CHANGING DIRECTION:

Changing Direction examines how to structure financial aid and financing policies and practices to maximize participation, access, and success for all students. Designed around an integrated approach to restructuring appropriations, tuition, and financial aid policies and practices, WICHE's overarching goal is better, more informed decision-making on issues related to financial aid and financing in higher education. Over a multi-year period, the project is examining the socioeconomic-political environment in order to foster the kinds of major changes needed in the near future at multiple levels—campus, system, state, and national—and to initiate and promote those changes through public policy.

Changing Direction provides a venue for policymakers and educators from all regions of the country to critically examine strengths and weaknesses of public policies and develop new models by looking at emerging trends, their potential impact on higher education, and the policy implications related to issues of financial aid, finance, cost of education, and access. The project addresses current practices and policies, and emphasis is on exploring innovative, creative, perhaps untested approaches to national- and state-level challenges. While this necessarily involves all sources of assistance and financing—federal, state, local, and institutional—the project focuses on state policies and practices. *Changing Direction* serves policymakers in the legislative and executive branches of state government and their staffs, higher education researchers, state executive agencies, governing and coordinating boards, educators, college and university leaders, and business leaders.

WICHE and its partners—the Center for Policy Analysis at the American Council on Education (ACE), the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), and the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO)—are exploring several key questions, including:

- How can policymakers at all levels—most particularly those at the state level—more effectively integrate tuition, financial aid, and appropriations policies in ways that promote student participation and completion?
- What kind of information and research is needed to strengthen policies and ensure their continuing effectiveness?
- How well do the policies and practices of the student financing system serve the needs of different population groups? How do different population groups view the effectiveness of the current student financing system?
- What are the implications of existing financing patterns for future policy improvements?
- What do current and near-term fiscal conditions mean for access to higher education, especially for low-income and underrepresented populations?
- How do financial aid and financing policies impact student retention at two- and four-year institutions?
- How do states establish an appropriate balance between direct support for high-quality educational programs and a level of financial assistance that enables students to participate in those programs?

Changing Direction expanded its scope to encompass the impact of revenue constraints on access and student retention and broader participation by the public two-year sector. Since policy change is a participative process that takes time to achieve, project resources are supporting individualized technical assistance through state roundtables, state case studies, and leadership institutes for legislators, executive office policy directors, trustees, and board members. Multi-state forums are being convened to seek input from key stakeholders, disseminate information, and continue dialogue on regional and national issues. For more information about *Changing Direction* and to access the project's publications, please visit www.wiche.edu/Policy/Changing_Direction/index.htm.

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