

## Request for Proposals on Research Exploring Equitable Postsecondary Value

### 1. Overview & Background:

The Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) seeks proposals for research papers exploring the equitable delivery of postsecondary value, using data on students' economic outcomes available through the [Equitable Value Explorer](#) (EVE).

IHEP is a nonpartisan, nonprofit research, policy, and advocacy organization committed to promoting postsecondary access and success for all students, regardless of race, background, or circumstance. IHEP served as the managing partner for the Postsecondary Value Commission, a group of 30 diverse leaders brought together to propose a [definition](#) of postsecondary value, develop a way to [measure](#) that value, and urge [action](#) to improve value and make it more equitable.

In 2021, the Postsecondary Value Commission released the [Postsecondary Value Framework \(PVF\)](#), which outlines the clear value-add that postsecondary education can provide to students and society, in both economic and non-economic terms. Core to the Postsecondary Value Framework are six economic value thresholds that measure earnings and wealth inequities over time, using a series of benchmarks. Assessing institutional, system, or state performance on those thresholds can uncover inequities in access, attainment, and post-college outcomes. By incorporating measures of student investment in their education, adjusting for state-specific variation in wages, and explicitly centering the importance of providing access to a diverse student population *and* supporting those students through graduation and beyond, the PVF provides a robust assessment of value in postsecondary education.

The EVE is an interactive web-based tool that allows users to analyze how institutions perform on the PVF's economic value thresholds. The EVE is built around publicly available data from the College Scorecard, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), and the American Community Survey (ACS), which users can download directly. The tool is supplemented by more granular analyses provided by the University of Texas system.

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### 2. Project requirements:

Successful proposals will leverage data shown in the EVE to answer research questions addressing the equitable delivery of postsecondary value. At a minimum, this means proposals should include research questions designed to leverage the information and data elements uniquely available in the EVE, focusing on one or more economic value thresholds included in the PVF.

Proposals should also explicitly center equity in the proposed research questions and methodologies. For example, successful proposals could center equity by focusing on disparities across student subgroups; providing a detailed exploration of the experiences and outcomes for a particular subgroup of students; or examining the outcomes of students at Minority Serving-Institutions (MSIs) or other institutions whose mission or history demonstrate a commitment to supporting Black, Latinx,

Indigenous, or underrepresented Asian American, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander students, students from low-income backgrounds, or women.

In addition to using data in the EVE, research proposals may incorporate other data sources. For example, institution-level data elements available through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), the College Scorecard, the Federal Student Aid Data Center, or the Census Bureau’s Postsecondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO) can be easily linked to the EVE files through the IPEDS UNITID or through the Office of Postsecondary Education ID (OPEID). Researchers can also use nationally representative data on population-level outcomes, such as that produced by the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey or other resources. Research teams with access to non-public data sources, such as state or institutional data, would be eligible for additional funding and time, given the additional level of effort these projects would require.

Researchers selected through this RFP process will be expected to author and publish 10- to 20-page written reports or briefs based on the findings from original data analysis and synthesis. Authors will also produce a 1–2-page executive summary that highlights key findings from their research in a clear, broadly accessible manner. IHEP will provide feedback to authors, and will serve as a resource on the components of the PVF, including the threshold definitions and insights on data and methodologies included in the EVE.

### 3. Technical description of the dataset:

The institution-level data underlying the EVE are assembled from a variety of sources, including the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS), and College Scorecard. The data include several metrics constructed to measure the economic value of postsecondary education. These metrics enable users to compare the earnings outcomes of students receiving federal financial aid—published through the College Scorecard—to median earnings of a comparison population drawn from ACS. For more details on the dataset construction and included variables, please see [the Technical Documentation](#) associated with the EVE.

More specifically, the EVE measures institution-level earnings relative to four economic value thresholds, referred to as T0, T1, T2, and T3, defined in Table 1 below. The thresholds are estimated using data from ACS, based on a combined 5-year file that aggregates data from 2017 to 2021. These earnings values are reported in 2021 dollars in the ACS and adjusted to 2022 dollars using the annual CPI-U.

**Table 1: Value Threshold Definitions**

Threshold	Definition	Measurement
T0 “Minimum Economic Return”	A student meets this threshold if they earn at least as much as a high school graduate plus enough to recoup their total net price within ten years.	Median earnings of workers with positive earnings in the same state the institution is located and with a High School Degree (or GED) as their highest level of educational attainment, plus yearly amortized total cost of obtaining the credential.

T1 “Earnings Premium”	A student meets this threshold if they reach at least the median earnings in their field of study, <sup>1</sup> which accounts for expected variations in pay across fields.	Median earnings of workers with positive earnings in the same state with the same level of degree (BA or AA) as the predominant credential awarded by the institution. For institutions that award less-than 2-year credentials, the earnings threshold is set at 0.89 times the threshold for Associate’s degree holders
T2 “Earnings Parity”	This threshold measures whether students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and women meet the median earnings of their more advantaged peers (White students, high-income students, or men).	Median earnings of male (when measuring female earnings) or White (when measuring non-White earnings) workers with positive earnings in the same state with the same level of degree (BA or AA) as the predominant credential awarded by the institution. For institutions that award less-than 2-year credentials, the earnings threshold is set at 0.89 times the threshold for Associate’s degree holders
T3 “Earnings Mobility”	This threshold measures whether students earn enough to enter the fourth (upper middle) income quintile regardless of field of study.	The 60 <sup>th</sup> percentile of earnings among workers with positive earnings in the same state the institution is located.

**4. Examples:**

Researchers are encouraged to think creatively to develop research questions related to postsecondary value that would be beneficial to federal, state, or institutional decisionmakers seeking to improve the equitable delivery of postsecondary value, and proposals are not required to focus on topics included in this section. However, project leads may wish to consider the following examples of topic areas and research questions in developing their ideas.

*Geography:* Earnings outcomes vary dramatically based on the physical location of former students, with those residing in higher-cost areas generally requiring higher earnings to achieve the same standard of living. The PVF proposes creating thresholds on a state level and the data included in the EVE calculate the threshold levels based on the state where the institution is located.

Further research on the role of geography in the PVF could include the following research questions:

- How does variation in earnings outcomes within states affect institutional performance against (one or more of) the economic value thresholds?

<sup>1</sup> While the earnings premium threshold is designed as a field level measure, limits in the publicly available data mean that at this time the data presented in the EVE is based on institution-level outcomes.

- In general, are institutions in rural areas at a disadvantage in comparison to those located in more urban areas in the same state, and what alternative geographic adjustments might be more appropriate for these institutions?
- How does student mobility within and across states, before and after college, contribute to institutional performance on each threshold?

Equity & Student Access: Student race/ethnicity and gender are strongly associated with post-college earnings, due in part to labor market discrimination and inequities in K-12 education, housing, and other life experiences. This relationship means that institutions whose missions and history demonstrate a commitment to serving Black, Latinx, Indigenous or underrepresented Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander students may be unfairly penalized through any earnings-based assessment of postsecondary value if proper methodological considerations are not used.

To address these broader societal disparities, the PVF relies on the use of thresholds, which measure the extent to which former students are meeting certain economic milestones, rather than comparing earnings outcomes across institutions in the absence of these contextual indicators. In addition, the PVF includes disaggregated thresholds, which allow for the comparison of student earnings outcomes relative to those within the same race/ethnicity or gender group.

Research focused on the role of access in the PVF could include the following research questions:

- How do the enrollment demographics of institutions relate to whether their former students' earnings meet or exceed each threshold?
- To what extent are the disaggregated thresholds effective at accounting for differences in the types of students institutions serve?
- How do minority serving institutions (MSIs), or other institutions that serve large proportions of historically underserved students, perform against the overall and disaggregated earnings thresholds?

Degree Field & Level: Because students' field of study can be closely correlated with their post-college occupation, earnings differences in the programs students enroll in can also contribute to differences in post-college earnings. This is particularly true among institutions whose graduates are concentrated in a small number of fields.

Further research on the role of degree field of study could include the following questions:

- How does the share of enrollment and/or degree production in STEM fields relate to institutional performance on the value metrics?
- How do outcomes at institutions that prioritize low-paying but highly socially valuable degrees (e.g. schools of social work, journalism, religious training centers, arts schools) compare to the minimum economic return threshold (T0)?

## 5. Budget

IHEP will provide \$10,000 or \$30,000 per paper selected from this solicitation.

Proposals based entirely on publicly available data, through the EVE and other public sources, will be eligible for Track 1. Selected proposals from this track will receive \$10,000 to support research, design, and publication expenses. To be eligible for Track 2, projects must combine publicly available data from the EVE with data that is not otherwise widely available, such as data from an institution or state system, state, or other entity. These proposals will receive \$30,000 to support research, design, and publication expenses.

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## 6. Timeline:

	Track 1:	Track 2:
Proposal submission window	May 31 – June 30, 2023	
Proposal leads will be notified via email of selection decisions	Mid-July	
Draft paper due	September 5, 2023	January 15, 2024
Authors will receive feedback from IHEP	October 3, 2023	February 15, 2024
Authors share revised versions with IHEP	No later than November 3, 2023	No later than March 15, 2024
Authors publish papers	December 1-15, 2023	April 15-30, 2024

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## 7. Submission requirements and deadline:

Applicants should submit a thoughtful, clear, and well-organized proposal package of no more than 6 pages that includes:

- **Project description:** Proposals should include the specific EVE data elements of interest, the components of the value framework that are applicable, and the subgroups of students or institutions that will be considered in the analysis, if applicable. Project descriptions should include a description of all data elements from the EVE or other publicly available sources that will be used, clear research questions and proposed methods, and a brief background and project justification on the importance to the field of the proposed project.
- **Equity commitment (no more than 1 page):** IHEP is committed to working with equity-focused partners who have a demonstrated track record of working to create a more racially and socioeconomically equitable postsecondary education system and fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion internally. Please describe your commitment to equity, including specific examples of how you or your organization works to advance equity for Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and underrepresented AANHPI students and students from low-income backgrounds and how you maintain an equitable workplace.
- **Background and qualifications (no more than 3 pages):** Share relevant background information about your organization and/or yourself (for individuals), including your relevant experience.

- **Proposed budget:** Funding for each project will be \$10,000 or \$30,000, depending on the track. Proposals seeking Track 2 support should provide a detailed justification for the ways in which their proposed project meets the criteria described in this RFP.
- **Proposed team (no more than 2 pages):** Please share information about key team member(s) who will be working on this project, including brief bio(s) that highlight their relevant expertise and a description of each team member's anticipated role.

Proposals are due to IHEP by 5:00 pm PT on Friday, June 30, 2023. Please reach out to the IHEP team with questions and to submit proposals ([lmcleese@ihep.org](mailto:lmcleese@ihep.org)).