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Executive Summary: How to Capitalize on Minority Serving Institutions

Minority Serving Institution (MSI) is a federal designation for higher education entities that meet either mission-based or enrollment defined standards. Massachusetts is home to 12 MSIs, 9 public and 3 private, which serve a diverse student population. As Massachusetts faces labor shortages and communities of color continue to face barriers to many career sectors, this report provides policymakers with a better understanding of what MSIs are and how Massachusetts can better use these critical institutions to strengthen workforce diversity.

What are MSIs?

There are two types of MSIs, as defined by the federal government: mission-based MSIs like Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) and enrollment-defined MSI. Enrollment-defined MSIs (of which there are five demographically defined subcategories) are fundamentally different from HBCU's and TCU's as they were not founded to educate specific minority populations but have come to serve a large percentage of students of color through demographic shifts. These institutions also tend to serve low-income students, first-generation students, and non-traditional students.

If a school demonstrates that they meet the MSI definition they become eligible to apply to competitive grant programs designed to strengthen their ability to expand access to education for low-income students of color.

Who Are MSI's In Massachusetts?

Although the number of enrollment defined MSIs can change, based on research by Rutgers' Center for MSIs, Massachusetts has 12 MSIs in the form of Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), Predominately Black Institutions (PBIs), and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs). The majority of the state's MSIs are public (9 of 12 in 2022), but private institutions like Franklin Cummings Tech, Cambridge College, and Urban College of Boston meet the criteria as well.

Massachusetts MSIs (2022)

Institution Name	MSI Type	Institution Type
Franklin Cummings Tech	HSI	Private, 4yr*
Bunker Hill Community College	AANAPISI & HSI	Public, 2yr
Cambridge College	AANAPISI & HSI	Private, 4yr
Holyoke Community College	HSI	Public, 2yr
Middlesex Community College	AANAPISI & HSI	Public, 2yr
North Shore Community College	HSI	Public, 2yr
Northern Essex Community College	HSI	Public, 2yr
Roxbury Community College	PBI	Public, 2yr
Springfield Technical Community College	HSI	Public, 2yr
University of Massachusetts-Boston	AANAPISI	Public, 4yr
University of Massachusetts-Lowell	AANAPISI	Public, 4yr
Urban College of Boston	AANAPISI & HSI	Private, 2yr

*Franklin Cummings Tech offers one Bachelor of Science program; however, 97% of its students are pursuing certificates and associate degrees

Much like nationally, MSIs in Massachusetts serve a much higher proportion of low-income students of color, compared to non-MSI colleges and universities. Data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) shows that in FY 2021, 53 percent of students attending an MSI in the state were diverse.¹ By comparison, non-MSI community colleges and state universities had enrollment that was 38 and 28 percent diverse, respectively. In addition, 27 percent (23,500) of all undergraduate students at MSIs in Massachusetts were receiving Pell Grants.² Since most MSIs in MA are 2-year institutions, their enrollment tends to include a high proportion of part-time learners (58%).³

The Challenge

The nature of MSIs and who they serve means that these institutions face greater challenges in supporting students in obtaining their degree and furthering their career. However, the state does not intentionally coordinate resources to support MSIs and the diverse students they educate. For instance, unlike the way the state funds public K-12 education, the state budget does not consider student demographics or the needs level of students when determining public higher education funding.

This means that institutions that serve large proportions of underrepresented students, including MSIs, have to look outside of the traditional state appropriation to receive additional support. While the federal grants for MSIs are meant to address these challenges, limited funding and a lack of technical assistance constrains their impact. More strategic investment into MSIs at the state level could create better outcomes for students of color and a larger pool of diverse talent for employers.

Creating a Strategic Approach to Support MSIs – Recommendations for Massachusetts

Massachusetts has an opportunity to play a more active role in supporting MSIs in Massachusetts in order to reach untapped talent sources and achieve our diversity and workforce goals. Below we provide a set of recommendations based on our research findings. These recommendations are organized into three categories:

Identifying MSIs in Massachusetts

Awareness and knowledge about who MSIs are and the role they play is limited. The U.S. Department of Higher Education does not regularly publish a list of eligible MSIs, leaving other organizations to fill the

¹ Roughly 12% of students did not identify their race/ethnicity and are not included in the percentage totals.

² Figure includes full-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students.

³ MTF analysis of IPEDS data. FY 2021.

information vacuum, oftentimes with competing results. In addition, the responsibility for obtaining a federal MSI designation is entirely on the higher education institution, which may not have the resources to navigate the complex application process. This lack of clarity and support around what institutions are MSIs makes state level policy coordination a challenge. Developing a Massachusetts-specific MSI definition could address these challenges and help the state integrate MSIs into our workforce development policies and programs.

Targeting State Support to MSIs and the Students They Serve

Massachusetts does not currently have a coordinated strategy to support MSIs and other like higher education institutions. State funding for MSIs is limited to the public higher education system and one-off workforce programs, both of which do not account for an institution's MSI status or the demographics of students served. There are several ways the state could support MSIs through funding:

- **Rethink the Base Funding Model for Higher Education** – State funding for the public higher education system does not account for different types of enrollment, demographics or the needs level of students. Introducing a funding formula for the public higher education system that accounts for demographics and socio-economic factors, in addition to the full costs associated with part-time students, is a more equitable approach that could increase the diversity of the talent pipeline prepared to fill available jobs.
- **Provide Direct Funding for MSIs within the State Budget** – The state should consider providing subsidies specifically for private MSIs so that all MSIs in the state can receive the resources needed to improve retention, graduation, and job achievement outcomes. Similar to the base funding formula, allocations could be determined by factors such as enrollment, demographics, and socioeconomic status.
- **Tailor Existing Programs to Prioritize MSIs** – Massachusetts has an opportunity to better engage MSIs by expanding and/or amending existing workforce development programs to incentivize or prioritize MSI participation. The TRAIN program and Donnelly Success Grants are two examples of existing programs that would be tailored to prioritize MSIs and diverse students. Including additional incentives for MSIs could be a way to boost participation in these grant opportunities and concentrate investment among students of color.
- **Focus Holistically on Student Success** – Supporting students as they persist through education programs is crucial. While many workforce programs in the state offer wrap around services, those funds are extremely limited and do not address systemic barriers. The SUCCESS program run by the Mass Association of Community Colleges is designed to more holistically support low-income students of color by providing high-touch services like individualized academic advising, coaching, and mentoring. Programs like SUCCESS could be expanded to target Massachusetts MSIs, bolstering the number of diverse residents prepared to enter the workforce.

Intentionally Connecting Employers to MSIs

Policymakers should also consider how to create a more coordinated way for employers to interact with MSIs across the state. Below are three ways to promote connections between employers and MSIs and their students:

- **Create Workforce Programs that Streamline Employer Access to Prospective Talent** - The Mass Life Sciences Internship Challenge and the Clean Energy Internship Program are two examples of programs that directly connect employers to available talent by creating a centralized repository of interested candidates for them to access. Creating programs with a similar approach, especially in high demand industries, would make it easier for employers to capitalize on MSI talent across the state.
- **Use Technology to Better Foster Connections Between Employers and MSIs** - Currently there is not a centralized place for employers to go in order to understand who MSIs are and what

degrees/training programs they offer. Many employers may be unaware of what an MSI is and the students they serve. Creating a centralized resource that employers could access in order to learn about MSIs could help to create connections between them. Expanding the MassHire site to include MSI resources for employers could be a good start.

- **Capitalize on Coalitions and Associations to Create Programs at Scale** – Partnerships between MSIs and employers are often formed organically through networking or convenings where leaders from business and education overlap. While this has led to successful one-off partnerships, it often does not lead to creating scalable programs. In conjunction with the business community, the state should consider how to capitalize on existing coalitions or support the formation of new ones to strengthen connections between employers and MSIs.