A Framework for Understanding Federal-State Partnerships for Higher Education

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Introduction

Broadly conceptualized, federal-state partnerships refer to collaborations between the federal government and states to create or implement policy. In the higher education policy arena, such partnerships have the potential to transform how higher education is funded and regulated, making college more affordable and more accessible to a larger number of students. Nationally, state-level funding for higher education has not kept pace with the cost of doing business. As a result, public institutions have become more reliant upon tuition as a vital source of revenue, causing tuition prices to rise substantially.[1] To prompt states to invest more of their own dollars in higher education—and thereby reduce the cost burden for students—federal policy can provide funding for states to increase their financial investments in higher education.

The federal government has created such partnerships on occasion, such as in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, which research has found to be effective at encouraging state investment in higher education.[2] In light of this evidence, college affordability proponents have argued that federal-state partnerships can be a valuable tool to encourage states to invest in higher education and to keep tuition and fees low.[3] A number of federal policymakers have likewise identified federal-state partnerships as a path to improving college affordability. For example, several Democratic members of Congress—including the chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, the chair of the House Education and Labor Committee, and other members of those committees—have introduced legislation that would create a federal-state partnership to provide community and technical college students with two years of free tuition.[4] Federal-state partnerships were likewise included in the CARES Act of 2020 and the American Rescue Plan of 2021—COVID-19 stimulus legislation enacted during two different presidential administrations—to encourage state investment in higher education.[5]

As these examples illustrate, federal-state partnerships have become a fairly common topic in conversations about college affordability and the federal government's role in higher education. Yet the academic literature lacks a broader conceptual analysis of how federal-state partnerships function in the higher education policy arena. Are such partnerships necessarily direct? Are they necessarily cooperative? Do they always involve funding? And what, if any, additional parties are involved in these partnerships?

The purpose of this analysis is to understand the forms and functions of federal-state partnerships in higher education policy and to advance a typology of such partnerships. Understanding how intragovernmental partnerships function can assist policymakers with the design of future federal-state partnerships and can provide policy advocates and other stakeholders with a greater understanding of how such partnerships may be a vehicle for promoting higher education affordability, accountability, and equity. This analysis also considers the roles that local governments and higher education institutions have played in federal-state partnerships, as they are important policy actors in the sector.

US Federalism and Intragovernmental Partnerships

US federalism divides government into three levels—local, state, and federal—with each level of government having its own jurisdiction and permissible powers, as well as limitations on power so as not to infringe upon the powers that are rightfully exercised by a different level of government.[6] Scholars of federalism have observed that the divisions of power across levels of government are not clear-cut, and that multiple levels of government often are involved together in governance and policymaking.[7] A common metaphor for federalism is the picket fence. Different policy areas are conceptualized as fence posts cutting through rails representing governmental levels such as local, state, and federal.[8] Under this analogy, the exact nature of intragovernmental partnerships varies from one policy subsystem to another depending on the unique political, economic, and constitutional contexts of each subsystem. Hence, the fence—while cutting through all three levels of "picket-fence federalism"—are separate from each other and cut through the levels in their own way.[9]

In addition to various metaphors for federalism, scholars have also identified different kinds of federalism, characterized by relationships between state and federal governments. There are:

> dual federalism, in which state and federal governments act independently of one another; cooperative federalism, in which federal and state governments coordinate their functions; and… coercive federalism, in which the federal government issues mandates or powerful incentives to prompt states to take certain actions.[10]

Federal-state partnerships have been created in a variety of policy subsystems, including transportation, health care, nutrition, K-12 education, and higher education.[11] Because partnerships between levels of government are relatively unique to each policy subsystem, it is important to analyze the form and function of intragovernmental partnerships within a particular substantive area—such as higher education—to fully understand how such partnerships work in that subsystem and to determine how they may be leveraged to create and implement policy.

Previous writings about federal-state partnerships in the higher education policy area have typically focused on the federal government's use of its spending power to construct direct, financial partnerships with state governments to fund higher education programs.[12] Often, these partnerships have involved the federal government creating powerful incentives for states to invest funding to further federal policy objectives. A common incentive is a *maintenance-of-effort* (MOE) provision, which is a requirement that states maintain a particular level of funding for higher education in exchange for receiving federal funds as part of the partnership.[13] College affordability advocates tend to view such requirements as useful "to ensure that new federal dollars invested in states do not supplant other forms of higher education funding and financial aid."[14] Studies have shown MOE policies to be effective at incentivizing state investment in education.[15] For example, Delaney's analysis of higher education spending across 50 states during the six years prior to and the three years that ARRA's MOE provision was in effect found that "the federal stimulus funds resulted in no significant decrease of state general appropriations for higher education" and that the policy's federal "funds seem to have enabled states to provide stable total funding levels for higher education general appropriations."[16] Thus, there is evidence that federal-state partnerships can be effective at advancing federal goals. However, the incentive should be sufficiently large to persuade states to participate.[17] Moreover, MOE provisions that apply to general appropriations and not other aspects of state funding for higher education, such as student financial aid, may result in states cutting those other areas of funding not covered by the federal MOE policy.[18] Also, as Alexander et al. have observed, MOE policies often permit the federal government to provide waivers for some states to avoid losing funding under certain circumstances, even if their state-level investment in higher education comes up short. But "if federal officials constantly permit waivers, the strength of the provision will be greatly diminished."[19]

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Research Methods

To identify federal-state partnerships in the higher education policy arena, I conducted a search of the Google Scholar and EBSCO databases for research reports and policy documents relating to federal-state partnerships in the higher education sector between the 1997 and 2021. These searches were supplemented with a general internet search for policies, policy proposals, and reports about federal-state partnerships in the higher education sector. Keywords used in these searches included combinations of *federal-state partnership(s)* or *state-federal partnership(s)* and *higher education*. I also conducted searches for particular federal higher education policies that involved states in some way, such as the MOE provision in the ARRA. These searches identified relevant documentation in the form of policy texts, academic articles, descriptions of policies on government and nonprofit organization websites, and reports produced by government agencies, policy think thanks, and higher education associations. Only reports, policies, and literature that focused specifically on a formal or informal partnership between the federal government and states with regard to higher education were included in the analysis. A total of 48 documents were included. I analyzed those documents to identify the manner in which states and the federal government collaborated, the extent to which other parties were involved in the collaborations, whether federal funding was involved, and if so, what states or other entities were required to do in order to receive that funding.

To supplement findings from the analysis of research and policy documents, I drew from an original dataset of in-depth interviews with a diverse range of policy actors in the higher education arena. These interviews were gathered and analyzed as part of a larger study of the federal government's role in higher education. Interviewees included individuals who worked as congressional or White House staffers, US Department of Education or other federal agency personnel, policy staffers at higher education-focused associations, policy consultants, and others active in the federal higher education policy arena. A total of 28 interviews were conducted for the larger study, and of those, 14 interviewees specifically discussed federal-state partnerships, other ways state governments have been involved in federal higher education policy, or other matters relevant to the present analysis. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. I developed and used an original scheme to code the interview transcripts, including codes for the role of states in federal higher education policy and federal policy's influence on states. For purposes of the current study on federal-state partnerships involving higher education, I closely examined excerpts of interview transcripts that were coded as relating to states to identify discussions related to federal-state partnerships.

Forms and Functions of Federal-State Partnerships

Federal-state partnerships in the higher education space can be clustered into four general categories: direct funding partnerships; direct regulation partnerships; indirect funding partnerships, and indirect regulation partnerships. This taxonomy is demonstrated in the grid that appears as Table 1, which compares how interventions in the form of funding and regulation coincide with whether the federal government is working directly or indirectly with states in the partnership.

TABLE 1. **Taxonomy of Federal-State Partnerships**

	FUNDING	REGULATORY
DIRECT	Partnerships between states and the federal government to provide financial support for higher education (e.g., matching funds, MOE, competitive grants)	Partnerships between states and the federal government to develop policies and regulations governing higher education (e.g., negotiated rulemaking, other advisory partnerships)
INDIRECT	States and the federal government separately contribute funding to higher education; although separate funding, the amount contributed by one partner influences the amount contributed by the other (e.g., funding for institutions/ student financial aid)	Federal laws and regulations directed at institutions, but also indirectly pressure states to take action (e.g., US Department of Education's state authorization regulations)

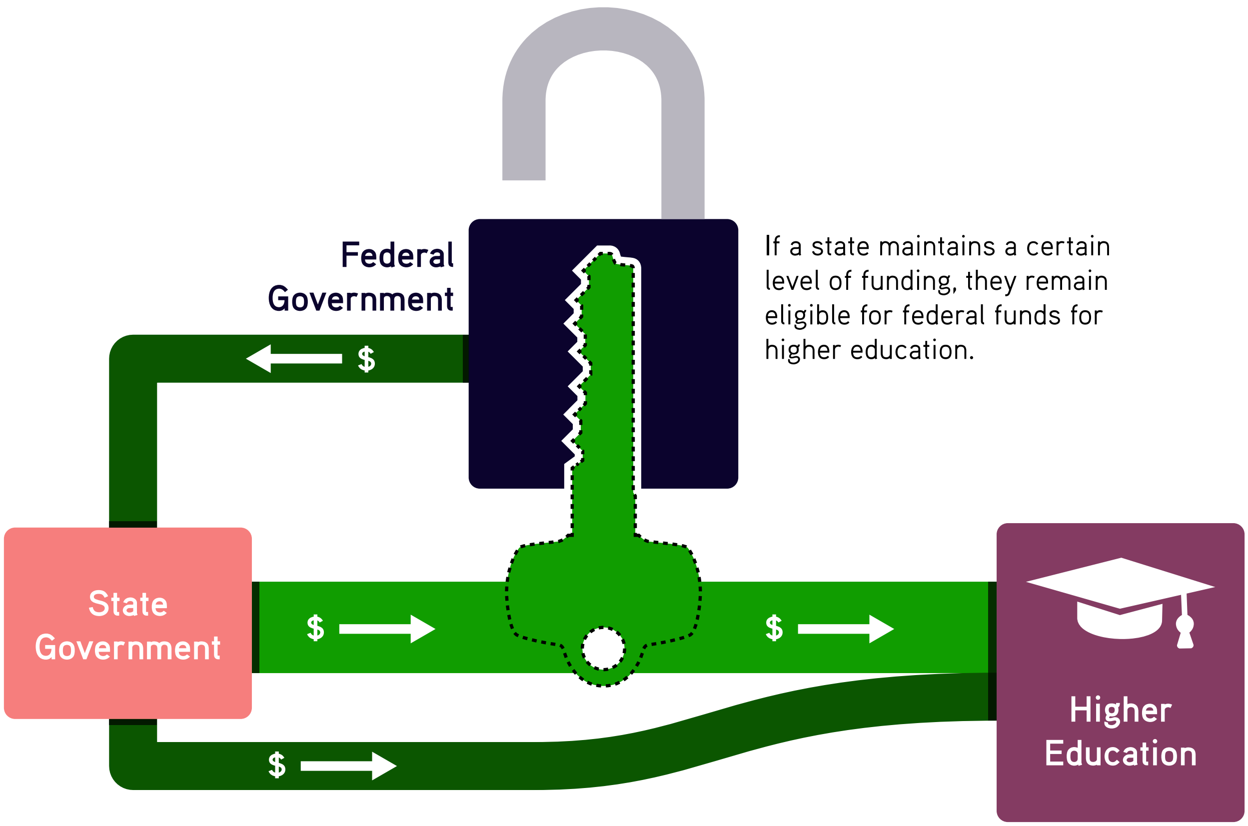
Direct Funding Partnerships

When policymakers and researchers discuss federal-state partnerships in the higher education space, they are typically referring to **direct, intentional partnerships between the federal government and states that involve federal funding** in some way. These partnerships often contain mandates or incentives to prompt state action as part of the federal policy.[20] Numerous examples of direct federal-state partnerships exist, although the way in which they involve federal funding and the amounts of funding involved vary by policy.

Maintenance of Effort Policies

For example, Figure 1 depicts a typical MOE policy, such as those found in ARRA, the CARES Act, and the American Rescue Plan. These partnerships incentivize states to maintain their funding for higher education at or above a certain level in order to be eligible to receive federal funds.[21]

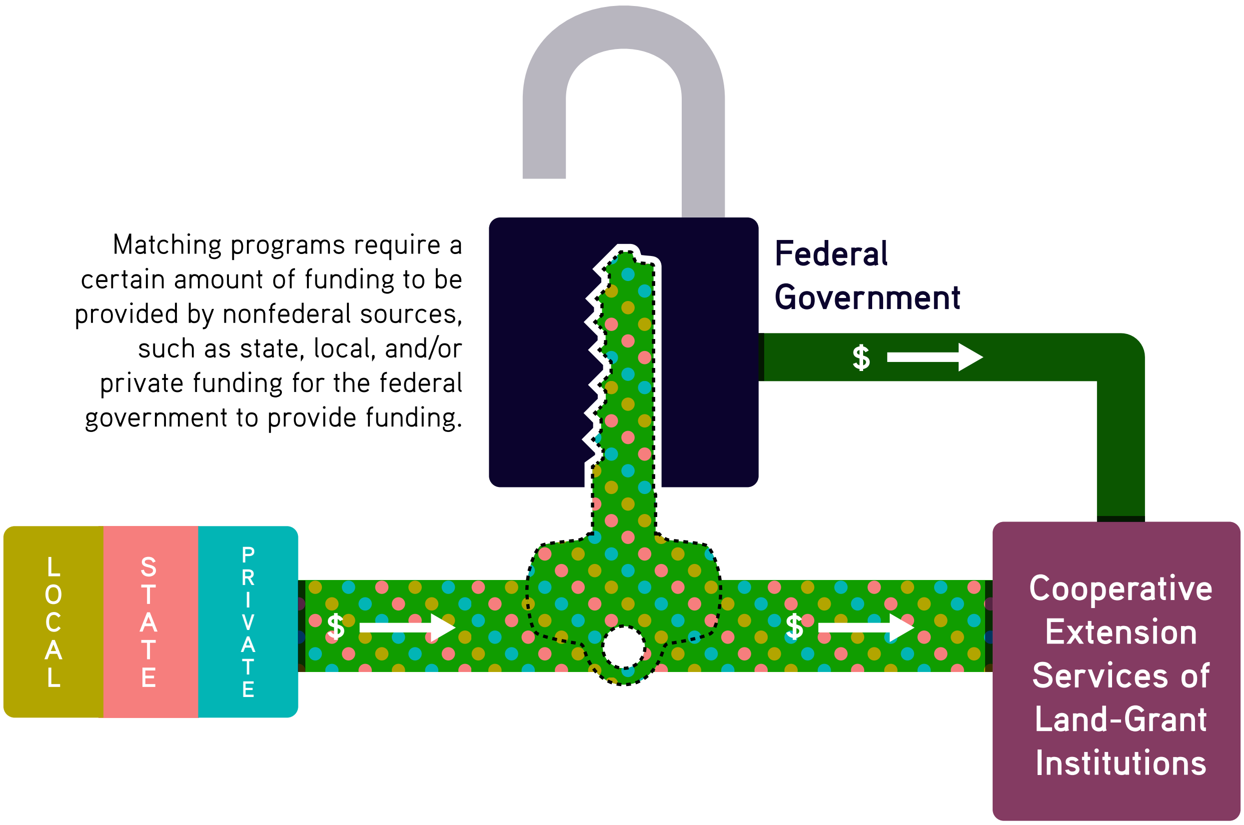
FIGURE 1. **Maintenance-of-Effort Federal-State Partnership**



Matching Fund Policies

Another type of direct funding partnership is the **matching model, in which federal funds are matched with a certain amount of state and other nonfederal funds.**[22] These are similar to MOE provisions in that matching programs also are incentives that require a certain amount of state or other support to be eligible for receiving federal funds. Whereas MOE policies require states to maintain a particular level of funding or obtain a waiver, matching programs require a certain amount of funding to be provided by nonfederal sources.[23] Figure 2 depicts an example of a matching program in the higher education sector: the cooperative extension services of land-grant institutions, for which the federal government provides up to half the funding, with the other half provided by nonfederal sources, such as state, local, and/or private funding.[24]

FIGURE 2. **Federal Matching Funding for Cooperative Extension Programs**

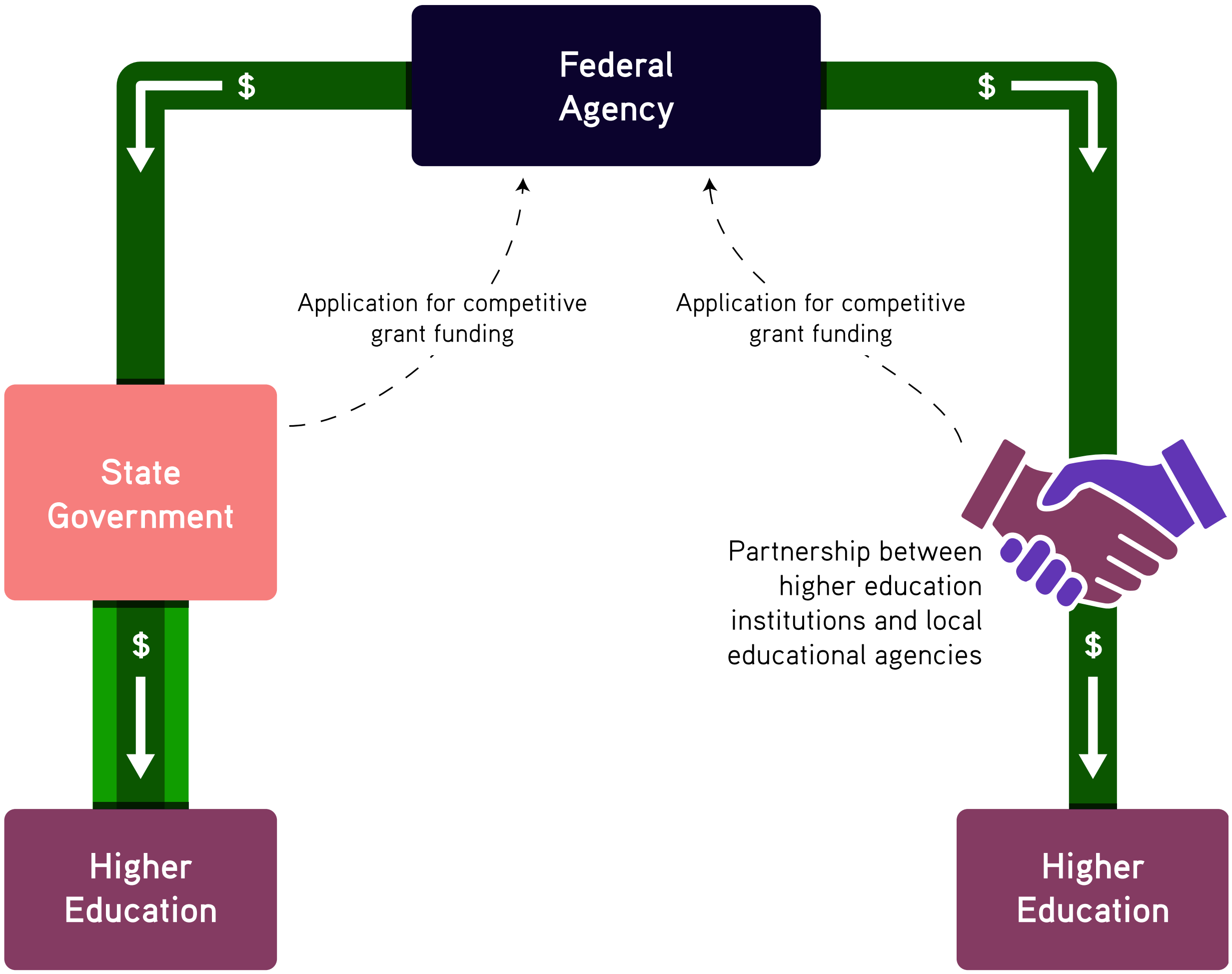


In some cases, both matching and MOE provisions appear in the same policy.[25] For example, the College Access Challenge Grant—a program enacted as part of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 that aimed to increase college preparation among low-income students—contained both matching and MOE requirements.[26]

Competitive Grants

Other direct funding partnerships involve **competitive grants—that is, programs in which states and other entities may apply for grants and a federal agency awards them at the agency's discretion**.[27] Often, competitive grants are combined with other types of direct funding partnerships, such as matching partnerships. This is the case with the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) initiative. GEAR UP is a federally funded program providing educational and financial interventions with the goal of increasing college access for underserved students.[28] The US Department of Education provides two types of competitive grants through GEAR UP: one to state governments, and one to partnerships between higher education institutions and local educational agencies.[29] The policy requires funded programs to provide "a 1:1 match of nonfederal dollars," thereby combining a matching partnership with the competitive grant.[30] Figure 3 depicts the GEAR UP model.

FIGURE 3. **GEAR UP Funding**



State Responses to Direct Funding Partnerships

Although direct funding partnerships provide an opportunity for states to obtain federal funding, particularly MOE policies, such policies have been viewed by some state-level actors as coercive. This is because in order to obtain federal funding, states must reserve a certain amount of funding for higher education. I interviewed a representative of state-level policymakers who indicated that MOE provisions are often disfavored by states. This interviewee said:

> From our perspective, we don't like maintenance-of-effort provisions. We live with them in federal education policy, and in some cases, they work, [such as] with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. In other cases, they don't, such as the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act, just given the fact that it's 100 percent MOE and they don't fund special education at nearly the level that they promised.

With regard to the MOE provision in the College Access Challenge Grant, the same interviewee said:

> Most states were looking at receiving on average two and a half to three million dollars a year for essentially making sure that low-income students knew their pathways into the postsecondary system. These small amounts of money came along with essentially an unworkable maintenance-of-effort provision … Even though two and a half to three million dollars can go a long way in a state, it is a relatively small amount of money for essentially the promise of taking this money and then saying that you're not going to cut your higher ed budgets at all.

This critique that the College Access Challenge Grant did not provide enough of a financial incentive for states has been echoed in other discussions of federal-state partnerships for higher education.[31]

Direct funding partnerships can run into implementation challenges, too. One challenge occurs when the policies are viewed as highly partisan or political. A state government representative interviewed for my research observed that funding partnerships to encourage tuition-free college—something that has been increasingly discussed in federal policy circles—could face problems similar to those experienced by the Medicaid expansion policy during the Obama administration. This respondent said:

> This is going to be a politically divisive issue… You would get even less state participation… just opting into a federal program in the first place, especially one that's tied to free college… a majority of state legislatures and governorships are still controlled by Republicans. I doubt that this would be all that appealing in many places.

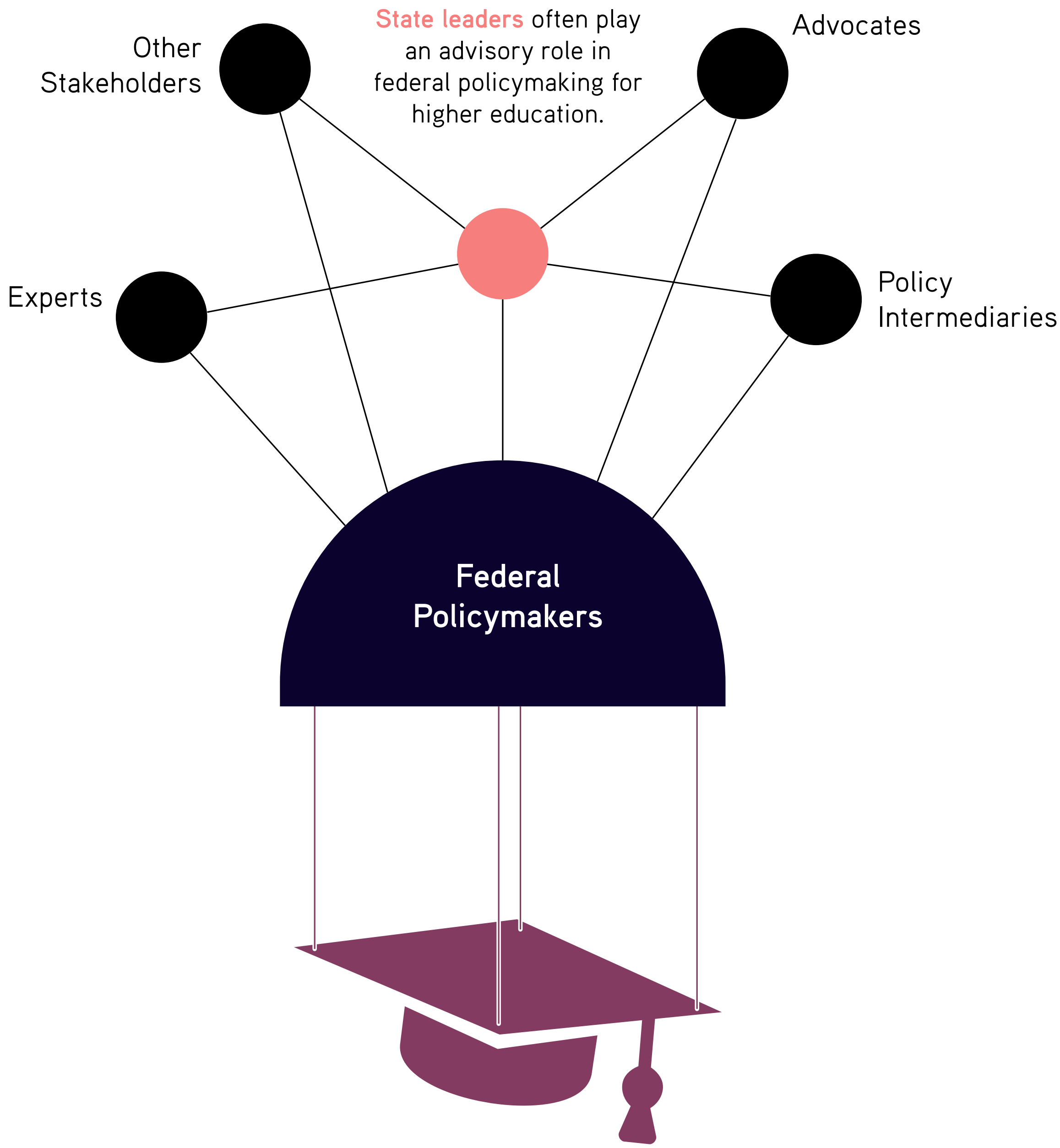
Another implementation challenge occurs when states experience budget shortfalls or during economic recessions, and MOE provisions require states to either prioritize higher education over government programs or obtain a waiver.[32] The same interviewee, quoted immediately above, also said that in the wake of state budget crunches due to COVID-19, a potential MOE policy to fund tuition-free college is "not something that state budgets have the capacity to handle right now." Because some direct funding partnerships may be viewed as unduly coercive and may cause implementation and budgetary challenges for states, in the words of the same respondent, "it's not really a partnership."

Direct Regulation Partnerships

Another form of direct federal-state partnership involves **state actors playing an advisory role, often in the context of states as federal policy stakeholders, working with and advocating before the federal government in favor of policies (including laws and regulations) that benefit state interests**. State governments often are stakeholders in federal higher education policy because such policies can affect states in a substantial way. For example, federal policies regarding state authorization of postsecondary institutions—that is, regulations governing how institutions must obtain authorization to provide postsecondary education to students located in particular states—have affected the relationship between states and institutions, and have even caused states to take policy action where they otherwise might not.[33] Moreover, state attorneys general are often involved in investigating and enforcing consumer protection laws against higher education institutions.[34] As stakeholders in federal higher education policy, state officials not only lobby and advocate on behalf of state interests but also sometimes work with federal officials as advisors on higher education policy matters.[35] A depiction of this type of federal-state partnership appears in Figure 4. These partnerships are direct in that state officials speak and work directly with federal officials—and often other stakeholders as well (such as individual or groups of higher education institutions or students)—yet they do not provide federal funding to states the way that direct funding partnerships do.

There are numerous instances of states-as-stakeholders working directly with federal officials in an advisory capacity. One example is when states participate in the US Department of Education's negotiated rulemaking process. This process involves the federal agency meeting with policy stakeholders in an attempt to draft proposed language for forthcoming regulations.[36] State officials (such as attorneys general) and representatives of state officials (such as the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association) have often served on negotiated rulemaking panels, as have a variety of other stakeholders, including representatives of higher education students, different kinds of institutions, accreditors, and others.[37] Representatives of states also have testified before congressional committees, such as when a representative of an association for state-level higher education officers appeared before the US Senate's Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee to provide testimony on federal policy issues affecting higher education accountability and affordability.[38] State officials also sometimes advise the president on higher education policy matters, as was the case when state-level officials and representatives of public colleges and universities participated in the White House Summit on Community Colleges during the Obama administration.[39]

FIGURE 4. **Direct Advisory Partnerships**



Another way the federal and state governments partner on higher education matters is when federal officials from the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs (IGA) consult with state officials. One of my interviewees who had served in the Obama White House explained that the IGA worked with state-level policymakers to promote the president's higher education and other priorities. This interviewee said:

> We usually worked with [IGA] when we were trying to get policies to get picked up at the state and local level… For example, the free community college, when we didn't really see it getting traction at the federal level, we said, "Okay, let's start at the state [and] local level." And so IGA was really our channel to convene and to connect with those legislators.

This is another example of a federal-state advisory partnership, but rather than state officials advising federal policymakers about prospective federal policies, the White House advised state officials on how they may create state-level higher education policy.

Indirect Partnerships (Federal⇔Institutions⇔State)

Federal-state partnerships are not always direct. **Indirect partnerships occur when a federal policy contains no direct mandate or incentive for states, but the policy nonetheless prompts states to take action**. As with direct partnerships, indirect partnerships may involve regulation or funding. These partnerships are often facilitated through intermediaries such as higher education institutions.

Indirect Regulation Partnerships

In the higher education policy space, this type of partnership is evident when the federal government provides funding not to the states but to the institutions, and in return for that funding, institutions have to abide by certain rules and regulations that involve the state in some way. For example, the Higher Education Act and its associated regulations have imposed requirements on institutions to receive authorization to operate in the states where they provide postsecondary education.[40] Although this requirement may have been intended to serve as an accountability check for institutional quality, different states have different standards for institutional authorization, with some states' standards being minimal while others are rigorous.[41] One of my interviewees described the situation as follows:

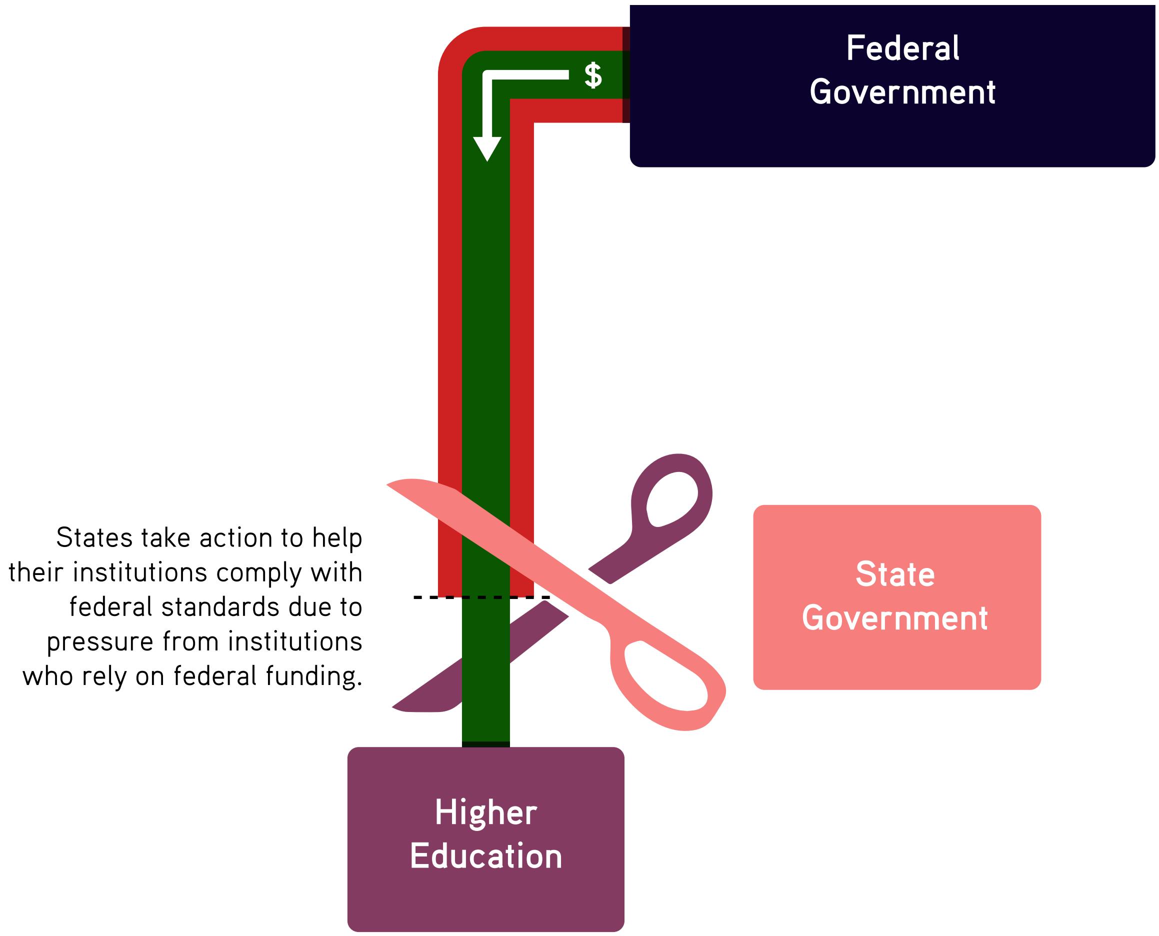
> You have some states … that have a very – it's a check-box authorization thing. You submit an application, they basically approve it. Whereas you have some states that have a lot more stringent authorization standards, and ongoing audits, and things like that … the federal government's interested in trying to have some sort of more uniform standards.

Indeed, in an effort to prevent institutions from getting authorized in states with lower standards and then offering distance learning programs to students located anywhere, a requirement in a 2016 US Department of Education regulation required that institutions must be authorized in every state where they enroll students—including students enrolled across state borders in distance learning programs—or risk losing eligibility to receive federal student financial aid.[42] For institutions that provide a lot of online courses and degrees, it can be a substantial burden to obtain authorization from every state in which students in those programs are located.[43] As a result, several nonprofit organizations (including regional higher education compacts and the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements) collaborated to create a reciprocity agreement—named the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA)—to enable institutions in a state that is a party to this contract to have their authorization recognized in other states that are also parties to the contract without the institutions having to go through individualized authorization procedures in all of those states.[44] It is the *states* that must be parties to the reciprocity contract, however. Institutions must be approved by their state to have their authorizations recognized elsewhere, but the state itself must opt to join the SARA contract.[45] Additionally, a provision in the state authorization rule developed during the Obama administration required institutions to be authorized in states that had a method for resolving student complaints against the institution.[46] Again, the regulation targeted institutions, which were responsible for obtaining authorization from a state with such a complaint system.[47] But it was state policy that determined the extent to which states could resolve complaints against out-of-state institutions.[48]

Although federal policy on state authorization places a direct obligation on institutions—not states—to ensure that colleges enrolling students across state lines are sufficiently authorized, states have taken action as a result of these federal regulations.[49] Specifically, institutions put pressure on their states to join the SARA contract, so they can avoid having to obtain authorization from individual states. That pressure has been effective—currently, every state other than California has signed onto the SARA contract.[50] Research has found that even some states that were reluctant to join SARA, fearing that doing so may jeopardize their power to enforce state-level consumer protection laws against out-of-state colleges, did end up joining the contract eventually, following pressure from institutions within their state.[51] Similarly, when the Department of Education determined that California policy did not meet the then-standard for addressing student complaints, the state took steps to amend its policy so students enrolled in out-of-state institutions would not lose federal financial aid eligibility.[52]

Figure 5 illustrates the federal-state partnership created by state authorization regulations. Although those regulations have targeted institutions, they involve policies and procedures that occur at the state level: states took action to help their institutions comply with federal standards due to pressure from institutions who relied on federal funding.[53] This is an indirect federal-state partnership because the partnership emerged from the federal government's regulation of institutions, who then put pressure on the states to take certain actions, such as joining SARA.

FIGURE 5. **State Authorization Regulations Partnership**

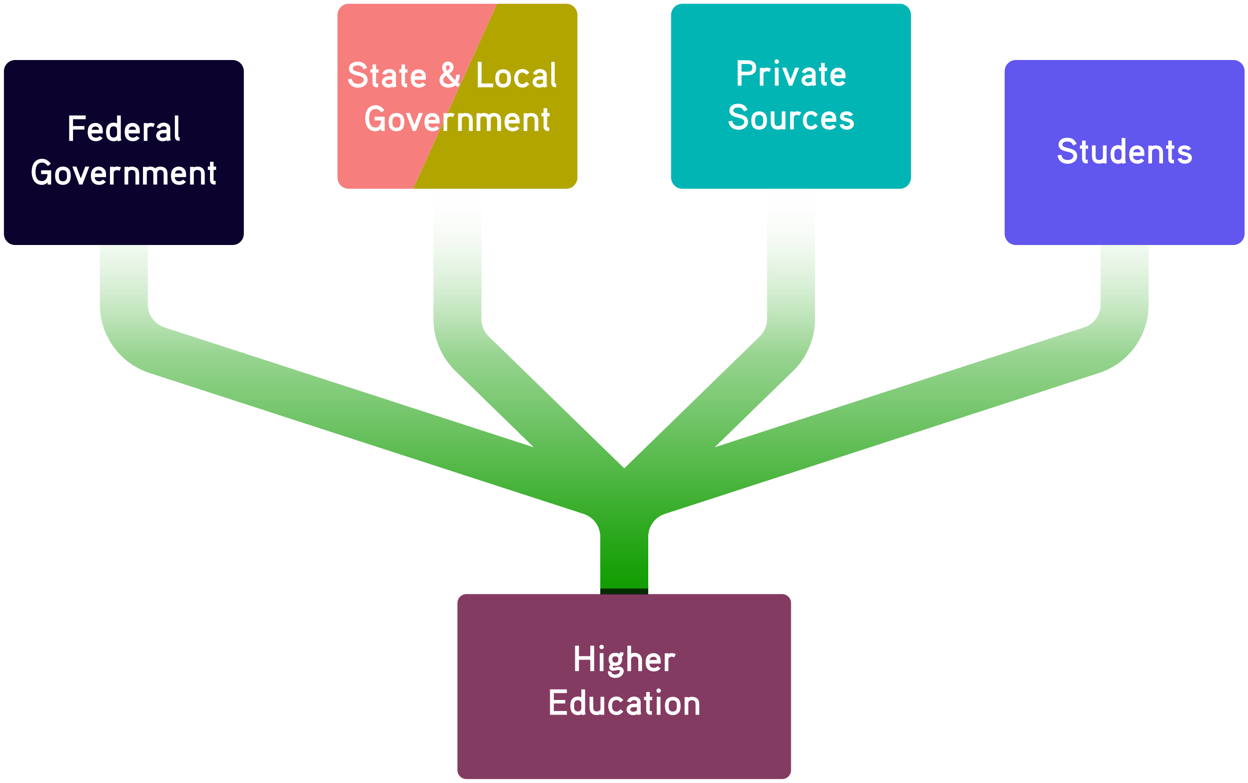


Indirect Funding Partnerships

Another indirect federal-state partnership, and one that is not often labeled a partnership, involves the funding of colleges. Economist Sandy Baum, writing for the Urban Institute, identified the funding of public higher education institutions as a partnership between the state and federal governments, and one that was "developed without a clear blueprint."[54] As Figure 6 illustrates, colleges are funded through many sources, including the federal, state, and (in the case of community colleges) local governments, students and/or their families (via tuition), donations from private parties, and other sources.[55] This is another form of indirect partnership because these are relatively independent funding sources, but they all contribute essential revenues to higher education institutions.[56]

Other indirect funding partnerships exist where the federal government funds partnerships between industry and universities for which funding from states is also supplied. For example, the National Science Foundation has funded Industry-University Cooperative Research Centers (IUCRCs), which are research institutes involving both university and corporate personnel for the purpose of enhancing technology transfer and strengthening relationships between university-based research and private industries.[57] Similar to colleges that obtain revenues from different levels of government as well as private sources, IUCRCs also receive financial support from both federal and state governments and other sources.[58]

FIGURE 6. **Higher Education Institutional Funding Partnership**



The Indirect Nature of the Partnerships

What these examples of indirect federal-state partnerships share in common is that the actions of one level of government have prompted action on the part of another level of government, albeit indirectly. For example, the federal government's state authorization rule prompted states to sign onto the SARA contract and in some cases adjust their student complaint policies.[59] And in funding higher education institutions, the smaller states' share of institutional revenues has become, the more federal funding has increased through student financial aid.[60]

The Role of Local Governments

Local government actors—such as city or county officials, school districts, and community colleges[61]—have played important roles in all the types of federal-state partnerships for higher education described above. An example of a federal-state-local direct funding partnership is the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), enacted in 2014.[62] This policy has provided federal funding to state and local workforce boards, and community college workforce development programs often receive support through WIOA.[63] Some local governments entities also participate in GEAR UP programs. The federal government provides two types of GEAR UP grants: one to states, and one to partnerships between higher education institutions and local educational agencies[64]—that is, local government entities such as a school district or a county-level department of education.[65] Local governments also are involved in funding and administering cooperative extension services, which operate through land-grant colleges to provide agricultural and related education within communities.[66]

Local governments also are involved in direct advisory and indirect partnerships. Community college representatives have participated in the US Department of Education's negotiated rulemaking sessions for higher education, for example,[67] and local governments provide some funding for community colleges, making them part of the indirect partnership that also includes the federal government, states, and private financial sources.[68] Although they are not present in every federal-state partnership, these examples demonstrate how local governments have been actively involved in many such partnerships affecting higher education.

The Role of Higher Education Institutions

As the typology described above demonstrates, higher education institutions are involved in federal-state partnerships in various ways. Institutions often are beneficiaries of direct funding partnerships. For example, in MOE partnerships that financially incentivize states to maintain funding for higher education, institutions benefit from receiving at least a minimal level of state funding.[69] In direct advisory partnerships, institutional representatives often play an advisory role alongside states and other policy stakeholders (see Figure 4 above). A prominent instance of institutional representatives participating in an advisory partnership with state and federal government representatives is negotiated rulemaking for higher education.[70] Higher education institutions also are present in indirect federal-state partnerships. In the case of the state authorization regulations, institutional pressure was a factor in states joining the SARA contract.[71] State, federal, and other partners also provide revenues for colleges and universities, and these institutions are the beneficiaries of that funding partnership.[72]

As beneficiaries of federal-state partnerships, institutions have advocated in favor of these policies. One example involving a direct funding partnership was when private colleges "intensely lobbied" in favor of the State Student Incentive Grant Program in the early 1970s.[73] Later renamed the Leveraging Education Assistance Partnership (LEAP), this policy provided matching funding to states as an incentive to increase state-level student financial aid.[74] Private institutions advocated for this partnership because they viewed it as a way to obtain more state funding—and it worked: within four years of this partnership's creation, 22 new state-level student aid grant programs emerged,[75] and the aid often went to students attending private colleges.[76, 77]

Although institutions have benefited from and advocated for certain federal-state partnerships, colleges and universities also have advocated directly to the federal government for beneficial policies, apart from partnerships with states. Individual institutions frequently engage in lobbying and advocacy on their own behalf,[78] and Washington DC-based associations, whose staff often have personal connections to Congress, also advocate for federal policies that benefit higher education.[79] An example of institutions bypassing state governments to seek resources directly from the federal government is the use of earmarks, which Marsicano and Brooks define as "direct funding appropriated to interest groups by Congress without the use of a competitive grant-making process."[80] Earmarks from Congress were banned for about ten years, but in 2021, earmarks were once again permitted.[81] By that summer, hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of earmarks for individual colleges and universities appeared in seven House of Representatives appropriations bills.[82]

Larger and more powerful institutions can benefit from their position of prestige, their alumni who work on Capitol Hill, or the fact that they serve as a major employer in their region to get attention—and resources—from policymakers.[83] One of my interviewees confirmed, "it's all about connections. And it's a connection that you have in DC that can get that stuff done." From this perspective, smaller or lesser-known institutions without extensive alumni networks and limited connections to Congress are likely at a disadvantage when it comes to seeking resources directly from the federal government.

Conclusion

This analysis identified four types of federal-state partnerships in the higher education policy arena: direct funding partnerships, in which the federal government provides funding directly to states; direct regulatory partnerships, in which states provide policy-relevant information and sometimes advocate for particular policies to the federal government; and indirect partnerships, either funding or regulatory, in which federal or state policy prompts certain action from the other level of government. Other policy actors—including local governments and higher education institutions—have played a role in each type of federal-state partnership. Table 2 summarizes this framework.

TABLE 2. **Framework of Federal-State Partnerships**

Type of Partnership	Definition	Example
Direct funding partnership	Direct, intentional partnerships between the federal government and states that involve federal funding in some way	Maintenance-of-Effort policies in ARRA, the CARES Act, and the American Rescue Plan
Direct regulatory partnership	State actors playing an advisory role, often in the context of states as federal policy stakeholders, working with and advocating before the federal government in favor of policies that benefit state interests	State actors participating in the US Department of Education's negotiated rulemaking process
Indirect funding partnership	When a federal policy contains no direct mandate or incentive for states, but the policy nonetheless prompts states to take action	States and the federal government both fund higher education institutions and university-industry partnerships
Indirect regulatory partnership		States joining the SARA contract following federal regulations of institutions regarding postsecondary state authorization

Some partnerships, such as direct advisory partnerships, have often resembled cooperative federalism, with the parties working together to achieve a common goal. Yet federal-state partnerships have also been perceived as coercive on states, such as when states fund higher education at the expense of other priorities due to MOE requirements, or when institutions pressure states into changing their own policies in order to help institutions comply with federal law.[84]

The typology presented here is useful for several reasons. First, it expands policy conversations about federal-state partnerships in the higher education space by recognizing the full array of such partnerships. As explained above, most prior writings on federal-state partnerships for higher education focus on direct funding partnerships, particularly MOE and matching policies that incentivize states to invest in higher education.[85] By specifically identifying and categorizing advisory and indirect partnerships, this analysis may provoke policymakers and advocates to consider the ways other types of partnerships between the states and the federal government can be used to improve equity and quality in higher education. Moreover, by specifically identifying a broader range of federal-state partnership types—and by highlighting the role of local governments and institutions within them—this study provides valuable information to policy actors of all kinds about possible state and federal resources that may be available to them.

By advancing a typology of federal-state partnerships, this analysis is useful for higher education policy researchers seeking contextual information or material to develop conceptual frameworks for future research. Such future research may include exploratory studies to identify additional examples of federal-state partnerships—particularly indirect kinds, which are not always obvious from the plain text of policy documents—and identifying ways to make such partnerships more cooperative and less coercive on states. As others have observed, federal-state partnerships can increase higher education access and equity.[86] Partnerships designed with intergovernmental cooperation in mind can help advance higher education equity in a manner that is useful and welcome across all levels of government.

Endnotes

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