, creation of new databases, etc.) that lead to new and/or improved methods and advance larger goals
- Improving mechanisms for measuring and improving quality
- Connecting authorization to the state’s larger quality assurance and improvement efforts
- Strengthening consumer protection
- Updating metrics, policies, and/or procedures for reviewing institutional financial health
• Developing a shared understanding of the importance, role, and purpose of state authorization
• Increasing the capacity of authorization offices
• Developing new and/or improved complaint processes
• Providing professional development opportunities to agency staff and/or institutions
• Developing new ways to systematize communication and/or partnerships with other quality assurance entities (e.g., U.S. Department of Education, relevant national or regional accreditation organizations)
• Developing ways of assessing new approaches to delivering education and new educational credentials, including hybrid education, badging, out-of-state educational activities of in-state providers, micro-credentials, and the like.
• Extending authorization to new providers, new sectors (including out-of-state providers not covered under reciprocity agreements, in-state distance education providers, etc.), and new delivery types.

Proposal ideas are not limited to the general topics listed above. Agencies should consider their needs and how they might improve their processes to better ensure consumer protection as well as quality assurance and improvement and propose ideas accordingly.

States interested in being part of the Learning Community should submit a letter of interest to SHEEO by 5 p.m. Mountain Time, December 16, 2019. State teams should consist of 3-4 staff with significant state authorization responsibilities. Teams may include non-SHEEO agency staff, and cross-agency or cross-sector teams are encouraged when appropriate. The letter of interest should be no more than four pages with standard margins in 11-point font and include the following:

• A brief summary of the current authorization practices, including perceived strengths and weaknesses—Please include links or references for the relevant rules or statutes as well as any informational resources published on current authorization practices.
• A list of goals the state team will work to accomplish as part of the Learning Community
• Priority authorization policies or processes the state would like to strengthen and ideas for how they might be strengthened—Please include links or citations for the policies and processes.
• Description of any professional development and technical assistance needs
• List of state team members who will participate in the community, including a short description of their current roles and responsibilities
• A description of how the $15,000 grant will be allocated

The work funded by the grants must be related to improvement in state authorization policies, practices, products, and/or processes. Teams will be required to submit brief final reports outlining the outcomes of their work and involvement in the project.

Letters of interest should be addressed to Dr. David Tandberg, SHEEO vice president for policy research and strategic initiatives, and emailed to Caitlin Dennis at cdennis@sheeo.org. Letters must be received by 5 p.m. Mountain Time, December 16, 2019, for full consideration.