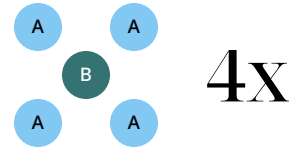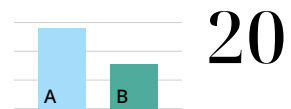# Postsecondary Success

The Challenge

Today's students aspire to achieve an education after high school – certificates or degrees – because they know it is the path to a better living and a better life. And many pursue this goal as more than simply students – they are also parents, employees, caregivers, and neighbors.

But our higher education systems were not designed with the needs of today's students in mind. As a result, students face a number of obstacles on their way to a certificate or degree, especially Black, Latino, and Indigenous students and students from low-income backgrounds, who have historically faced higher obstacles to success.
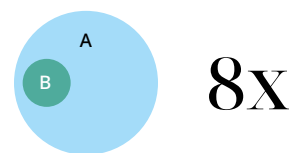
For some, the challenge is finding the financial resources to continue their education beyond high school or to keep going once enrolled. For others, the challenge is staying on a path to a credential in the face of confusing course options and policies, all while juggling work and home responsibilities. For many, it is all of these challenges – and more.

4x

A student from an upper-income background (● A) is _four times more likely_ to have a bachelor's degree by age 24 than a student from a low-income background (● B).

20

The percentage of white adults (● A) with at least an associate's degree is _20 points higher_ than that for Latino adults (● B).

8x

A household headed by a white college graduate (● A) has _eight times the wealth_ of a household headed by a Black college graduate (● B).

These inequities lead to other inequities in our communities and society, including:

Health outcomes

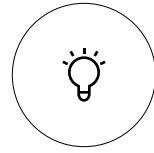**Volunteering participation**

Voting participation

Home ownership

The Postsecondary Success strategy is committed to eliminating obstacles facing today's college students, especially Black, Latino, and Indigenous students and students from low-income backgrounds. Eliminating obstacles that stand in the way of high-quality learning and a clear path to a certificate or degree is essential for making opportunity – equitable opportunity – a reality for today's college students and for meeting the needs of our economy and our communities.
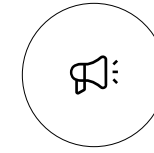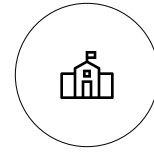
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Our
Approach

Catalyzing <u>innovation</u>, using new technologies to improve teaching and learning anytime, anywhere and providing better and more timely advice to students and the people supporting them about paths to certificates and degrees. Learning should be the focus of college, not figuring out how to navigate the system.
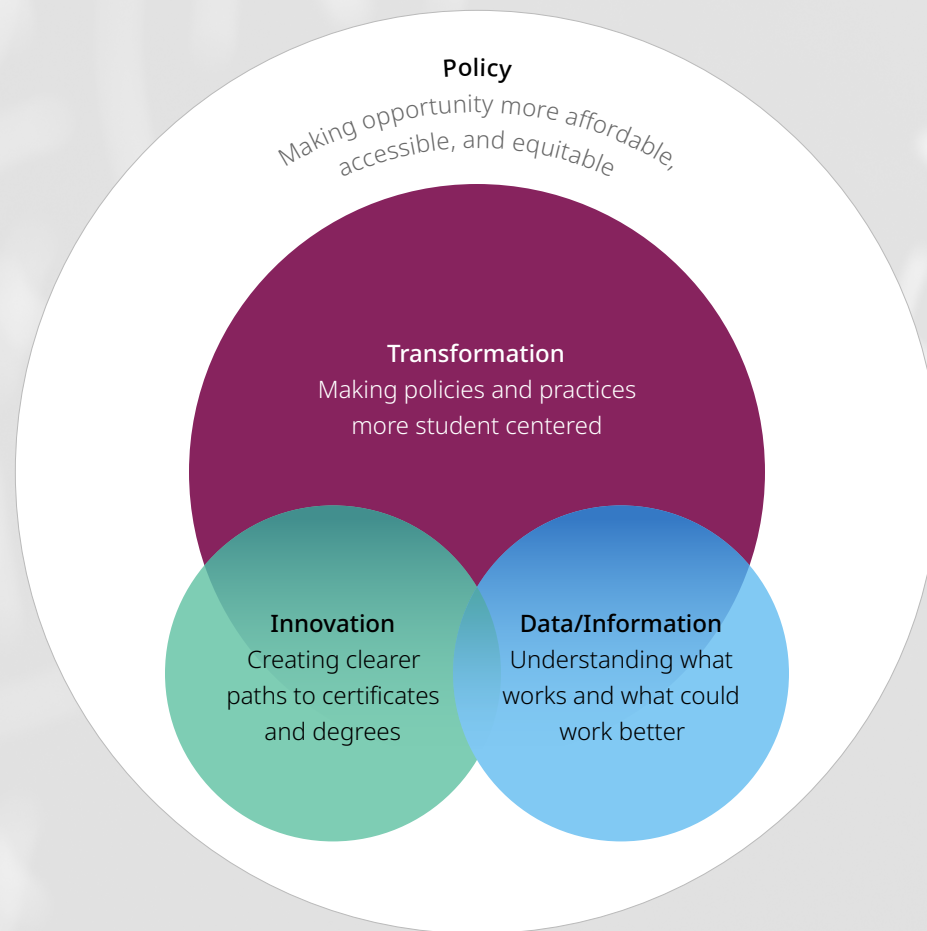
Creating better <u>data and information</u>, focusing on equitable value for all students. Strong, secure, and connected data systems can help college and university leaders and policymakers make better decisions about how to invest available resources to guide more students to the finish line.
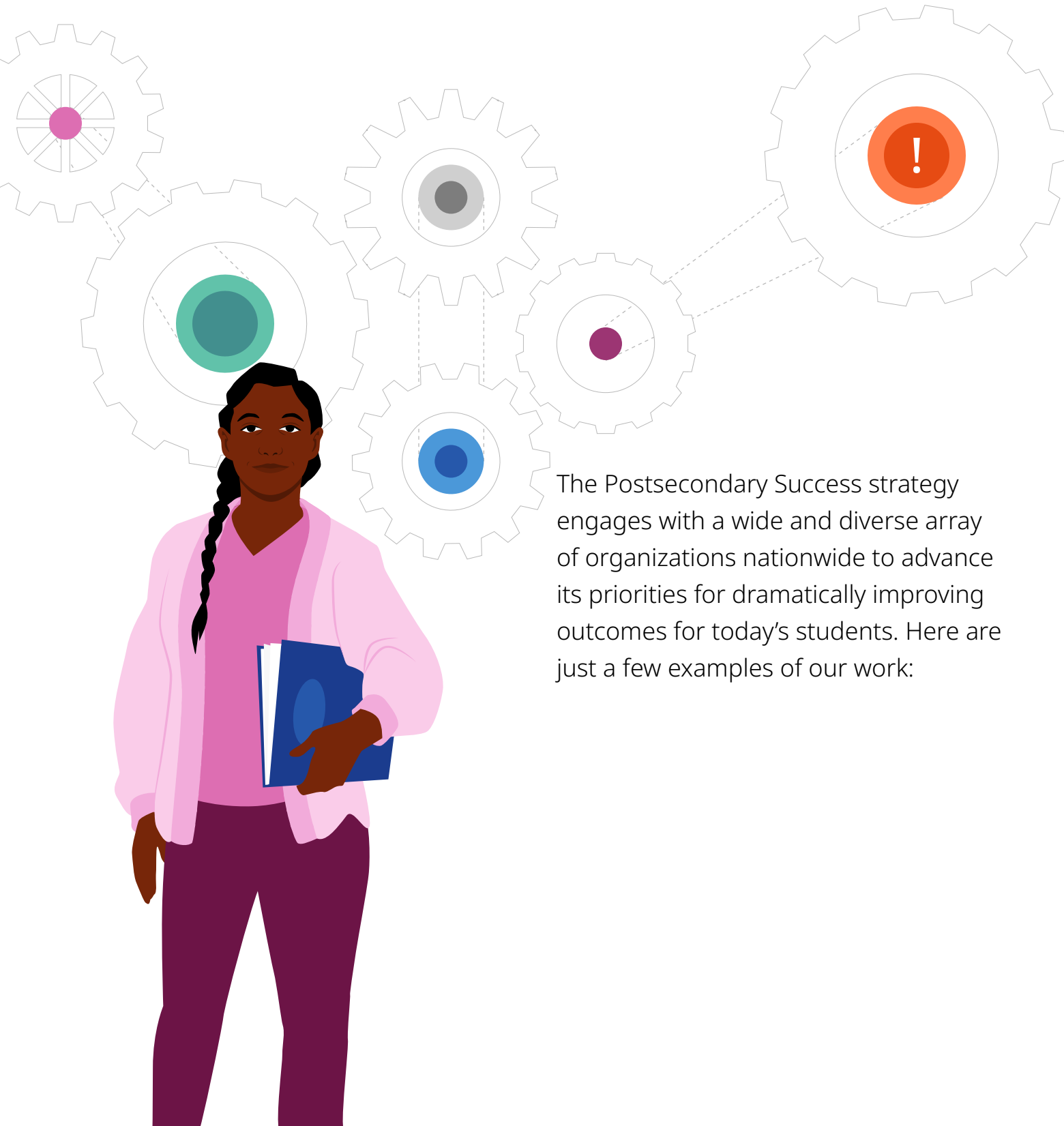
Advocating for state and federal <u>policy</u> that focuses on the needs of students facing the greatest financial and academic challenges. This includes targeting student aid dollars and simplifying the process of applying for aid, as well as investing in and holding colleges and universities accountable for the value they deliver to their students and communities.

Supporting institutional <u>transformation</u>, which includes embracing innovation, using data and information for continuous improvement, and connecting colleges and universities to each other and to resources and experts that can help them to change policies, practices, and business models to become more student-centered and increase equitable value for students.

Policy
Making opportunity more affordable, accessible, and equitable

Transformation
Making policies and practices more student centered

Innovation
Creating clearer paths to certificates and degrees

Data/Information
Understanding what works and what could work better

From Ideas to Action

The Postsecondary Success strategy engages with a wide and diverse array of organizations nationwide to advance its priorities for dramatically improving outcomes for today's students. Here are just a few examples of our work:

Innovation

Strong Start to Finish. This network for nearly 20 organizations, colleges, universities, and university systems across 13 states is committed to developmental education reform in order to improve students' skills to increase their chances of success in a credit-bearing, college-level program. The network supports the scaling and implementation of proven developmental education reforms, oversees efforts across state higher education systems, develops and shares innovative research, and facilitates quality technical assistance to members of the network and beyond.

Digital Learning Infrastructure Initiative. Having high-quality tools and platforms doesn't translate into improved student outcomes unless they are coupled with support for the people using those tools and platforms.

That's why we are actively engaging with the field to learn about building a supportive environment for digital learning. For example, *Complete College America* is engaging six Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in an effort to co-design a process of strengthening digital culture within these institutions. The selected colleges and universities will create a framework for evaluating – and changing – policies, practices, and perspectives to promote student success through digital learning that can be shared and adapted across diverse institutions.

Data and Information

Postsecondary Value Commission. The foundation supported the work of the commission, which developed new answers to the question "What is college worth?" through a new *measurement framework* and an *interactive tool* that measures students' return on investment at thousands of colleges and universities nationwide. The commission also produced an *action agenda* designed to promote changes in policy and practice that will help to boost return on investment.

Policy

Postsecondary Data Collaborative (PostsecData). This diverse coalition of organizations, led by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP), advocates for high-quality data to inform institutional, state, and federal policies and promote stronger student outcomes. The coalition is playing a lead role in the call for more transparent data collection and reporting at the federal level.

Transformation

Intermediaries for Scale. The foundation is working with six organizations to serve transforming institutions as connectors, advisors, and strategists. The intermediaries are focusing on four priorities:

- Increase awareness of successful and promising transformation strategies among campus leaders and communities.

- Inform key campus-level decisions about change options and strategies and supporting decision-makers.

- Support transformation by providing guidance and resources for adopting, implementing, evaluating, and sustaining changes in policy and practice.

- Build connections across colleges and universities to accelerate and streamline learning about transformation – what it looks like in different settings, how long it takes, what it costs.

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Visit our website for more information
on Postsecondary Success strategy.

usprogram.gatesfoundation.org/what-we-do/postsecondary-success