

Michigan College Access Network

Four-year Strategic Plan: 2017–2021

10.2017

Our Mission

Increase college readiness, participation, and completion in Michigan, particularly among low-income students, first generation college-going students, and students of color.



Letter from the Board Chair and Executive Director

Dear Partners,

Since our founding nearly a decade ago, the Michigan College Access Network has known that college changes everything, and perhaps even more critical to our mission is the notion that college is for everyone. We are proud to put forth a strategic plan that works to ensure that each and every student across Michigan has access to the knowledge, tools, and supports to make college a reality.

At the center of our strategy is a relentless focus on improving outcomes and opportunities for low-income students, first generation students, and students of color. Too often, state, regional, and local initiatives fail to consider the additional barriers these students face when pursuing their college goals. In this strategic plan, MCAN has refocused each of our strategic initiatives to ensure that equitable access and cultural awareness is intentionally integrated into our work. This has long been an organizational priority, and we welcome the challenge to continue to improve our support for communities and organizations as they serve students and families with the highest needs.

MCAN is honored to continue to partner with organizations and leaders across the state to increase the percentage of Michigan residents with degrees or certificates to 60 percent by the year 2025. Achieving this goal will require students from a variety of backgrounds, communities, and experiences to pursue a college education. For the next four years, MCAN will be focused on four central priorities: fostering a college-going culture; identifying multiple pathways and smooth transitions; improving college affordability; and supporting credential completion. Together, we believe these priorities will help Michiganders across the state achieve the benefits of a college education.

We are grateful to the many leaders and organizations that are joining us in this effort, and we look forward to engaging more partners in this ambitious effort and make college a reality for all students in our state.

Sincerely,

Sharlonda Buckman
Board Chairperson

Brandy Johnson
Executive Director

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INTRODUCTION

The Michigan College Access Network (MCAN) is a statewide nonprofit intermediary that mobilizes state and local leaders to increase college readiness, enrollment, and completion rates. Our efforts are oriented toward achieving the ambitious goal of increasing Michigan’s postsecondary educational attainment rate to 60 percent by 2025. MCAN aims to accomplish this goal through advocacy, capacity building, coordination and collaboration, dissemination of research and data, and grantmaking. MCAN’s mission focuses its efforts on supporting low-income, first generation college students, and students of color to increase access to postsecondary educational opportunities statewide.

MCAN has accomplished a great deal since its formal launch in 2010. As its initial strategic plan comes to a close and MCAN approaches its ten-year anniversary in 2020, the Board and staff have made 2017 a priority year for setting goals and strategies to ensure purposeful growth for the organization. This strategic plan validates the organization’s mission and values and sets forth four priorities for the next four years. The plan is intentionally set at a high level, providing a structure to allow the staff to effectively allocate time and resources while allowing for flexibility to respond quickly to new needs and opportunities.

PLAN DEVELOPMENT

The 2017–2021 MCAN strategic planning effort was robust—informed by research, stakeholder feedback, and Board and staff engagement. MCAN retained Public Sector Consultants (PSC) to facilitate the process, which began in March 2017 and concluded in September 2017. MCAN’s senior staff partnered with PSC throughout the process, meeting frequently to discuss perspectives on the organization and its mission, how to define organizational priorities, the strategies to achieve those priorities, and how to document these decisions in the strategic plan. MCAN’s Board of Directors engaged in the strategic planning process at its meetings, as well as through ongoing communications.

The first phase of the process included information gathering and research implemented by PSC with input and oversight from MCAN senior staff, including:

1. An online, qualitative survey of MCAN Board members and staff members to gather input on mission, values, and priorities, as well as to determine the organization’s most important accomplishments. Survey results were analyzed anonymously.
2. Key informant interviews with national leaders in college access. The purpose of these conversations was to gather input on how MCAN could advance important college access goals and strategies.
3. A focus group with Local College Access Network (LCAN) coordinators to gather input on the future of college access in their communities, the challenges and barriers to their work, and their successes. PSC also gathered input on strategies that MCAN could employ to best support LCANs in achieving their college access goals.
4. A survey of 420 school counselors, advisers, teachers, and K-12 administrators across the state, gathering information about their satisfaction with MCAN programs such as Michigan College Month, College Cash Campaign, College Decision Day, Reach Higher High School Grants, and school counselor training.

The results of these research elements guided MCAN senior staff and PSC in the development of recommendations for strategic priorities, which were presented and discussed with the Board of Directors in June 2017. Using the research and the Board's input, MCAN and PSC collaborated in the development of key strategies to align with four strategic priorities, and drafted this strategic plan. The plan was presented and approved by the Board in September 2017.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

As part of the strategic planning effort, MCAN reflected on its biggest accomplishments. These accomplishments have been a part of establishing MCAN as a force for change in college access at the state and national levels. Since its inception, MCAN has:

- **Built a strong nonprofit organization.** In 2010, MCAN's executive director, Brandy Johnson, founded MCAN as a public-private partnership in collaboration with then-governor Jennifer Granholm's administration. In the seven years since, the organization has grown from one staffer with a \$1 million budget to a team of 13 staff members at MCAN headquarters and a \$7 million budget.
- **Established itself as a national leader in the field.** MCAN is unique when compared to college access efforts across the country, in that it is an independent organization organized for the express purpose of serving as an intermediary organization in order to mobilize a statewide movement. MCAN is regularly asked by other college access networks across the country to provide consultation. MCAN was also honored in September 2016, when we welcomed the National College Access Network conference to Detroit by helping amass the conference's largest ever group of attendees—approximately 1,100 college access professionals.
- **Launched and supported 32 LCANs in communities across Michigan, fostering local engagement in college access efforts.** MCAN has invested nearly \$5 million in targeted grantmaking and thousands of hours of training and technical assistance to this effort. MCAN has also developed tools for LCANs to implement collective impact strategies, such as the Charting the Course Guidebook and accompanying collective impact benchmarks. This support has led to the development of strong LCAN leadership teams that have established clear goals to meet the unique college access needs of their local communities.
- **Developed and implemented statewide initiatives to promote college application and enrollment** including Michigan College Month and College Decision Day. High schools across Michigan participate annually in one or both programs. To date, 533 schools have participated in the statewide initiatives. In 2015, these statewide efforts garnered national attention when former First Lady Michelle Obama participated in College Decision Day events in Detroit.
- **Developed and implemented grant programs.** MCAN's grants include the Reach Higher High School Grant, which has supported 117 individual high schools in utilizing data to strategically implement programs and drive system-level change to improve postsecondary outcomes, and the Innovative Program Grants, which invest in piloting or scaling programming that increases college readiness, enrollment, and completion in local communities.

- **Developed and implemented professional development for school counselors.** Statewide, more than 445 individuals have completed MCAN’s school counselor professional development course. MCAN’s training provides school counselors with a better understanding of how to build a college-going culture, utilize data to drive postsecondary planning, and help students maximize financial aid opportunities. The course has been so successful that Michigan’s professional development program has been modeled in several other states.
- **Advocated for policy reforms that expand postsecondary opportunities for low-income students, first generation college-going students, and students of color.** For example, in 2014 MCAN convened a group of high-level policy leaders and stakeholders to develop the Reaching for Opportunity report, which provides a detailed action plan for increasing postsecondary attainment in the state. In 2016, MCAN’s executive director was appointed by Gov. Rick Snyder to serve on the 21st Century Education Commission.
- **Placed 56 well-trained, near-peer college advisers in 70 high schools across Michigan through the AdviseMI program.** AdviseMI, which was established in 2015, helps to fill the gap in college advising at Michigan high schools by training recent college graduates to help students navigate postsecondary education options, apply to colleges, complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), secure financial aid, and enroll in higher education institutions that will serve them well.
- **Hosted an annual conference for seven consecutive years that has grown in participation every year,** with over 550 attendees participating in 2017. Through the annual conference, college access leaders and practitioners across Michigan have had the opportunity to collaborate, share best practices, and explore new opportunities to improve their shared work.

MISSION AND BIG GOAL

Through this strategic planning process, MCAN reaffirmed both our mission and big goal.

Our mission: Increase college readiness, participation, and completion in Michigan, particularly among low-income students, first generation college-going students, and students of color.

The Big Goal: Increase the percentage of Michigan residents with degrees or postsecondary certificates to 60 percent by the year 2025.

VALUES

To achieve its mission and the Big Goal, MCAN confirmed its existing values.

College is postsecondary education: MCAN uses the term “college” to refer to the attainment of valuable postsecondary credentials beyond high school, including professional/technical certificates and academic degrees.

College is a necessity: Postsecondary education is a prerequisite to success in a knowledge-based economy. Everyone should pursue and complete a postsecondary credential beyond high school.

College is for everyone: The postsecondary education attainment rates among low-income students and students of color are significantly lower than those of other students. MCAN is committed to closing these gaps.

College is a public good: Postsecondary educational opportunity and attainment are critical to a just and equitable society, strong economy, and healthy communities.

HOW WE WORK

Regardless of the priority or program, we ensure all of our work is mission driven, works toward our goals, honors our values, and aligns with our organizational strengths. The work that we do is **equity focused** by supporting increased access to postsecondary opportunities for low-income students, students of color, and first generation students. We are also **attainment oriented**, focusing on helping students earn degrees and postsecondary certificates, and **student centric**, working with partners to ensure systems and programs are meeting the needs of students. Finally, we continually use data to inform our work and educate our partners, ensuring **data-driven** decision making.

OUR ROLE

The way we do our work is also defined by the role that MCAN plays in the college access movement. MCAN's role is comprehensive and multifaceted, with an emphasis on partnership and collaboration to meet collective goals. Specifically, we:

- **Advocate:** MCAN is well known as the statewide voice for college access in Michigan, and is recognized as the country's leading college access network. MCAN works with policymakers to influence policy that will help the state reach the Big Goal.
- **Build capacity:** MCAN builds the capacity of communities through the development of LCANs that set a shared vision for change among community partners. MCAN also builds the advising and counseling capacity of local schools through professional development opportunities and the placement of college advisers.
- **Convene:** MCAN brings together critical leaders and organizations in the college access and success field to have meaningful conversations, identify gaps, and explore opportunities for collaboration. We work to align our efforts with others and encourage our partners to do the same.
- **Develop partnerships:** In recognition that MCAN cannot reach Goal 2025 alone, we work to forge strong partnerships with like-minded, mission-aligned organizations at the local, state, and national level.
- **Disseminate data and research:** MCAN has access to a variety of data to demonstrate Michigan's progress toward reaching the Big Goal, as well as the communications network to disseminate research to partners and community stakeholders.
- **Invest:** MCAN provides several grant programs for schools, LCANs, and communities to financially support college access infrastructure and programming.

OUR PARTNERS IN SYSTEM CHANGE

In order to increase Michigan’s attainment rate to 60 percent by 2025, MCAN needs to collaborate with others through a coordinated effort that extends from state government to students. We engage with partners across a variety of systems to advance the college access movement and achieve collective priorities—with a particular focus on improving opportunities and outcomes for low-income students, first generation college-going students, and students of color. These systems include:

- **State agencies and individuals:** Including the Office of the Governor, lawmakers, various state departments and associations, and philanthropic organizations
- **Regions and communities:** Including LCANs, prosperity regions, Promise Zones, community foundations, United Ways, local governments, and community-based nonprofit organizations
- **Education systems**
 - **K–12:** Including traditional school districts, charter schools, and intermediate school districts
 - **Higher education:** Including public and private two-year and four-year colleges and universities
 - **Workforce:** Including Michigan Works! agencies and large employers
- **Practitioners:** Including school counselors, college advisers, and other direct service providers

GROWING OUR IMPACT: PRIORITIES

Through the strategic planning process, MCAN identified four priorities that will be the primary focus of its efforts over the next four years. The four priorities are:

1. Foster a college-going culture
2. Identify multiple postsecondary education pathways and facilitate smooth transitions
3. Improve college affordability
4. Support credential completion

These four priorities will be implemented to create lasting impact and increase the number of low-income students, first generation college-going students, and students of color entering college, persisting, and completing high-quality certificates and degrees. To work toward these priorities, MCAN will implement multiple strategies and partner with actors across different systems, as outlined in the previous section.

For each priority, we have identified needs and opportunities and established a guiding vision—what we must accomplish to execute the priority and how. We have also outlined new and existing strategies to advance the priorities. Exhibit 1 provides a visual representation of our priorities and how they intersect with the work that we do.



PRIORITY ONE: FOSTER A COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE

Vision

Residents across our state believe college is very important to succeed in the labor market. In every high school across the state, professionals support this belief and help all students define and achieve their postsecondary goals.

Needs and Opportunities

Culture consists of underlying values, beliefs, and meanings that are deeply held, static, and enduring. To raise Michigan's educational attainment rate, the citizens of our great state must understand, value, and believe in both the private and public value of postsecondary educational attainment. When students have school, parental, and community support, college is seen as the norm—higher education is the expectation rather than the exception.

MCAN leads the charge in changing the hearts and minds of Michiganders by espousing the mantra that a high school diploma simply is not enough to compete in the 21st century global economy. There are also many individual and community benefits of postsecondary education, including increased median income, decreased unemployment rates, lower smoking rates, lower incarceration rates, and higher levels of civic participation, such as volunteerism, voting, and blood donation. Particular attention is paid to supporting a college-going culture within communities supporting populations of low-income students, first generation college-going students, and students of color.”

Related Dashboard Metrics

- Michigan residents who think college is very important to be successful in the labor market
- Michigan residents who think that it is very likely that their child will get a college education

Whenever possible, MCAN will disaggregate data representing college-going students based on characteristics such as family income, race/ethnicity, and status as a first generation college student.

Strategies

Existing Strategies

MCAN has a long history of fostering a college-going culture. We are committed to continuing many of these successful efforts. For example, we will continue to advocate for policies that support college access, such as supporting funding for higher education, increasing student financial aid, and expanding training requirements for school counselors. We will also continue to coordinate College Decision Day with high schools statewide. These events promote the importance of college and celebrate students’ academic achievements.

In addition, MCAN remains committed to supporting the professionals who work to promote college access daily. We plan to continue to provide school counselor training. Since 2013, MCAN has led a collaborative effort to offer school counselors training as college/career advisers, postsecondary planners, and education advocates. We also intend to continue to invest in AdviseMI, which embeds recent well-trained college graduates in high schools to serve as dedicated, near-peer college advisers for significant numbers of low-income students, first generation college-going students, and students of color. The goal of the program is to increase the number of high school students who enter and complete postsecondary education.

New Strategies

MCAN is also interested in exploring new opportunities for fostering a college-going culture. For example, at the state level, we are considering how to offer fellow college access advocates a way to formally join MCAN in our work toward the Big Goal. We know that Michigan needs a diverse set of organizations and individuals to voice their support for postsecondary education, and we are exploring a variety of methods to help align these efforts. MCAN also plans to work with the Michigan Higher Education Attainment Round Table (MIHEART) to implement recommendations from *Reaching for Opportunity: An Action Plan to Increase Michigan’s Postsecondary Credential Attainment* that enhance the ability of middle schools and high schools to build strong college-going cultures. These strategies could include encouraging the state to provide school districts grants to hire more school counselors, supporting professional development for school counselors, and working with Michigan Department of Education to explore opportunities to improve Educational Development Plan implementation.

At the local level, MCAN is considering strategies to improve the data available to local leaders and partners across the state. One option is to develop a statewide, interactive, online map visually displaying qualitative and quantitative college access data and assets. Qualitative data will include LCANs, college access–focused community organizations, high school partners, and university partners. Through grantmaking, MCAN will support mission-aligned programs and organizations that bring focus, action, and impact to the priorities outlined within this strategic plan.

PRIORITY TWO: IDENTIFY MULTIPLE POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION PATHWAYS AND FACILITATE SMOOTH TRANSITIONS

Vision

All students graduating from a Michigan high school understand their postsecondary options, and they enroll in a postsecondary institution that is a good match or fit for their aspirations, academic readiness, and career ambitions.

Needs and Opportunities

For generations, Michigan families could rely on a high school diploma to provide a middle-class lifestyle, thanks to the robust labor market of the automobile manufacturing industry. But the 21st century global economy demands education beyond high school, whether it is a certificate in a skilled trade or technical field, an associate degree, a bachelor's degree, or beyond.

We are faced with the challenge of defining pathways that include stackable credits and credentials, align well with students' aptitudes, and will lead to multiple options for education and careers. These challenges are amplified in schools that serve large numbers of low-income students, first generation college-going students, and students of color. MCAN has a role to play in identifying the certificates and degrees that lead to well-paying careers and making that information available in communities across the state.

Related Dashboard Metrics

- SAT total score of 11th-grade students
- Eleventh-grade students scoring at or above the SAT or college-ready benchmarks
- High school graduates who enroll in a higher-education institution within one year

Whenever possible, MCAN will disaggregate data representing college-going students based on characteristics such as family income, race/ethnicity, and status as a first generation college student.

Strategies

Existing Strategies

MCAN has been working for nearly a decade to define and communicate successful educational and career pathways. An important component of this work is ensuring that every high school has school counselors and college advisers that can talk to students about educational and career options that align well with their strengths and interests. It is particularly important, as Michigan's economy changes and technology shifts, that MCAN, school counselors, and college advisers are able to understand the landscape, communicate, and promote stackable education credentials that lead to well-paying careers for all students.

An important component of this work has been developing and growing the AdviseMI program. This program hires recent college graduates, trains them to be effective college advisers, and places them in high schools across the state. Currently, there are 56 AdviseMI advisers in 70 schools. MCAN will continue to grow this program by strategically placing advisers in schools that are interested in participating and serve a significant number of low-income students, students of color, and first generation students. MCAN also remains committed to ensuring college advisers are well trained and supported.

To further support students, MCAN has successfully created and led professional development to school counselors, and we have received positive feedback on our efforts. We will continue to provide professional development opportunities, with a particular focus on recruiting school counselors that serve low-income students, students of color, and first generation students. Because of the high level of participation in recent years, MCAN will also create additional professional learning opportunities that allow school counselors to deepen their knowledge about college advising and how best to support students.

MCAN will also continue to coordinate Michigan College Month, which encourages graduating high school seniors to apply to college and for financial aid during the school day. Michigan College Month places a special focus on assisting first generation students and students who may not have otherwise seriously considered applying to college.

New Strategies

MCAN will explore new strategies to help students and professionals alike navigate multiple postsecondary pathways and ensure smooth transitions between high school and postsecondary. Based on our work with partners, we know that students, families, and professionals can find it difficult to understand the educational pathway necessary to meet a student's postsecondary goals. MCAN will work with our partners to improve knowledge of high-quality educational pathways and stackable credentials that lead to well-paying careers.

In addition, MCAN will pursue new strategies to improve college enrollment. Too many students commit to attending college on Decision Day, but do not enroll in the fall. MCAN has identified “summer melt,” the phenomenon of high school students enrolling in college but never attending in the fall, as an important issue to tackle. Specifically, MCAN is working to identify national nonprofits with proven strategies to consider expanding to Michigan. MCAN is also exploring ways to encourage students to earn college credits before leaving high school through opportunities such as early middle colleges, advanced placement, international baccalaureate, dual enrollment, and articulated career and technical education programs because earning credits in high school makes it more likely that students will enroll and complete a postsecondary education program.

PRIORITY THREE: IMPROVE COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY

Vision

All students graduating from a Michigan high school will have the financial knowledge, literacy, and readiness to understand the costs and benefits of postsecondary education. Students will also have the resources, advising, and coaching they need to enroll in and efficiently complete their degree or certificate program.

Needs and Opportunities

The most commonly cited barrier to postsecondary education is affordability. Along with being socially, informationally, and academically ready, it is equally important that all students have access to the necessary funds to enroll in, persist in, and complete college.

With the growing media attention surrounding the increasing average student loan debt, many students have been left wondering, "Is college worth it?" Research shows that individuals with a college degree make, on average, a million dollars more over the course of their lifetime than an individual with only a high school diploma. Research also shows that there is a fundamental disconnect between the perceived cost of college and the real cost of college, particularly for low-income, first generation college students who are the most eligible for financial assistance.

Related Dashboard Metrics

- High school seniors completing the FAFSA

Whenever possible, MCAN will disaggregate data representing college-going students based on characteristics such as family income, race/ethnicity, and status as a first generation college student.

Strategies

Existing Strategies

MCAN is committed to continuing several strategies that aim to make college more affordable. At the state level, MCAN and its partners will continue to advocate for policies that improve affordability, such as increasing state funding for need-based student financial aid. MCAN will also continue to coordinate Michigan College Month and FAFSA completion campaign programs like College Cash Campaign to encourage more students, especially low-income students, students of color, and first generation students, to complete the paperwork required to access financial aid.

We will also continue to support local efforts related to affordability through targeted grantmaking. To make these strategies as successful as possible, MCAN will work to improve access to and dissemination of data from tools like the federal student aid FAFSA completion database.

New Strategies

Cost continues to be a significant concern for many college-bound students. MCAN will continue to implement new strategies aimed at increasing knowledge, reducing costs, and eliminating affordability as a barrier to college enrollment. For example, MCAN will expand our professional development opportunities to increase school counselor knowledge about completing FAFSAs and accessing other opportunities for financial aid. We will also continue to build partnerships with other organizations and state offices that are equally committed to improving affordability such as the Michigan Department of Treasury's Student Scholarships and Grants Division, Federal Student Aid office, and national organizations like uAspire.

We know that adults returning to college also face significant challenges related to affordability. MCAN will work with new partners, such as workforce development agencies, to share information about financial aid resources, as well as how to promote postsecondary education guidance for employers to implement as a part of their work flow.

PRIORITY FOUR: SUPPORT CREDENTIAL COMPLETION

Vision

All students who enroll in college will attain a postsecondary degree or certificate, while minimizing their time to completion.

Needs and Opportunities

Since its inception, college completion has been part of MCAN's mission. For the first time, however, completion of a degree or certificate is now a central focus area for the organization.

Getting students to enroll in college is the first step, but access alone will not allow our state to reach Goal 2025 or position our students for success. Too many Michiganders start college, but do not finish. Michigan has one of the highest rates of people in the labor market who have earned college credit, but have not yet earned a degree or credential. Michigan must do more to ensure our access efforts translate into college graduates.

Colleges and universities are best positioned to promote and implement the changes necessary to improve completion rates. For that reason, MCAN will support, not lead, efforts to improve college completion. We have a long history of partnering with institutions directly as well as their statewide associations to improve access. We will strengthen existing and create new partnerships to leverage additional work on this critical issue.

Related Dashboard Metrics

- Graduates not enrolling in remedial coursework
- Graduates enrolled, achieving at least 24 credits within 16 months
- Community college completion/graduation/transfer rate
- Public university six-year graduation rate
- Postsecondary completion for high school graduates

Whenever possible, MCAN will disaggregate data representing college-going students based on characteristics such as family income, race/ethnicity, and status as a first generation college student.

Strategies

MCAN is exploring a variety of ways to engage with key partners to improve college completion. Central to our efforts is our ongoing collaboration with three statewide associations that represent colleges and universities across the state: Michigan Association of State Universities, Michigan Community College Association, and Michigan Independent Colleges and Universities.

One promising strategy is expanding MCAN's college advising efforts to postsecondary institutions in the form of success coaches. Over the last three years, MCAN successfully designed and launched AdviseMI, an AmeriCorps program that places recent college graduates as college advisers in high school settings. MCAN will explore how to replicate this concept at the postsecondary level by partnering with institutions to place completion coaches on campuses to help students make timely progress toward their degrees or certificates.

Another potential area of focus is remediation. MCAN will explore how to strengthen partnerships between high schools and colleges to help students understand placement policies, assess readiness for college-level work, and work to improve skills and knowledge during high school. These strategies will help students avoid remediation and enroll in credit-bearing coursework immediately.

In addition to working with high schools, MCAN will collaborate with higher education partners to scale successful remediation strategies. The Michigan Center for Student Success (housed at the Michigan Community College Association) is already working with many community colleges to expand corequisite models of delivering developmental instruction. MCAN will find ways to support these institutions in implementing this strategy at scale—which allows students to complete remediation requirements and complete a credit-bearing course concurrently. MCAN will also partner with colleges to improve support for students that require developmental education before entering credit-bearing coursework. This work includes ensuring students are not using their limited financial aid dollars or risking the possibility of jeopardizing their long-term grade point average or transcript by attempting remedial coursework.

MCAN will work to increase awareness of the benefits of enrolling full-time to students. Too often students who enroll in college part-time never finish. Many states and institutions have organized campaigns to encourage and incent students to enroll full-time and complete their program of study in as little time as possible. MCAN will partner with statewide associations to encourage institutions to implement tuition and financial aid policies that incent students to complete their credentials—such as offering tuition discounts their senior year, awarding more financial aid to students who have accumulated large numbers of credits, or offering a fixed tuition rate for students that enroll in 12 or more credit hours per semester.

Finally, MCAN will leverage its role as an intermediary organization to support postsecondary professionals and institutions. For example, MCAN can deploy its communications capacity to share important changes to the Michigan Transfer Network/Agreement and support replication and dissemination of best practices. MCAN can also provide professional development opportunities for direct service providers, such as admissions representatives, financial aid officers, and student support staff. Additionally, MCAN can sponsor convenings of higher education administrators to learn about and work on proven completion strategies, and invest in strategies that work through grantmaking.

GROWING OUR IMPACT: INFRASTRUCTURE BUILDING

In addition to supporting programs and strategies to advance the four priorities, MCAN also works to build infrastructure that can have a sustained and equitable impact on college enrollment, persistence, and completion. These infrastructure-building efforts all aim to strengthen our ability to reach Goal 2025, and, in particular, increase support for low-income students, first generation college-going students, and students of color. MCAN's infrastructure-building work centers on four efforts at the state, community, higher education, and practitioner levels:

- **State:** Michigan Higher Education Attainment Roundtable (MIHEART) and Michigan College Access Alliance (the Alliance)
- **Community:** Local College Access Networks (LCANs)
- **Higher education:** MCAN Higher Education Advisory Board

- **Practitioner:** Professional development and networking opportunities to support college access leaders and practitioners

STATE SYSTEMS: MIHEART AND THE ALLIANCE

Vision

The state is served by coordinated network of college access professionals, organizations, and communities that support college access and promote alignment of resources to meet Goal 2025.

Needs and Opportunities

Michigan has a variety of programs, organizations, and resources dedicated to helping more students attain college degrees and postsecondary certificates; however, the state’s higher education system is highly decentralized. That can make it difficult for institutions of higher education to share best practices or coordinate efforts. MCAN partners with and supports two efforts, Michigan Higher Education Attainment Roundtable (MIHEART) and Michigan College Access Alliance (the Alliance), to coordinate and strengthen these existing like-minded organizations to provide impact.

Strategies

- MCAN will continue its critical role as a convener of college access stakeholders. In particular, MCAN will continue facilitation of MIHEART, a collaboration of cross-sector leaders and stakeholders that uses policy interventions to help move the needle on credential attainment, with a focus on low-income students, first generation students, and students of color. MIHEART also encourages local leaders to identify their own attainment goals and advance regional strategies based on their unique geography, challenges, assets, and priorities.
- MCAN will also continue facilitation of the Alliance, a formal partner roundtable consisting of statewide college access leaders, service providers, and stakeholders. The purpose of the Alliance is to share updates on stateside initiatives, align programs and resources, and facilitate opportunities for deeper collaboration.
- MCAN will continue to recruit diverse perspectives and participants to participate in both MIHEART and the Alliance.

COMMUNITY SYSTEMS: LCANS

Vision

Every community across the state is supported by a strong, sustainable Local College Access Network (LCAN). LCANs lead efforts to identify local needs and implement community-based solutions to improve college access and completion.

Needs and Opportunities

Since 2010, MCAN has worked tirelessly to build a robust network of LCANs across the state—community-based college access alliances supported by community and education leaders representing K-12, higher education, the nonprofit sector, government, business, and philanthropy. As of 2017, there are 32 LCANs in Michigan. These organizations set community-specific goals focused on student success,

establish a system of data gathering and analysis, report results, and hold partners accountable for performance. MCAN supports LCANs by providing capacity-building support, training, guidance, and funding. LCANs extend and improve MCAN's capacity to reach into local communities, organizing leaders around a singular vision of increasing educational attainment.

MCAN will continue to support existing LCANs and work with new communities to establish an LCAN where there is community buy-in, need, and capacity.

Strategies

- MCAN will continue to provide support to existing LCANs, while encouraging the development of new LCANs in communities where they do not currently exist, with a focus on communities with high numbers of low-income students, first generation students, and students of color. This work will include providing strategic funding to strengthen existing local college access network and spark new ones, as well as providing professional development opportunities for LCAN coordinators and leadership team members.
- MCAN will also seek new opportunities to collaborate with LCANs to identify what is working well and what could be improved as MCAN continues to provide leadership and support.

HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM: HIGHER EDUCATION ADVISORY BOARD

Vision

Colleges and universities across Michigan recognize the challenges students face in enrolling and completing a postsecondary degree. They collaborate to identify what works to implement effective strategies to serve students.

Needs and Opportunities

The Higher Education Advisory Board is created to raise the profile of access and attainment issues, particularly for first generation, low-income, and minority students, among higher education leaders. To date, there are 57 colleges and universities represented on the Higher Education Advisory Board, which accounts for more than 80 percent of all institutions of higher education in the state. The purpose of the Board is to create a streamlined way to communicate information about MCAN strategies and programs to each institution and to provide a mechanism for the institutions to give MCAN feedback on ways we can maximize our impact.

Strategies

- MCAN will continue to convene and support the Higher Education Advisory Board, with an eye toward identifying opportunities to disseminate college access information and tools to higher-education institutions, while gathering feedback from institutions about MCAN's work.
- MCAN will work through the Higher Education Advisory Board to encourage participation in MCAN's other strategies and activities, and gather feedback and input on activities to improve effectiveness.
- MCAN will continue to recruit diverse perspectives and participants to participate on the Board.

PRACTITIONERS: STRENGTHENING THE PROFESSION

Vision

College access leaders and practitioners across Michigan have a regular opportunity to hone their skills, collaborate, share best practices, and discuss new opportunities to improve their shared work.

Needs and Opportunities

For our efforts to be successful, it is critical that the professionals working with students and families everyday have the skills, knowledge, and tools necessary to provide effective support. Many school counselors in our state had not previously been afforded the opportunity to participate in extensive training around college access issues. MCAN has worked to fill this void and supports a network of professionals committed to improving college access outcomes in Michigan.

Strategies

- MCAN will continue to host an annual conference including breakout sessions, networking opportunities, and an awards dinner.
- MCAN will target and offer professional development opportunities to school counselors, advisers, and counselor fellows at schools serving low-income, first generation, and students of color.
- MCAN will increase dedicated communications for all practitioners, ensuring the dissemination of information, tools, and training that will help them increase their effectiveness for students.

KEYS TO OUR SUCCESS

Having a thriving organization is an essential part of being able to provide quality services to partners across the state. To that end, MCAN is focusing on building key organizational assets to guide ongoing, strategic growth in support of our mission. We identified six key “buckets” (or categories) of organizational health, including:

- Visibility
- Budget and sustainability
- Governance
- Leadership and succession planning
- Operations
- Staffing

Over the past five years, MCAN has focused most of our internal energy on improving three of these six areas: governance, operations, and staffing. In this strategic plan, we will shift our internal focus to brand and image, budget and sustainability, and leadership and succession planning. During the implementation planning work that is to follow strategic plan development, MCAN will identify specific metrics to that will demonstrate success in each of these areas.

INCREASE VISIBILITY

Vision

MCAN is a state and national leader in college access. MCAN's brand is well known and represented professionally in all materials and publications.

Needs and Opportunities

MCAN is well respected across Michigan and the United States as a leader in college access. We are nonpartisan advocates for robust programming, strong partnerships, and sound policy and investment. In the four years ahead, MCAN will continue to build on this brand and image to position our organization and priority areas for success.

In doing so, we will focus on three critical audiences: the public, practitioners, and Michigan policymakers. To be most effective in our work, MCAN must continue to engage the public in a conversation about postsecondary education. In a variety of audiences, MCAN staff experience challenges to our use of the term college. While MCAN defines this term broadly, some of the individuals and organizations it serves define it much more narrowly. MCAN believes that a statewide discussion about what postsecondary success looks like is necessary and valuable to the college access movement. Historically, school counselors have been an essential partner for MCAN. We will continue partnering with them throughout this strategic plan to prepare them to have conversations with students and families about postsecondary benefits and opportunities. Another critical audience is state policymakers, especially members of the legislature. In 2018, lawmakers in the state House, Senate, and Office of the Governor will be up for election. This is a tremendous opportunity to share MCAN's work and collaborate with our partners to educate a new class of lawmakers about the need to work toward Goal 2025.

Strategies

- Improve clarity in messaging about what MCAN is and who it serves, and what college means. MCAN will engage with the public in a conversation about the term to promote a college-going culture and inform MCAN's own messaging.
- Implement an advocacy campaign targeted at new lawmakers, aimed at increasing broad knowledge of college access issues and the importance of postsecondary education, and promoting MCAN as the primary contact.
- Refresh MCAN's brand. MCAN's brand was created when the organization was first being incubated. To celebrate our tenth anniversary, MCAN will update our brand to showcase our progress and priorities. This will include amplifying our work related to increasing credential completion in our branding.
- Document MCAN's successes and capture the story of how the organization gets work done.

DIVERSIFY FUNDING

Vision

MCAN is supported by a diverse set of funders and funding streams. Because of this diversity, the organization is strong even if a funding source shifts.

Needs and Opportunities

Over the past five years, MCAN's budget has grown dramatically—from approximately \$1 million in fiscal year (FY) 2011 to nearly \$7 million in FY 2017. During this growth, MCAN's staff and Board have collaborated closely to build a fiscally sound organization. Over the next four years, MCAN must continue to be fiscally responsible while striving to diversify funding sources and ensure sustainability for many years to come.

MCAN has worked hard to diversify its existing funding sources; however, the organization continues to rely on several major funding streams to support its work. MCAN is proud to be supported by public and private investments, including federal funding, state investment, philanthropic support, community-based funding, and earned revenue. MCAN works closely with our funding partners regularly—including educating policymakers about the value of these investments. In addition, MCAN staff will work to identify new sources of funding to support this critical work.

Strategies

- Continue improving financial practices to ensure ongoing fiscal sustainability
- Continue to inform policymakers of the value of public investments in college access through MCAN
- Continue to explore opportunities for new funding sources

PLAN FOR LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION

Vision

MCAN is known for having a staff that can craft and implement an ambitious plan for the future. MCAN is also known for fostering and recruiting talent.

Needs and Opportunities

MCAN benefits from a strong leadership team that has largely served since MCAN's infancy. While this team remains committed to the organization, MCAN recognizes the need to plan for future transitions. MCAN already has systems in place to ensure effective transitions at the Board level and has implemented systems to ensure that staff are cross trained to minimize the effect of staff transitions, but more work remains to ensure the same handoff could occur at the senior staff level. MCAN also has a history of growing and retaining talent. We will explore ways to continue in this tradition and formalize professional development opportunities for leaders within our organization.

Strategies

- Develop a leadership succession planning strategy
- Invest in professional development opportunities for MCAN leadership, especially diversity and inclusion training.

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