Earlier in this meeting, we learned about and discussed the completion agenda from the perspectives of the federal government, national organizations, states, and institutions. This session will explore whether WICHE should establish a goal for the Western region, and if so, what strategy should we use for achieving such a goal.

As the session on state goals showed, most of the Western states have adopted completion goals, though these goals vary considerably. Some have established goals based on the presumed need for an educated workforce, an idea that evolved from the work of the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. Some reflect aspirational goals, albeit possibly unattainable ones. Some states have goals focused on reducing the equity gaps in educational attainment. And a few states have not even established goals.

The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce projects that by 2018 the percentage of new jobs requiring a college-level credential will range in the WICHE states from a low of 58 percent in Nevada to a high of 70 percent in Colorado and Washington (the Pacific territories were not included in the Georgetown analysis). In another analysis the National Center for Higher Education has projected the annual increase necessary to reach Lumina Foundation’s “Big Goal” of 60 percent of the adult population with a college certificate or degree by 2025 also varies substantially from one state to another: the gap to be filled is the largest for Nevada, at 29.5 percent (which would require doubling the current share of adults with a college degree or certificate), compared to a low of 14 percent for Colorado.

But achieving the national goal doesn’t mean every state should meet that goal independently. Rather, some states will need to be above the national average in order to meet their economic needs and established goals; while others will not need to reach the national average, to meet their goals or job requirements of the future. Colorado, for example, will have to increase its share of the young adult population with a college degree by 24 percent, not the 14 percent mentioned above, because its future job requirements exceed the national goal. Nevada’s economic forecast, on the other hand, wouldn’t require reaching the national goal, though the state’s aspirational goal certainly would.

Might it make sense, therefore, for the West to devise a plan in which the regional goal would match the federal one but would be achieved through shared contributions to the increases in attainment, rather than through a host of different efforts to meet the average? This session will examine what it would take for the Western states and territories, acting together
rather than independently, to reach the national goals and will look at whether working cooperatively toward such an achievement makes sense.

Speaker:  
David Longanecker, president, WICHE

Biographical Information on the Speaker

David Longanecker has served as the president of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education in Boulder since 1999. Previously, Longanecker served for six years as the assistant secretary for postsecondary education at the U.S. Department of Education. Prior to that he was the state higher education executive officer in Colorado and Minnesota. He was also the principal analyst for higher education for the Congressional Budget Office. Longanecker has served on numerous boards and commissions. He has written extensively on a range of higher education issues. His primary interests in higher education are: expanding access to successful completion for students within all sectors of higher education, promoting student and institutional performance, assuring efficient and effective finance and financial aid strategies, and fostering the effective use of educational technologies, all for the purpose of sustaining the nation’s strength in the world and increasing the quality of life for all Americans, particularly those who have traditionally been left out in the past. He holds an Ed.D. from Stanford University, an M.A. in student personnel work from George Washington University, and a B.A. in sociology from Washington State University.