the POWER of SYSTEMS
STRATEGIC PLAN



NASH
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS

Advancing Prosperity for the Nation

The National Association of Higher Education Systems (NASH) is the sole membership organization representing the interests of public higher education systems across the United States. Our 54 members represent over 700 individual institutions that serve more than 8.2 million students nationwide. Founded in 1979 as a platform for exchanging ideas and information among chief executives, NASH now empowers public higher education systems to foster a more accessible, resilient, and innovative postsecondary education sector, enabling students and communities to thrive.

Public higher education systems differ in size, scope, geography, and context. Our daily work embraces both the similarities and unique strengths of these systems and the students they serve. NASH promotes systems as coordinated entities that leverage their collective power, along with their governing and policy-making authority, to address critical issues affecting the regions and states they serve.

Systemness—the concept that we can achieve far more together than we could individually—is the cornerstone of our work. We believe systems can drive large-scale, student-centered change across institutions more efficiently and effectively than any other entity. Rather than mere mediators, auditors, or allocators, systems are essential engines of postsecondary transformation.

America's systems are at a pivotal moment, facing unprecedented challenges and opportunities, including enrollment declines, rapidly emerging technologies, and political pressures. NASH is committed to empowering systems to tackle these challenges and fuel growth and progress in their communities and across the nation.

The Power of Systems advances prosperity for the nation by seeding, testing, and scaling practices that move the dial on student success.

Proven Performance

NASH BY THE NUMBERS

700+ INSTITUTIONS FROM ALL SECTORS OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

8.2M STUDENTS

1M+ FACULTY & STAFF

1.1M+ DEGREES AWARDED ANNUALLY

35% OF PELL GRANTS

70% SOCIAL MOBILITY
STUDENTS FROM FAMILIES IN THE BOTTOM 40 PERCENTILE OF INCOME MOVE TO THE TOP 60



Our Mission

NASH activates the power of systems to cultivate a more accessible, resilient, and innovative postsecondary sector that enables students and communities to thrive.

Our Vision

Systemness unlocks the power of postsecondary education to advance prosperity for the nation.

Purpose

These principles, adapted from NASH's articles of incorporation, drive the organization's actions and define its role within the postsecondary education landscape to:

- **Advance the effectiveness** of public multi-campus systems in meeting public needs for higher education;
- **Serve as a forum** for the exchange of information and perspectives relating directly or indirectly to the administration and leadership of systems of higher education; and
- Work to **maximize opportunities and impact** and to **resolve common problems** in higher education.

Community

NASH convenes networks to share best practices, expand their knowledge base, and collaborate on shared problems of practice. By bringing together system leaders both by role and by topics of interest, we maximize opportunities to spread and scale interventions proven to move the dial on student success. We also bring key stakeholders to the table to lift up the power of systems in driving effective and lasting change.

NASH defines a system as a group of two or more colleges or universities, each with substantial autonomy and headed by a chief executive, all under a single governing board served by a system CEO. NASH associate members include formal consortia or other multi-campus organizations that have a record of collective interests and collaboration. Despite variations in structure and authority, all NASH members are committed to advancing systemness, improving student success, and expanding prosperity through the power of public higher education.

Strategic Priorities

NASH's strategic priorities, informed by member and partner engagement, highlight our focus on amplifying the role and effectiveness of public higher education systems by supporting our members in their work at home and on the national stage. NASH is committed to continuous improvement and data-driven decision making as we:

1. Champion the power of public higher education systems to serve as key agents of change in shaping the future of postsecondary education.

NASH creates and shares resources to operationalize systems' transformative potential, advocates for systems with policymakers and key partners, and serves as a voice for systems in the postsecondary landscape. These efforts advance a greater understanding of systems and their potential to drive large-scale change.

- *Success will be demonstrated through elevating system voices in the field and references to NASH's partnership and support, continued innovation through grants and funded partnerships, and engagement in the College is Worth it campaign.*

2. Enhance the capacity of public higher education systems to identify and respond to emerging student, community, and state needs.

NASH offers professional development, facilitates NASH Improvement Communities, and provides tailored technical assistance to address sector-wide issues. As a result, system leaders understand how to leverage systemness to advance their goals and have the tools to cultivate a culture of continuous improvement to meet the needs of their students, communities, and states.

- *Success will be demonstrated through opportunities for participation in NASH initiatives and offerings, expansion of NASH's member-facing data systems and supports, and utilization of NASH-generated resources and publications.*

3. Foster community amongst NASH members to maximize the impact of public higher education systems.

NASH amplifies the reach of systems, fostering peer networks that serve as a foundation for collective impact. By harnessing our members' range of perspectives and expertise, we tackle shared challenges, exchange best practices, and expand our influence on the postsecondary sector.

- *Success will be demonstrated through engagement in NASH Leadership Councils, enhanced opportunities for members to collaborate and convene including at the Superconvening, and replication and scaling of proven interventions through case studies, toolkits, and other member resources.*

Process

NASH uses a seed-test-scale approach to overcome common challenges facing the postsecondary sector. This framework provides a coordinated and iterative way for members to innovate, adopt proven interventions, and share learnings, maximizing collective impact across their institutions and others nationwide.

SEED

To move the dial on student outcomes, you need to start small. NASH identifies and invests in promising practices proven to work at one institution or system on the road toward lifting them up as examples for potential replication.

TEST

NASH embraces a "fail before scale" approach that encourages institutions to make small policy and practice changes, monitor impact, and hone interventions before investing in time and resource-intensive pilots or programmatic overhauls.

SCALE

Once a solution has been proven to reliably support student success across contexts, NASH disseminates learnings to take what works to scale to the benefit of students and communities nationwide.



Focus Areas

NASH's strategic focus areas are designed to support the unique role of system heads and their leadership teams. By operationalizing and optimizing systemness, NASH provides expertise on leveraging systems' governing authority and convening power to drive student-centered transformation and advance prosperity for the nation. In addition to providing hands-on technical assistance and direct support for innovations, we coordinate role-alike leadership councils and topical networks to enable members to share best practices, collaborate on shared challenges, and learn from experts to help transform challenges into opportunities. **NASH positions systems to not just meet the moment, but to boldly shape a brighter future for higher education and the communities it serves.**



BUILDING CAPACITY: *STRENGTHENING SYSTEMS' LEADERSHIP, INNOVATION, AND RESILIENCE*

Recognizing the power of data, we have prioritized strengthening systems' capacity for data-informed decision-making, enabling members to set benchmarks and measure progress with confidence.

- Strengthen and enhance the diversity of system leadership by delivering professional development that meets the dynamic needs of system leaders.
- Empower systems to take advantage of emerging technologies and innovation, offering guidance, hosting communities of practice, and facilitating partnerships to harness new tools for student success, research, and administration.
- Create opportunities for systems to enhance efficiency and ensure long-term financial sustainability through resources and collaboration.
- Lift up and celebrate the unique role of system leaders, including by implementing a new-system-head onboarding plan, peer mentorship program, and enhancing networking opportunities.



NAVIGATING CHALLENGES: *EQUIPPING SYSTEMS TO LEAD IN A COMPLEX AND RAPIDLY CHANGING ENVIRONMENT*

We equip systems with resources to adapt and lead effectively amidst an unpredictable and dynamic landscape.

- Equip systems to advocate at the state and local level, providing expertise and comparative data to support conversations with governing boards, state legislative and executive leaders, and business leaders around systems' structure and systemness, contributions to economic prosperity, and other critical conversations.
- Host events (virtual and in-person) highlighting promising practices, member opportunities, and in response to emerging challenges.
- In consultation with members, develop a strategy to engage at the federal level on critical higher education issues with and on behalf of systems.
- Seek out mission-aligned grant opportunities and maintain relationships with key funders in support of the power of systems agenda.



DRIVING SUCCESS: *IMPROVING STUDENT OUTCOMES THROUGH SCALABLE, SYSTEM-LEVEL SOLUTIONS*

We support systems in improving student transfer pathways, expanding access to career-connected credentials, and increasing degree completion while reducing student debt.

- Co-create, identify, and promote proven solutions that support student enrollment, retention, completion, and long-term success.
- Advance student-centered approaches that enhance mobility within systems and states.
- Expand the use of improvement science methodologies and mindsets in public higher education to support testing and scaling of interventions proven to improve outcomes.
- Launch a dashboard to provide first-of-its-kind insights into publicly available data through the lens of systems and to enable members to draw comparative insights.



REINFORCING VALUE: *DEMONSTRATING AND AMPLIFYING THE VALUE OF PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS*

Our efforts underscore the essential role of higher education systems in driving economic mobility and community resilience.

- Explain, elevate, and promote the value of public higher education systems to their constituent institutions, the states and communities they serve, and to stakeholders across the postsecondary landscape.
- Develop a typology of systems to support benchmarking against peers with contextual and other similarities.
- Tell the story of NASH and member successes by translating projects into practical resources and tools forming an archive of promising practices and insights.
- Collaborate with peer associations, industry leaders, and other experts to enhance NASH's platform and voice and maximize member value.



ADVANCING PROSPERITY: *ENABLING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND COMMUNITY VIBRANCY THROUGH THE POWER OF SYSTEMS*

By preparing an educated workforce, fueling innovation, and promoting economic mobility, systems strengthen communities and boost our global competitiveness.

- Elevate systems' workforce development efforts, highlighting their role in preparing students to succeed in careers that meet local workforce demands.
- Promote system-level collaboration with pre-K-12 partners to build mutually reinforcing relationships around topics including dual enrollment, college readiness, and educator preparation.
- Support members in efforts to identify and mobilize state and local resources, positioning systems at the center of solutions to workforce and community challenges.
- Coordinate an annual convening of members, their staff, and other stakeholders to promote collaboration and learning.

Since 2020, NASH has transformed the role of higher education systems by turning the concept of systemness into a driving force for national impact. We've expanded our scope and deepened our effectiveness through strategic initiatives and practices that serve students, institutions, and states:

CHAMPIONING SYSTEMNESS

Proved that systems are more than the sum of their parts—driving outcomes and value at scale by aligning campuses around shared goals.

DRIVING STUDENT SUCCESS

Set bold targets to increase credential and degree completion, reduce student debt, and advance social mobility across diverse student populations.

LAUNCHING ACTION-ORIENTED COMMUNITIES

Brought together systems through communities of practice to collectively tackle shared challenges with urgency and focus.

INNOVATING FOR IMPACT

Applied improvement science and collective impact models to break down barriers and fast-track solutions in complex educational environments.

CONVENING FOR CHANGE

Hosted national convenings that build community, disseminate knowledge, and scale proven strategies across systems.

GENERATING AND SHARING KNOWLEDGE

Produced influential research and publications to inform system-level leadership and strategy.

EXPANDING REACH

Welcomed new members including community and technical college systems to enable cross-system collaboration, enhance our reach, and amplify our potential for scale.

BUILDING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Raised funding and forged collaborations with NGOs, government agencies, and education providers to amplify system-wide change.

DEVELOPING SYSTEM LEADERS

Delivered high-impact professional development programs to strengthen the leadership capacity of system executives and emerging changemakers.

There are countless ways to support the work of NASH. Join our members in enabling upward social mobility and community vibrancy across the country. Visit our website to learn more, connect with our team, and partner with us.