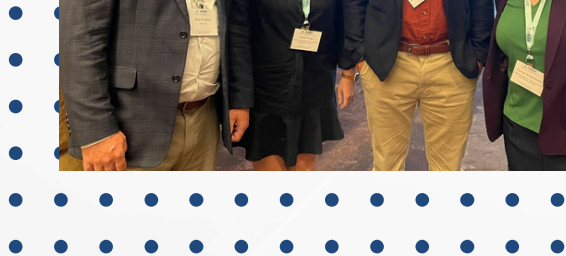




From Insight to Impact



2025
Annual Report

By Jacquelyn Villa

Welcome

Hello!

When reflecting on the past year, I wondered what meaningful progress and success look like. At the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), we measure progress and success by the impact we have had on students, communities, and states we've supported with evidence-based, data-informed strategies. Although NCHEMS' work has been instrumental in offering recommendations to improve higher education opportunities, not everyone is aware of all our important work, so we are excited to mark a new milestone — our inaugural annual report!

As president of NCHEMS, I have been honored and proud to see all that our team has accomplished this year.



National Reach

We have worked on and completed over 20 projects across 13 different states, with our team visiting 16 different cities nationwide, along with a larger number of smaller communities where we have sought input from local leaders.



New Strategic Plan

We have developed a new strategic plan and adopted a new vision, an updated mission, and a fresh set of values for the organization.



Board Changes

We welcomed two new members to the Board of Directors and extended our gratitude to our three outgoing members for their years of service.



At the heart of it, our mission is to enhance how institutions, systems, governments, and communities make effective strategic decisions. This mission has come to life through our diverse portfolio of work, which tackled some of the most pressing and meaningful topics in higher education policy and practice. Our work supported:

- Finance and affordability through tuition and funding model reviews across multiple states.
- Student access and success, with a focus on first-generation students, developmental education, and interstate reciprocity programs.
- State funding formulas that are more sustainable and effectively allocate public resources.
- Organizational structure and governance improvements to help institutions adapt for strategic impact.
- Rural education and workforce development, particularly through the role of land-grant universities and extension systems.
- Strategic planning and peer benchmarking to help leaders prepare for the future.

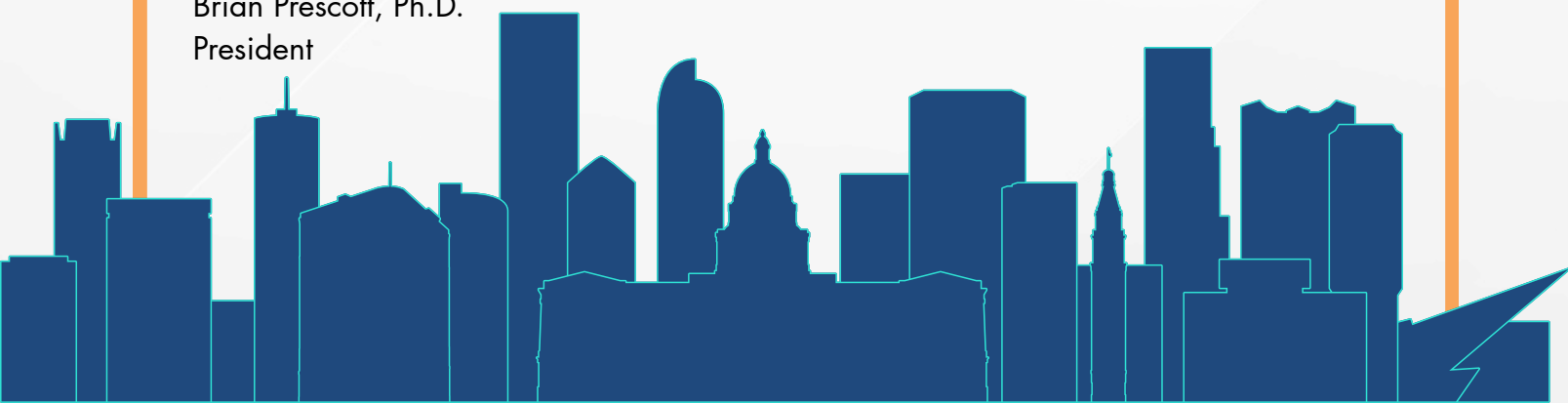
Across all our projects, we remained focused on aligning resources, strategies, and policies to strengthen postsecondary outcomes nationwide. Each project reflected a tailored response to local needs while advancing broader insights that will shape the field. Through our work, we've had the privilege of engaging with visionary state leaders, dedicated researchers, institution and system leaders, and communities committed to better outcomes for students.

This annual report serves as a reflection of our past year and an affirmation of what we can accomplish when we build shared intentions on strong, evidence-driven foundations. As I look to the year ahead, the postsecondary education industry will continue to grapple with familiar and new long-term challenges, even as federal action and broader political headwinds create uncertainty and unprecedented demands on state, system, and institutional leaders. In this highly consequential moment, keen analysis, unimpeachable evidence, and policy insight are more important than ever, and NCHEMS remains focused on providing that support as we address evolving challenges in higher education.

With gratitude,



Brian Prescott, Ph.D.
President



Our Purpose

As an organization with a 55 year history, NCHEMS has continually had to renew its vision, mission, and strategic focus. In 2025, NCHEMS underwent a process to engage its leadership, staff, and the Board of Directors in sharpening NCHEMS' vision for success and its role in attaining that vision. These statements serve as guideposts for NCHEMS as we continue our service to partners and stakeholders across the postsecondary landscape.

Vision

“

We envision a future in which postsecondary education expands opportunities for all, strengthens communities, and advances the public good.

”

Mission

NCHEMS partners with institution, system, government, and community leaders to effectively use evidence to improve strategic decision-making in postsecondary education.



Our Values

We **collaborate**.

We are **pragmatic**.

We are **rigorous**.

We **learn**.

We are **independent**.



Board of Directors



Sandy Baum

Center on Education
Data and Policy, Urban
Institute



Harrison Keller

University of North
Texas



Jason Lane

University of Illinois
System



**Valerie
Lundy-Wagner**

Public Policy Institute of
California



David Tandberg

Adams State University



**Cynthia
Teniente-Matson**

San José State
University



Charles Welch

American Association
of State Colleges and
Universities



*Photo of NCEMS Board of Directors at dinner during
February 2025 meeting.*

Our Staff



Dan Armour

Accountant



Artemio Cardenas

Research Associate



Johnna Clark

Research Associate



Louisa Hunkerstorm

Senior Associate



Sarah Pingel

Vice President



Brian Prescott

President



Sarah Torres Lugo

Research Associate



Jacquelyn Villa

Project and
Communications
Manager



Stacey Zis

Director of Operations
and Board Relations

Not pictured: Nancy Stalowski, Senior Associate.

By the Numbers

20 Completed Projects



26 Presentations Delivered



LinkedIn Followers

1,915 ↑172%

X Followers

465 ↓15%

Bluesky Followers

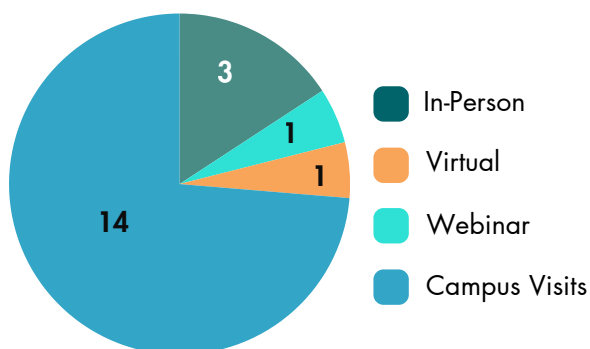
54 Joined December 2024.

Project States

13 Worked across five states for working group sites, totaling 16 states engaged.

Numbers above as of Aug. 19, 2025.

NCHEMS Convenings and Campus Visits



Blogs Published



7

Includes the first three-part series, and featured insights from projects and the higher education field.

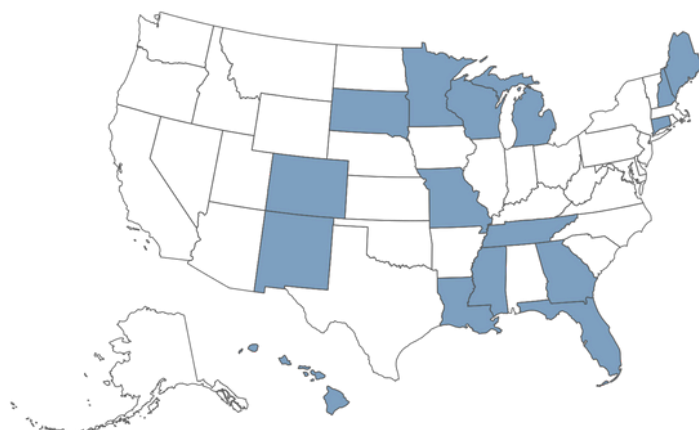
Reports Published



17

Includes a summary of proposed changes, policy brief, catalyst framework, and organizational study, along with traditional reports.

On the Ground



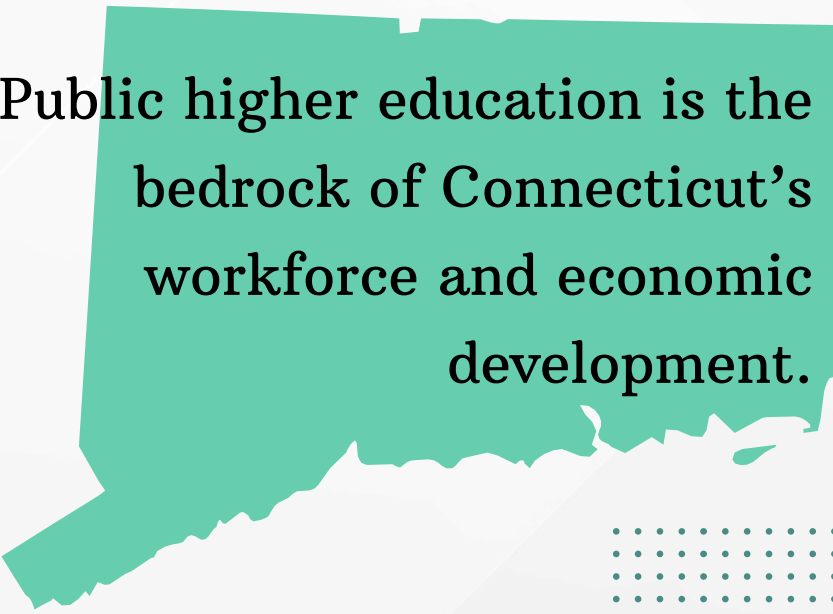
 NCHEMS engaged in FY25.

Project Spotlights

Connecticut State Colleges and Universities Finance, Structure, and Governance Study

Facing over a decade of enrollment declines and mounting budget deficits, the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) System is grappling with significant financial and operational challenges. In response, the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management (OPM) asked NCHEMS to conduct a study of CSCU's organizational structure, enrollment trends, staffing, finances, and physical campus footprint. OPM wanted NCHEMS to compare the findings to peer institutions and other best practices around the country. The goal was to find ways to ensure the system's financial sustainability while maintaining student access and affordability, improving student outcomes, and meeting the state's workforce needs.

NCHEMS found that the System had not adjusted its spending in line with its declining revenues, and that immediate action was needed to align costs and operations. Recommendations emphasized the need for system-level reforms that would add value to the work of the individual institutions and restore their credibility with the state. NCHEMS also recommended changes for the State of Connecticut, which has a responsibility to create a policy environment that fosters CSCU's success.



**Public higher education is the
bedrock of Connecticut's
workforce and economic
development.**



This work took place against the backdrop of shifting demographics across the U.S. The number of high school graduates is expected to peak in 2025 and then steadily decline in the future. These enrollment declines and falling college-going rates are challenging long-held assumptions about institutional growth. New England has been particularly affected, with an aging population forcing colleges and college systems to confront earlier than in many other parts of the country. NCHEMS believes that public higher education is the bedrock of economic and workforce development, and that systems like CSCU must adapt collaboratively and strategically to sustain that role into the future. Public colleges and universities, as well as the states and systems that support them, must find ways to continue to meet student and state needs while remaining financially strong, even as student populations and revenues shrink. NCHEMS' work with CSCU highlights the urgency and potential for reshaping public higher education systems to ensure financial sustainability and continued service to students, communities, and the state's long-term needs.



Project Spotlights

Aligning South Dakota's Academic Portfolios with Institutional Sustainability

As many colleges face declining enrollments and financial constraints, institutional and system-level leaders are increasingly reviewing their academic program portfolios with a focus on finance. More than in the past, they're asking questions such as: Which programs merit additional investment? Which should become smaller? Which need restructuring? Which should be phased out altogether?

Traditional academic program review processes are often helpful in improving program curriculum and student success but can be less relevant to institutional budgeting. Leaders need a strategic way to allocate resources across academic programs and departments that furthers institutional goals. Too often, program budgets are based on other factors, such as inertia (e.g., the program's budget from the past), expediency (e.g., the retirement of faculty members), or politics (e.g., the communication skills of program leaders).

In partnership with the South Dakota Board of Regents (SDBOR), NCHEMS developed an approach to evaluating the financial contributions of academic programs that balances nuance with practicality. Grounded in how resources actually flow through institutions, the method uses clear, accessible metrics while accounting for the interconnectedness of programs and the complexity of campus operations. NCHEMS helped SDBOR assess program- and department-level financial health and proposed criteria to guide ongoing evaluation—emphasizing that financial sustainability must be considered alongside goals like student success, workforce alignment, research, and economic development.

Budgets are too often shaped by inertia, expediency, or politics—not institutional strategy.

The regular and rigorous review of each institution's program mix is difficult and can be controversial, but NCHEMS doesn't believe it has to be. If all stakeholders are grounded in strong evidence and united in a focus on the institution's strategic goals, it's easier to see the difference between decisions that are difficult and decisions that are necessary. The costs of not doing this kind of analysis can be significant. Institutions that fail to make changes to their portfolios of academic programs face financial risk. They also lose the opportunity to re-allocate resources and invest in programs that should be added or expanded. These adjustments can help ensure institutions meet the needs of students, employers, communities and states, and that the education they offer will remain relevant into the future.



Dive Deeper Into the Research With Our Blog Series



- [Part I: How Academic Programs Fit into the Financial Puzzle](#)
- [Part II: Measuring the Financial Impact of Academic Programs](#)
- [Part III: Modeling Institutional Finances in Uncertain Conditions](#)

Project Spotlights

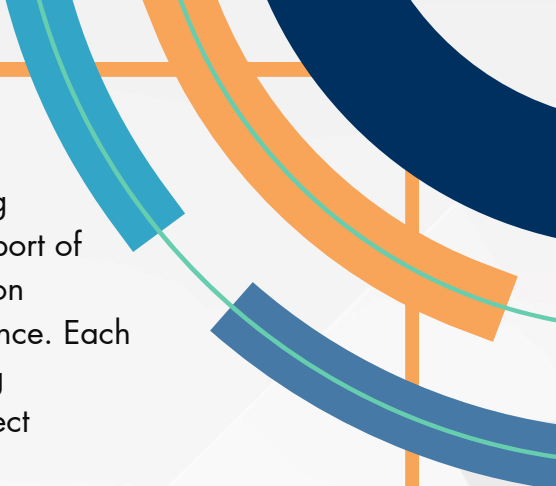
Cooperative Extension's Role in Rural Development

For generations, rural communities have demonstrated resilience in the face of persistent underinvestment. As technological and economic shifts accelerate, these communities are once again being asked to adapt. Known by many for agricultural programs and 4-H, Extension has evolved over its 100+ year history to meet a wide range of local needs and can offer a critical access point to postsecondary education and economic opportunity in rural areas.

With a presence in or near nearly every U.S. county, Extension is uniquely positioned to help communities navigate change through localized, practical partnerships. However, a recent NCHEMS study, "Shaping Community Impact: The Role of Funding and Governance in Extension's Contributions to Rural Economic and Workforce Development," found that Extension's ability to support rural workforce and economic development is deeply tied to how it's funded. The structure, sources, and conditions of that funding significantly affect what services Extension can offer and how quickly it can respond to local challenges and opportunities.

Photos from the April 2025 convening with the Cooperative Extension Working Group in Boulder, CO.





To showcase Extension's work in community, economic, and workforce development, five working group sites are receiving funding and in-kind data support from NCHEMS with the support of the Ascendium Education Group, to demonstrate how Extension partners with rural communities to strengthen economic resilience. Each project leverages Extension's trusted position while connecting communities to resources and ideas. A summary of each project follows.

- The **Colorado State University Extension** is studying how employers perceive digital badges offered by rural community college partners that respond to rural workers' preferences.
- The **University of Maine Cooperative Extension** is creating stackable micro-badges, in partnership with its business school, that give small business owners practical, targeted skills they need.
- The **University of Missouri Extension** is hosting regional workforce training summits where data and employer insights will combine to identify local job opportunities and training gaps that Extension can help bridge.
- The **Southern Rural Development Center** is providing Extension professionals a resource-sharing network and training in community and economic development to strengthen their capacity to partner with community stakeholders in development efforts.
- The **University of Tennessee's Center for Industrial Services** is collaborating with UT Extension to grow its Workforce Development Academy. This initiative aims to provide training for local workforce developers in rural communities, helping leaders identify and address skills gaps to enhance workforce performance and improve economic outcomes.

These projects showcase Extension's three interconnected strengths and potential roles in community, economic, and workforce development: bringing diverse partners together around shared goals, translating complex data into community action, and creating accessible learning opportunities that build local capacity.

This approach — working alongside local people to build capacity from within — creates lasting impact because it is grounded in trust and place-based knowledge. However, the research makes clear that Extension's ability to respond to emerging needs is limited by fragmented funding streams and organizational silos that keep it disconnected from larger workforce development strategies.

As this work continues to progress, we will gather valuable insights for rural development strategies across the country, which will be shared in a lessons learned report in early 2026.



Our Project Partners

NCHEMS gratefully recognizes the partnership of these organizations, and others, that have worked with us to advance strategic decision-making through the use of evidence. Over the past year, NCHEMS has worked shoulder-to-shoulder with each of these partners to address challenges in higher education finance, governance, planning, and other issues.



**National Council for
State Authorization
Reciprocity Agreements**

MHEC • NEBHE • SREB • WICHE



COLORADO

**Department of
Higher Education**



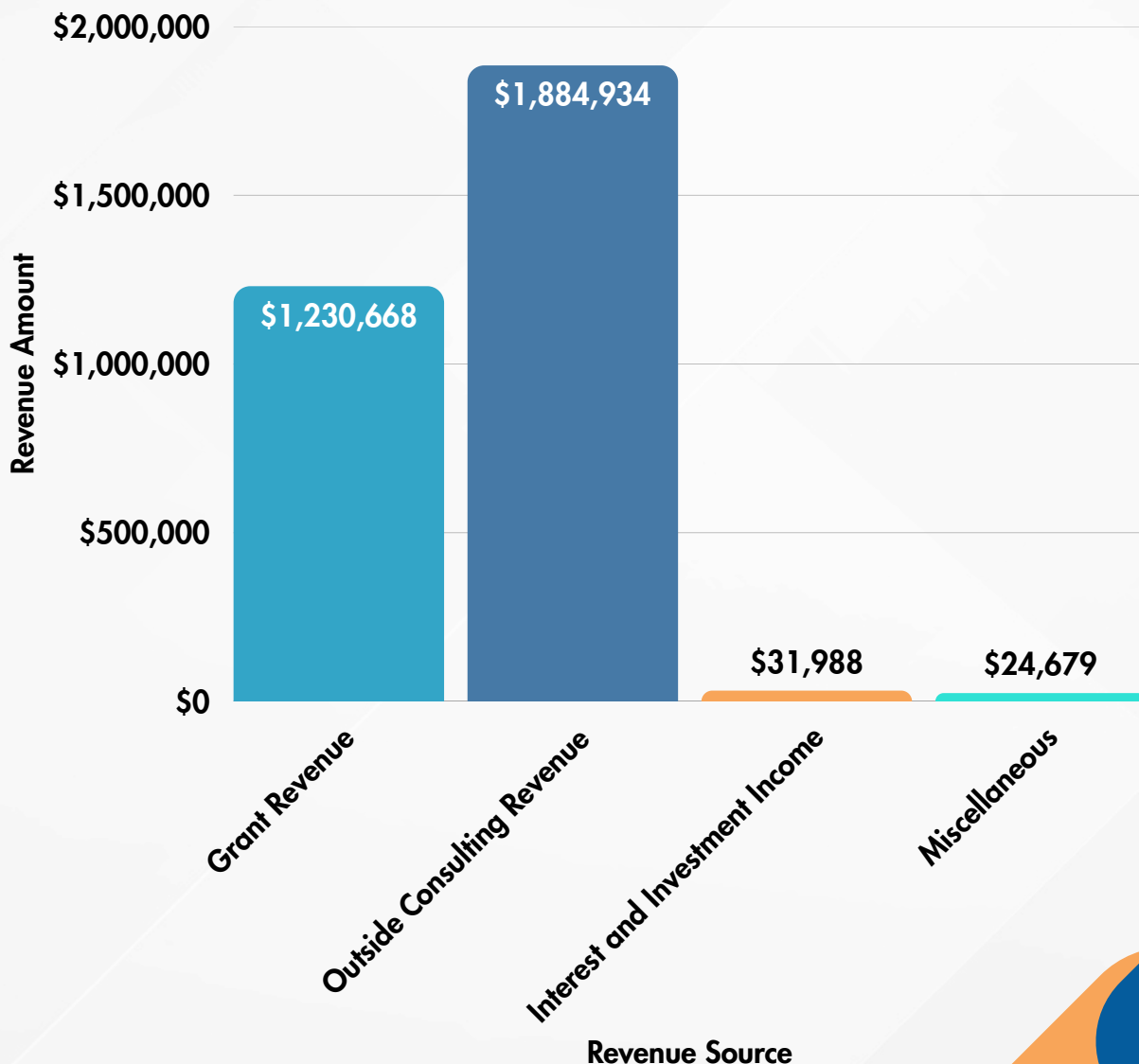
**BOARD of REGENTS
STATE OF LOUISIANA**



Financials

As a 503(c)(3) nonprofit, NCHEMS works with institutions, higher education systems, governments, and community leaders to complete projects that help them improve their strategic decision-making. To support this work, NCHEMS recognized **\$3,172,270 in total revenue** in the 2024 fiscal year. Of this total, **\$1,884,934 came from contracts**, **\$1,230,668 came from grants**, and **\$56,668 came from other sources**, shown in the graph below as interest and investment income and miscellaneous.

NCHEMS FY24 Total Revenue



Financials

FY24 Revenue Report

Grant Revenue	\$1,230,667.97
Outside Consulting Revenue	
• <i>Direct Public Support</i>	\$222,285.11
• <i>Government</i>	\$929,961.52
• <i>Program Service Contributions</i>	\$666,607.96
• <i>Other Consulting Revenue</i>	<u>\$60,079.13</u>
Total Outside Consulting Revenue	\$1,884,933.72
Interest and Investment Income	\$31,988.33
Miscellaneous	\$24,679.25
Total Revenue	<u><u>\$3,172,269.27</u></u>





Stay connected and help us
shape the future.



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