



## **The Need**

Over the past century, the nation's colleges and universities have made great strides in serving a growing and diversifying population. This unprecedented expansion of college opportunity has paid large economic and social dividends, and it must continue.

The nation faces intensifying global competition and rapidly growing demands for a skilled workforce. Yet disparities in educational opportunity and degree completion linger, even as more Americans than ever recognize that education beyond high school is essential to their economic and social well-being.

Significant increases in spending by taxpayers and students have not moved the needle: the percentage of adults with a college degree has increased little in recent years. While we must continue to invest in higher education, we cannot award the number of degrees needed to be competitive and expand opportunity without increasing productivity—this means getting more degrees for the dollars we spend.

## **The Initiative**

Making Opportunity Affordable is a multi-year initiative focused on the bottom line for higher education: lowering cost per degree by increasing the percentage of adults with a college degree. Working with partner organizations and state and institutional grantees, the initiative seeks to develop, implement, and sustain policies and practices that can cost-effectively expand the nation's degree production.

## **Audiences**

Making Opportunity Affordable's primary audiences are leaders with the authority and capacity to advance a productivity agenda for higher education: 1) political leaders; 2) higher education leaders; and 3) business, community, and opinion leaders.

## **Strategies and Outcomes**

Making Opportunity Affordable is built around three key strategies: 1) building demand and leadership for a productivity agenda; 2) equipping higher education leaders and policymakers with new data and knowledge for improving productivity; and 3) engaging states through a program of grants to pursue strategic changes in policy and practice that will result in more degrees for dollars invested. The initiative will gauge success in each state by reductions in cost per degree and increases in the percentage of adults with a degree, particularly for underrepresented students. Nationally, the initiative will be successful to the extent that it stimulates a sustained conversation about productivity and builds momentum for widespread changes.

## **Three Common Principles**

Three principles will guide Making Opportunity Affordable's work in states:

- **Measure What Matters:** Develop transparent goals and measures aimed at producing more degrees in relation to dollars spent, and report publicly on progress.
- **Fund What Matters:** Reform state and institutional financing and budgeting policies to provide real incentives for serving underrepresented groups, increasing persistence and completion, and building capacity where it is needed.
- **Do What Matters:** Change regulations, policies and practices to increase operational efficiency and promote reinvestment in academic programs and models that lead to increased degree production.